



## *Board of Education Column*

*By Seth Holden, Board of Education*

### **Negotiations Update**

It is mid-May in a legislative year, which means negotiations between the Fargo Board of Education and the Fargo Education Association are in full swing! In this column, I will discuss a new process for negotiating the terms of our contract that both sides have agreed to and hope will make sitting down at the negotiating table more collaborative.

This new eight step-process begins with either party presenting a topic, “Defining the Problem.” After that party is done with their presentation, the next step is for the other party to ask questions, “Clarify the Problem.” In the third step, “Gather Needed Resources/Information,” both parties determine different pieces of data, or answers to specific questions regarding this topic that those at the table will need in order to begin discussing any possible solutions to the presented problem. After those three steps, the topic or problem enters the “Pause Process,” where we wait for the collection of data and questions are answered. These first four steps allow for one party to really listen to the other about a certain issue, have a conversation about that issue and collaboratively identify the information needed to solve the problem.

After the agreed upon data is collected and both parties are ready to continue with a certain topic, we enter the “Share Information” step. We use this information to enter the next step, which is “Identify Solutions.” This step is another collaborative part of the process where we come together to brainstorm possible solutions to the problem. This is also the point of the meeting where I will jokingly quote Board Member Clark by reaffirming that, “there is no bad idea until we’ve determined that it is a bad idea.” We next move on to the “Assess Viability of Solutions” step. At this step there may be additional information needed to determine not only is the solution viable, but does it truly solve the problem and are there any other unforeseen problems that may arise by adopting this solution. Our last step in the process is to “Select a Solution.” At this point we have listened to one another, collaboratively identified solutions and have come to a solution together.

So far, I feel that this new process is working well. It is my hope that it will continue to work well and assist us as we work toward negotiations that are more collaborative and less adversarial in nature than they may have been in the past.

