# NORTH DAKOTA TEACHERS' FUND FOR RETIREMENT BOARD
# MINUTES OF THE APRIL 23, 2026, BOARD MEETING

## MEMBERS PRESENT
Dr. Rob Lech, President
Alexis Rasset, Vice President
Thomas Beadle, State Treasurer
Mike Burton, Trustee
Scott Evanoff, Trustee
Cody Mickelson, Trustee

## MEMBER ABSENT
Levi Bachmeier, State Superintendent, DPI

## GUESTS
Kirsten Tuntland, Assistant Attorney General
Paul Wood, GRS
Members of the Public

## STAFF PRESENT
Scott Anderson, CIO
Deneen Gathman, Retirement Accountant
Chase Kauffeld, CRO
Missy Kopp, Executive Assistant
Sarah Mudder, Communications/Outreach Dir.
Sara Seiler, Supervisor of Internal Audit
Jodi Smith, Executive Director
Rachelle Smith, Retirement Admin. Assistant
Dottie Thorsen, Internal Auditor
Tami Volkert, Bus. Partner Officer
Denise Weeks, Retirement Program Mngr.

## CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Lech, President of the Teachers' Fund for Retirement (TFFR) Board of Trustees, called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. on Thursday, April 23, 2026. The meeting was held in the WSI Boardroom, 1600 E Century Ave., Bismarck, ND.

**The following members were present representing a quorum: Treasurer Beadle, Mr. Burton, Mr. Evanoff, Dr. Lech, and Mr. Mickelson.**

## AGENDA

The Board considered the agenda for the April 23, 2026, TFFR meeting.

**IT WAS MOVED BY MR. BURTON AND SECONDED BY TREASURER BEADLE AND CARRIED BY A VOICE VOTE TO ACCEPT THE APRIL 23, 2026, AGENDA AS PRESENTED.**

**AYES: TREASURER BEADLE, MR. BURTON, MR. MICKELSON, MS RASSET, MR. EVANOFF, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

## MINUTES

The Board considered the minutes of the March 26, 2026, TFFR meeting.

**IT WAS MOVED BY TREASURER BEADLE AND SECONDED BY MR. EVANOFF AND CARRIED BY A VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE MARCH 26, 2026, MINUTES AS DISTRIBUTED.**

**AYES: MR. MICKELSON, MR. EVANOFF, TREASURER BEADLE, MR. BURTON, MS. RASSET, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

## GOVERNANCE

### Plan Management Policy Update

Mr. Wood, GRS presented the annual Plan Policy Score, a forward-looking metric designed to supplement the actuarial valuation by assessing the plan's long-term funding outlook under a range of potential investment return scenarios. The score serves as an early warning tool and fiduciary oversight measure, helping the board evaluate whether the plan is trending in the right direction. Unlike the annual valuation, which examines a single point in time, the Plan Policy Score uses 5,000 stochastic projections to evaluate a broad range of potential outcomes.

The score is based on five factors: current funded ratio, downside funded ratio, probability of reaching an 85% funded ratio by 2040, likelihood of funding improvement over the next 10 years, and the plan's ability to recover from a significant market downturn. The plan's score improved from 10 to 11 out of a possible 14 points, reflecting continued progress driven primarily by strong investment returns and improved funding metrics.

GRS noted that the plan's fair value return of approximately 11% during fiscal year 2025 contributed positively to the results, while payroll growth remained below assumptions, which slightly reduced projected contribution growth. Overall, the analysis found no significant concerns and showed a consistent positive trend, with the score improving from 6 in 2019 to 11 today.

The board discussed future enhancements to the metric, including revisiting the fixed 2030 and 2040 target dates as those milestones draw closer and exploring whether additional factors, such as payroll growth sensitivity or variable contribution rate structures, should be incorporated into future analyses. GRS indicated a willingness to provide additional education on variable contribution rate funding models at a future meeting.

**IT WAS MOVED BY MR. MICKELSON AND SECONDED BY MR. BURTON AND CARRIED BY A VOICE VOTE TO ACCEPT THE PLAN MANAGEMENT POLICY UPDATE**

**AYES: TREASURER BEADLE, MS. RASSET, MR. EVANOFF, MR. BURTON, MR. MICKELSON, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

### TFFR GPR Committee Update

Mr. Mickelson provided an update from the April 13, 2026, GPR Committee meeting. The Committee discussed the plan for review and rewriting of the TFFR governance manual. After considering both internal rewrite and external support, the committee agreed that engaging Funston is the most efficient option and would allow staff to focus on other priorities.

Because Funston has already reviewed TFFR governance documents as part of the State Investment Board project and works with pension systems nationwide, they can provide governance best practices and streamline the review process. The proposed timeline would allow the project to be completed by the end of December, with stakeholder interviews, governance recommendations, and a revised governance framework.

Staff noted that the review would likely separate governance responsibilities from operational policies, creating greater clarity around board oversight and administrative functions. Funding is expected to be managed within existing resources, contingency funds, or, if needed, through the Emergency Commission process.

**IT WAS MOVED BY MR. MICKELSON AND SECONDED BY MS. RASSET AND CARRIED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO AUTHORIZE STAFF TO MOVE FORWARD WITH PURSUING ENGAGEMENT OF A GOVERNANCE CONSULTANT TO CONDUCT A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND REWRITE OF THE TFFR GOVERNANCE MANUAL, INCLUDING IDENTIFICATION OF AN APPROPRIATE FUNDING PATH AND PRESENTATION OF A PROPOSED PROJECT TIMELINE.**

**AYES: MS. RASSET, MR. BURTON, MR. MICKELSON, MR. EVANOFF, TREASURER BEADLE, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

## Delinquent Accounts Update

Ms. Smith reported significant progress in bringing delinquent employer accounts into compliance. Since the previous report, all identified school districts except Fort Ransom have resolved their reporting deficiencies and returned to compliance.

Fort Ransom remains under review due to unique circumstances surrounding the district's closure and questions regarding contribution requirements for a return-to-work administrator. Staff is working with the Attorney General's Office and the Department of Public Instruction to determine the appropriate course of action and noted that a formal opinion is still pending.

Board members commended staff for their efforts in improving compliance following implementation of the new pension administration system and recognized the positive results achieved through ongoing outreach and follow-up with school districts. Staff indicated there is currently no timeline for receiving guidance from the Attorney General's Office.

## 2026-27 Board Calendar & Education Plan

Ms. Smith reviewed the revised board meeting schedule that would reduce regular TFFR Board meetings from six to four per year, with meetings held on Wednesday afternoons alongside State Investment Board meetings. The proposed schedule is intended to improve efficiency, reduce travel demands, and better align meeting agendas with key decision points required by statute, administrative rules, and governance requirements.

While meetings may be longer, staff believes consolidating topics into four quarterly meetings will provide sufficient oversight while reducing the overall number of meeting days. Additional virtual meetings would remain available as needed for disability determinations, QDRO approvals, legislative updates, or other time-sensitive matters.

Staff also outlined plans for an annual strategic planning session in August, informed by benchmarking data from CEM, which compares TFFR operations and performance metrics to peer pension systems nationwide. The session would provide an opportunity to review retirement trends, operational performance, strategic priorities, and any potential legislative considerations before the start of the legislative session.

**IT WAS MOVED BY MR. BURTON AND SECONDED BY MR. EVANOFF AND CARRIED BY A VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE 2026-27 BOARD CALENDAR AND EDUCATION PLAN.**

**AYES: TREASURER BEADLE, MS. RASSET, MR. EVANOFF, MR. BURTON, MR. MICKELSON, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

## REPORTS

### Outreach Update

Ms. Mudder provided the Outreach Update for the quarter ending March 31, 2026. There has been continued strong engagement from employers and members through GovDelivery and the TFFR YouTube channel. Updated member education videos remain the most frequently accessed content and continue to be a valuable resource for TFFR members.

Ms. Mudder also provided an update on the project with MABU which is focused on developing resources for early-career teachers and new TFFR member education, including a retirement planning presentation, welcome communications, milestone-based email campaigns, and other educational materials designed to increase engagement and understanding of retirement benefits early in a member's career. The project remains in development, with additional work and refinement expected over the next month. Once finalized, the materials will be shared with the Board and introduced to school partners through stakeholder organizations.

### Quarterly TFFR Ends

Ms. Smith reviewed the TFFR Ends report. Staff reviewed the Board's responsibilities and identified six key oversight areas: governance and policy, funding and financial oversight, risk and compliance, leadership and organizational oversight, and operations and member services.

There has been significant progress in governance planning, financial reporting, investment oversight, audit and compliance activities, and leadership transitions. Succession plans are now in place for key leadership positions, while work continues on a broader business continuity plan.

Operationally, employer compliance has improved, adoption of the new pension administration system continues to increase, and member education efforts have expanded through enhanced outreach and training.

The Board also received an update on the CEM benchmarking study, which will compare TFFR's staffing, costs, service levels, and performance against peer pension systems nationwide. The results will help identify strengths, opportunities for improvement, and future resource needs.

### Quarterly Executive Limitations/Staff Relations Report

Ms. Smith provided the quarterly Executive Limitations/Staff Relations report. A new Multimedia Specialist position has been posted to support communications, outreach, website management, ADA compliance efforts, and growing public records requests.

Staff continue to advance key projects, including SharePoint implementation, job description updates, general ledger system replacement planning, and business continuity efforts. The upcoming CEM benchmarking study will provide comparisons to peer retirement systems and help identify future resource and staffing needs.

The Board also discussed ongoing costs and risks associated with the pension administration system, including vendor dependence, limited control over software changes, and the need to evaluate long-term support and maintenance strategies.

**IT WAS MOVED BY TREASURER BEADLE AND SECONDED BY MS. RASSET AND CARRIED BY A VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE QUARTERLY OUTREACH, TFFR ENDS, AND EXECUTIVE LIMITATIONS/STAFF RELATIONS REPORTS.**

**AYES: MR. BURTON, MS. RASSET, MR. EVANOFF, TREASURER BEADLE, MR. MICKELSON, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

## CONSENT AGENDA

**IT WAS MOVED BY TREASURER BEADLE AND SECONDED BY MS. RASSET AND CARRIED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO APPROVE DISABILITY APPLICATIONS 2026-4D, 2026-5D, 2026-6D, AND 2026-7D.**

**AYES: MS. RASSET, MR. MICKELSON, TREASURER BEADLE, MR. BURTON, AND PRES. LECH**
**NAYS: NONE**
**ABSTAIN: MR. EVANOFF**
**ABSENT: SUPT. BACHMEIER**
**MOTION CARRIED**

## ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the TFFR Board, Pres. Lech adjourned the meeting at 2:35 p.m.

Prepared by: Missy Kopp, Assistant to the Board