

Sarah Ricks  
School Law Seminar and NDSBA Convention Report

I appreciate the opportunity to attend this year's law seminar and convention. As always, I came away with good information and inspiration to continue working hard for Dickinson Public Schools.

School Law Seminar  
Thursday

The school law seminar presented several timely topics. The first presentation was fascinating about immigration and education- laws regarding new citizens, non-citizens and ELLs. As our district continues to experience inward migration and a more diverse student population, this will be very helpful to understand what our legal and ethical educational obligations are to these students.

We also got to hear presentations on labor issues including overtime, laws governing contracts and the right to renewal, current and future trends in teacher and administrative licensing in the state, IDEA, juvenile court services and what we might expect from the legislative session in 2017.

Some of this information was new, and some was just a good refresher. I was encouraged that the state is being very thoughtful in its approach to licensure in order to help address the teacher shortages some districts are experiencing and in helping teachers to gain licensure for areas in which there is a particular need. I also found the juvenile court system presentation particularly interesting. It is clear that we need to be very thoughtful in the way we handle those students in difficult life situations and who may be struggling with substance abuse. There was some good information on attendance incentive programs that have been successful in other places. I was also interested to hear that the juvenile courts will do free inservices on juvenile mental health and other issues which we could potentially take advantage of in our district.

NDSBA Convention Sessions Attended  
Thursday

General Session- Murray Banks

Mr. Banks presented really solid advice on leadership. He was very inspirational and reminded us that people are most important in any organization and that positivity is the key to good leadership and to making good progress. He asked many reflective questions to help us investigate our own styles of communication and leadership. He encouraged us to be innovative and bold and to set the tone that fantastic things can happen in our district. I found his presentation both practical and uplifting.

Friday

General Session- Robert O'Neill

It was a real privilege to be addressed by Mr. Robert O'Neill former leader of Seal Team 6. His message was never quit. His stories of heroism were incredible. He emphasized mind over matter, persistence and trust. Be prepared to fight. Perform under fire. Trust your people. Never quit. It was an emotional presentation to reflect on the freedoms we enjoy thanks to our veterans and service men and women. Again, very inspirational.

### Breakout Sessions

Evolving Benefits for Students with the Flex Mod Schedule- This was a great presentation by Legacy High School principal Tom Schmidt. They are having great success with this new kind of scheduling which allows the benefits of the block schedule of eight periods scheduled by alternating longer and shorter classes based on the needs of the class. It also allowed for more individual attention for students, more freedom to do large presentations and bring in speakers and a more college-like experience for students. I was very impressed and intrigued. Tours are done at Legacy every other Monday and Mr. Schmidt would even be willing to come and present here in Dickinson if administrators and teachers in our district would be interested.

Collective Bargaining Contract Language- This was a presentation by Andy Sever. He had practical advice when looking at contract language and he encouraged participants to bargain from a place of mutual respect and understanding. His message resonated with me and the negotiations experience we are hoping to create moving forward.

Superintendent, Business Manager, and Board Evaluation- This presentation was done by Rocky Mountain Evaluations which showed the nuts and bolts of using the new NDSBA online evaluation system. The board was impressed with what we saw and intend to give it a try later this school year. I look forward to being able to reflect on our performance as a board and to enhancing communication between the board and the superintendent by providing frequent, specific feedback.

### General Session- Story Musgrave

Mr. Musgrave is a larger-than-life figure. He is an astronaut, doctor, pilot and engineer. His message was that there is always a path to success, that we can take a journey to excellence together. He talked about the cosmos being all connected but we chop it up and compartmentalize it. It was strong argument for connected, cross-disciplinary and project-based learning. His life story was fascinating and made me renew my commitment to life-long learning.

### Breakout Session

Raising the Bar: Changing and Creating a Positive Culture for Students- This was presented by the principal at Solon. He laid out a roadmap for the way in which they have changed a very negative, isolated-teacher culture to one of positivity and collaboration. The positive culture change is having huge effects on student achievement. It was a good reminder of how crucial culture can be.