**GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**
GRAND FORKS SCHOOL BOARD
GRAND FORKS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #1
MEETING MINUTES
October 15, 2026

The Grand Forks School Board Government Affairs Committee met on Thursday, October 15, 2026, via Google Meet, with JoNell Bakke presiding.

**Committee Members Present**: JoNell Bakke, Mary Adams, Dr. Terry Brenner, Ryan Gatzke, and Dr. Kris Arason.
**Committee Members Absent**: Amber Flynn and Chris Triggs.

**Others Present:** Senator Jonathan Sickler, Senator Scott Meyer, Representative Eric Murphy, and Cindy Johnson, Senior Executive Assistant and School Board Operations Coordinator

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**Call to Order.**
The meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m.

**Approval of Minutes.**
It was moved by Adams and seconded by Bakke to approve the minutes of May 28, 2026, as written. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously. Absent: Flynn.

**Discussion of Legislative Topics.**
Dr. Brenner discussed a draft list of the district's legislative topics, including special education funding, English Learner (EL) funding, state aid, easing the 3% cap, health insurance costs, and teacher retention bonuses.

Senator Meyer joined the meeting at 12:03 p.m.

Bakke explained that the state's current special education funding weighting factor isn't giving districts enough money to cover real costs.

Dr. Arason joined the meeting at 12:05 p.m.

Representative Murphy explained how state aid payments work under the current formula, noting that $842 per student is meant specifically for special education under the 2014 Picus Odden recalibration report, which he speculated not many school districts knew. Across the state, special education costs hit $325.5 million, with the state paying about 67% ($220 million). Dr. Brenner pointed out it was still far short of the district's expenses.

Senator Sickler joined the meeting at 12:12 p.m.

Murphy said the state wants to see how districts spend their funds locally and plans to propose, along with other legislators, a new plan in which the state pays 60% of the previous year's actual special education costs.

Bakke explained that larger districts need extra funding because they serve more high-need students, including required services for private school and homeschool students.

Dr. Brenner asked if state lawmakers would consider relaxing the 3% cap on school district budgets. Representative Meyer and Representative Murphy both said the state is unlikely to remove the cap. They suggested the district ask local voters to approve a cap change through a ballot measure.

Dr. Brenner brought up high health insurance costs, noting the district pays $10 million a year for its self-funded plan. Representative Murphy pointed out that more state funding also means more state control, which he did not like. He discussed allowing districts to enroll in NDPERS,

but suggested that there isn't much support at the state level for taking over health insurance costs.

Representative Murphy indicated that he would share a bill on EL funding from the previous legislative session with Dr. Brenner. On school lunch debt, Senator Meyer said the state should help cover costs if it requires schools to provide meals. Bakke discussed that state money should go to public schools first before funding private or home schools.

Senator Meyer asked about Peachjar, a district communication tool, and who pays for that debt. He has received questions about *The Gavel* newsletter, and a lot of people are wondering who pays for it. Dr. Brenner explained that the district pays a setup fee, but anyone submitting a flyer pays to upload it.

Representative Murphy discussed the Waterford early reading program for PreK–3, which was offered to target schools. The state set aside $1.5 million for it but spent only $192,000, so he wants to open the program to all children statewide to boost early reading. Dr. Brenner noted the program is used at Head Start.

**Next Meeting Date.**
The next meeting date is scheduled for Thursday, December 3, 2026, at 12:00 p.m.

**Adjournment.**
There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

APPROVED _____
(Date)

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JoNell Bakke, Meeting Chairperson

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Ryan Gatzke, Interim Business Manager

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