

**GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**  
GRAND FORKS SCHOOL BOARD  
GRAND FORKS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #1  
MEETING MINUTES  
February 26, 2026

The Grand Forks School Board Government Affairs Committee met on Thursday, February 26, 2026, with Josh Anderson presiding.

**Committee Members Present:** Josh Anderson, Amber Flynn, Jay Kleven, Dr. Terry Brenner, and Brandon Baumbach.

**Committee Members Absent:** Dr. Catherine Gillach and Matt Bakke.

**Others Present:** Representative Mark Sanford, Senator Jonathan Sickler, Representative Eric Murphy; Senator Scott Meyer, Senator Jeff Barta, Principal Stacey Skarperud, School Counselor Kiya Knable, School Counselor Blake Neubauer, Special Education Executive Director Dr. Elisa Diederich, CTE Executive Director Eric Ripley, Principal Leslie Bjelde, and Cindy Johnson, Executive Secretary.

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**Call to Order.**

The meeting was called to order at noon.

**Approval of Minutes.**

It was moved by Flynn and seconded by Anderson to approve the minutes of December 2, 2025, as written. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

**Discussion of Legislative Topics.**

A discussion was held regarding the state's current and projected fiscal outlook, with particular attention to how changes in oil production and revenue collections may affect future budgets. Legislators noted that oil production has generally remained consistent, though there are concerns about fewer new wells and recent decreases in tax collections. Because oil revenue is a significant component of the state budget, legislators emphasized that the state may face tighter fiscal conditions in upcoming budget cycles.

While there is strong legislative support for K-12 education, it was acknowledged that education funding could still face pressure if revenues decline. Legislators indicated that during downturns, the state typically considers

spending reductions first, though discussions about alternative revenue sources may also occur. The broader fiscal outlook remains uncertain as lawmakers await additional economic and production data.

Committee members asked about property tax policy and whether additional tax reductions might be pursued that could affect education funding. Legislators explained that the recently implemented 3% cap was already a significant reform and that further reductions may be difficult. They distinguished between property tax reform and property tax relief, noting that previous relief payments were funded through legacy revenues. It was also noted that local political subdivisions may seek voter approval to exceed the 3% cap for a four-year period if necessary.

The discussion then focused on the financial pressures associated with special education services. District administrators reported that enrollment has increased by approximately 140 students over the past two school years, along with a rise in the number of students requiring Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). In particular, the district has seen substantial

growth in students with autism and intellectual disabilities, expanding from two autism classrooms in the past to eight currently. These programs require smaller class sizes, specialized equipment, and additional staff, which significantly increases costs. Administrators emphasized that while the district is proud of the quality of services provided, the growing number of students needing support is placing a strain on resources and staffing capacity.

Legislators noted that the cost of special education varies widely depending on the level of services required and reiterated ongoing legislative efforts to shift a larger share of those costs to the state. They invited district leaders to share further details in Bismarck to help lawmakers better understand the increasing costs and funding challenges.

Additional factors affecting district finances were discussed, including the number of students transferring from other districts to access specialized programs, the district's tuition agreements with other districts, and the challenges of tracking families who move into the district for services. Administrators also described efforts to maximize Medicaid billing for eligible services, though upcoming policy changes—particularly related to speech therapy billing codes and broader Medicaid funding reductions—may reduce future reimbursement revenue.

Legislators also referenced other potential policy considerations, including proposals for universal school meals and federal legislation that could affect funding.

**Next Meeting Date.**

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, April 16, 2026, at noon, via Zoom.

**Adjournment.**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

APPROVED \_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

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Josh Anderson, Meeting Chair

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Brandon Baumbach, Business Manager