

The North Dakota School Boards Association presented a two-day seminar in Bismarck to assist school board members in their elected positions; topics were selected based on requests from school board members and business managers.

The Early Bird Session included information **superintendent and teacher nonrenewal** resources, including definitions, North Dakota Century Code, evaluations, Reduction-In-Force (RIF) and related procedures. The session also touched on Continuing Contract Law. This session was a helpful review.

The other early bird session was **Investigating Employee Misconduct**, presented by Barrett M. Christina, staff attorney for the New Hampshire School Boards Association. Again, this was a helpful review; however, it was emphasized that school districts need to follow their board policies and seek legal advice if needed.

The Friday Negotiations Seminar opened with a session on **Health Care Reform: What You Need to do from Now to 2018**, presented by Brian Rossen of American Fidelity. This session bogged down briefly, as probably all of us do when we are thinking about health care reform, then got back on track. I was reassured to learn that the Dickinson Public Schools has implemented or addressed the concerns and is on track with the myriad of insurance changes.

The Negotiations Seminar included several presenters. NDSBA staff went over negotiations basics and presented a new handbook that's been updated to reflect current law. Jim Johnson, school board member from Fargo, presented a replicable way to look at money during negotiations. The Human Resources director at Bismarck Public Schools presented information about establishing ground rules. And Williston Public Schools presented information on the recognition process. A panel of presenters from Dickinson Public Schools, Valley City Public Schools and Stanley Public Schools shared information about negotiations in their districts.

NDSBA staff presented information about some of the bills related to negotiations that the **Legislature** is addressing. HB 1251 proposes to change the time that staff has to return contracts from 30 days to 14 days, among other provisions. A proposal to eliminate retroactive pay was amended out of the bill in the committee. HB 1315 relates to hard-to-fill positions. To check the status of any education-related bills, check the NDSBA web site for links to the latest news.

Mr. Dean Rummel, chair of the **Education Fact Finding Commission**, gave an overview of the commission, its role and its procedures. In the past five years, only three of 24 teacher contract negotiations have not settled contracts after the EFFC conducted its hearing. There were nine hearings in 2013 and four in 2014. Mr. Rummel commented that "economics is always the issue." He stressed that he is the only school board (former) member on the Commission; the other two members are former teachers. He said that going to impasse earlier avoids long lasting hard feelings. He encouraged both sides to keep talking.

The last item of the seminar was **Issuing Teacher Contracts**, presented by NDSBA's legal counsel Annette Bendish. She emphasized timeframes and the ND Century Code. She

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highlighted selected areas of a sample teacher contract. She also noted that an updated form is on the NDSBA web site, but the DPI web site still has the old form. She also referenced DEA vs. DPS 2014 court ruling. Ms. Bendish also noted that after impasse the negotiated agreement can only cover one contract year. A two year Master Contract is allowed if both sides negotiate and agree to it.

Overall, this was a useful and relevant negotiations seminar, especially since it's a legislative year. The format was a departure from past years' seminars on the topic and it seemed that attendees responded favorably to the change. I estimated that close to 300+ people attended. Each session had several insightful questions posed by audience members at the end, which contributed to good discussion among the attendees. In attendance were board members, business managers and superintendents.