



**THE NORTH DAKOTA  
TEACHER RETENTION AND  
RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE**

*Recommendations and Report*

OCTOBER 2024



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## LETTER FROM THE GOVERNOR

North Dakota has the opportunity to lead the nation in providing world-class learning experiences for all K-12 students in our great state. Our administration recognizes the importance of quality educators in delivering relevant and personalized education to ensure all students graduate choice-ready for college, career or the military with the knowledge, skills and disposition to be successful in life, work and community.

The Office of the Governor received a request in July 2023 from the state Education Standards and Practices Board to approve emergency rules that would allow an undergraduate student who has yet to complete their student teaching experience and higher education degree to be considered a teacher of record for a semester. The Governor has the authority to approve emergency rules, and our administration supported that request. This request was seen as a quick, short-term fix and did not address broader issues regarding retention and recruitment within the field of education.

This emergency rule provided the launching point for the North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force led by our office in partnership with appointed members and stakeholders. Recognizing that our future workforce is fostered and inspired by educators and school district staff, this Task Force underscores the critical importance of our current and future education workforce as essential to the state's economy and success.

This Task Force represents a range of experts across the educational landscape: school board members, teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, teacher support staff and other critical voices. The work of this Task Force was not designed to provide "the" solution to teacher retention and recruitment but rather to spark a conversation about steps we can take to best support our education workforce.

The Task Force met four times as a full group with stakeholder listening sessions and working groups to take a deeper dive into specific focus areas. Executive Order 2023-08 established the Task Force and required a report of recommendations to the Office of the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

We look forward to sharing this list of prioritized recommendations and encourage policymakers to partner on solutions with long-term impact to the retention and recruitment of educators.

We are deeply grateful for the dedication and tireless work of the Task Force members. Through their passion for ensuring the success of our students and educators, they have achieved what we strive to do every day in state government: Empower People, Improve Lives and Inspire Success.

With Gratitude,



**Governor Doug Burgum**

(2016–Current)





## A SPECIAL THANK YOU

Significant consideration was given to ensure teacher voices were incorporated into the Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force recommendation process. Thank you to the Task Force members and the participants of the listening sessions, especially the teachers who made this possible.

### North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force Members

- **The Honorable Kirsten Baesler**, Superintendent of Public Instruction | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
- **The Honorable Steve Swiontek**, State Representative | Fargo, North Dakota
- **The Honorable Dean Rummel**, State Senator | Dickinson, North Dakota
- **Maria Neset**, Senior Policy Advisor | North Dakota Office of the Governor
- **Luke Schaefer**, CEO of the Central Regional Education Association | Minot, North Dakota; Task Force Chair
- **Patti Stedman**, School Board Member | West Fargo, North Dakota; Education Standards and Practice Board Member
- **Bret Dockter**, Middle School Teacher | Harvey, North Dakota; 2022 State Teacher of the Year
- **Ashley Seykora**, Instructional Coach | Rugby Public Schools, North Dakota
- **Abby DuBord**, Elementary School Teacher | Bismarck Public Schools, North Dakota; 2023 State Teacher of the Year Finalist
- **Dr. Robert Lech**, Superintendent | Jamestown Public Schools, North Dakota
- **John Porter**, Executive Director of South East Education Cooperative; Co-Director of the South Valley/Rural Cass Special Education Units | Fargo, North Dakota
- **James Green**, High School Principal | McKenzie County Public Schools, Watford City, North Dakota
- **Dr. Sherry Tandeski**, Elementary School Principal | St. John Public Schools, North Dakota
- **Jenny Bladow**, Director of Teacher Education | College of Education & Human Development, Northwood, North Dakota; Education Standards and Practice Board Member
- **Erin Jacobson**, Coordinator of the North Dakota Teacher Support System | Bismarck, North Dakota

### Listening Session Organizations

- North Dakota State Teacher of the Year
- North Dakota United
- North Dakota School Board Association
- North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders



# TEACHER RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT: A CALL TO ACTION

In recognition of the impact teachers have on student growth, Governor Doug Burgum decided to address the issue of teacher retention and recruitment in the state of North Dakota. Teachers are the [number one factor](#) influencing student growth and achievement. Yet, across the country, district and school leaders [struggle](#) to retain educators and fill vacant classrooms. In many states, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated educator attrition, leading states to examine not only how to fill vacancies, but how to strengthen and diversify weakened educator pathways.

North Dakota is not immune to these challenges, despite the Roughrider State being ranked in the top [25 percent](#) of states for teaching attractiveness. [61 percent](#) of schools reported being unable or finding it very difficult to fill teacher vacancies. The North Dakota University System reported a [six percent](#) shortage of qualified educators across disciplines.

Retaining, and by extension, recruiting, a high-quality educator workforce is pivotal for enhancing the well-being of North Dakota's students. Evidence shows that highly effective educators can alter the trajectory of a child's future. When evaluating the most influential factors related to student performance in reading and math assessments, teachers were found to have a [two to three times](#) greater influence than any other aspect of schooling, including services, facilities, and school leadership. Students assigned to highly effective teachers are [more likely](#) to pursue higher education, earn higher salaries, and less likely to experience early parenthood. Students who benefit from teachers focused on improving behavior and other hireable skills display [increased rates](#) of high school graduation, SAT participation, and intentions of college attendance.

To address the educator retention crisis in the state, the Governor issued an [Executive Order](#) to create the [North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force](#) (the Task Force) to provide recommendations through a final report to the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction no later than September 30, 2024. The recommendations must include pathways to:

- ➔ Increasing recruitment to the teaching profession;
- ➔ Improving teacher preparation programs across the state;
- ➔ Reviewing and evaluating current pathways to licensure and a review of new opportunities around teacher licensure;
- ➔ Reevaluate teacher compensation and contracts;
- ➔ Enhancing working conditions and supports to improve retention in the teaching profession;
- ➔ Identifying best practices from other jurisdictions and potential impact to long-term positive outcomes related to teacher recruitment and retention.

The Task Force will also identify partners to sponsor legislation based on the report's recommendations during the 69th Legislative Assembly and conduct stakeholder meetings and roundtable discussions across the state to gather feedback from pertinent stakeholder groups.



# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This report aims to provide insight into the current state of teacher recruitment and retention in North Dakota, highlighting successes and identifying opportunities for strengthening policy and practice. Based on this understanding, the Task Force developed the following recommendations to guide key education stakeholders in supporting a high-quality educator workforce in North Dakota that is able to effectively provide all students with an opportunity to succeed.

## **Recommendation #1: Provide a Safe and Supportive Environment for Educators and Learners in Every Building**

The Task Force recommends state agency leaders and education stakeholders collaborate to address system gaps, leverage opportunities and activate a continuum of support to create safe, supportive environments for educators and learners in every building, as measured by a statewide system of student behavior metrics.

## **Recommendation #2: Reduce Barriers for Schools that Wish to Provide Child Care**

The Task Force recommends the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services collaborate with education stakeholders to streamline regulations and reduce barriers for schools that wish to offer on-site child care.

## **Recommendation #3: Understand Supportive School Culture**

The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Further, the Task Force recommends school boards include employee satisfaction in driving their strategic goals.

## **Recommendation #4: Fund Mentorship**

- a. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund a graduated mentorship through the ND RISE program for teachers within their first three years in a new position.
- b. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund the development and facilitation of an administrator mentorship program with an emphasis on supporting teachers by improving working conditions, including but not limited to student behaviors, teacher voice and parent concerns.

## **Recommendation #5: Fund Educator Pathways**

- a. The Task Force recommends state agencies and the legislature adjust the reimbursement rate to 100% for schools offering CTE courses leading to a career in education.
- b. The Task Force recommends the legislature incentivize local and state initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher leadership opportunities.

## **Recommendation #6: Maximize Benefits for Educators**

The Task Force recommends related state agencies partner with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the Bank of North Dakota, the Teachers' Fund for Retirement (TFFR), the North Dakota Teacher Support System and other appropriate organizations to offer comprehensive financial planning resources and training.

## **Recommendation #7: Optimize Educator Earnings**

The Task Force recommends a legislative study to explore the feasibility, impact and process of:

- a. Creating a health insurance pool for school employees.
- b. Analyzing compensation structures to maximize lifetime earnings.



# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATION #1. PROVIDE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS IN EVERY BUILDING

**The Task Force recommends state agency leaders and education stakeholders collaborate to address system gaps, leverage opportunities and activate a continuum of support to create safe, supportive environments for educators and learners in every building as measured by a statewide system of student behavior metrics.**

This recommendation aims to support a safe and supportive working environment for all North Dakota educators. The Task Force specifies measuring improvement in addressing system gaps, leveraging opportunities and activating continua of support by utilizing statewide data systems focused on student behavior. Positive school cultures and healthy learning environments have a significant impact on student outcomes and [educator retention](#). Strong school environments result in higher engagement and attendance for students and staff, reduced office referrals and decreased teacher [turnover](#). Safe and supportive learning environments may be measured through student metrics such as risky or unsafe behavior which are shown to be [reduced](#) within positive learning environments.

## RECOMMENDATION #2. REDUCE BARRIERS FOR SCHOOLS THAT WISH TO PROVIDE CHILD CARE

**The Task Force recommends the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services collaborate with education stakeholders to streamline regulations and reduce barriers for schools that wish to offer on-site child care.**

North Dakota is [home](#) to 64,000 children under 5 years of age, with around [10,000](#) babies born in the state every year. For children, [the earliest years of life are a critical window](#) of development with long-lasting implications for their success in school and life. For North Dakota parents and employers, however, lack of quality, affordable and available child care poses a threat to workforce participation. With [72 percent](#) of North Dakota's parents in the workforce, the Task Force recommends improving access to quality, affordable child care as part of efforts to remove workforce barriers across schools, especially in areas of critical need.

## RECOMMENDATION #3. UNDERSTAND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

**The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Further, the Task Force recommends school boards include employee satisfaction in driving their strategic goals.**

This recommendation aims to increase awareness and planning to support employee satisfaction through data collection. Job satisfaction is influenced by factors which maintain or encourage people in their role. This recommendation supports data collection to inform planning and improvement of workplace satisfaction including [factors](#) such as compensation, school policies and relationships. This includes achievement, recognition and career advancement. By incorporating employee satisfaction data in strategic goal setting, schools and districts will identify key factors related to educator retention in plans for continuous improvement aimed at ensuring supportive school culture.



## RECOMMENDATION #4. FUND MENTORSHIP

**A. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund a graduated mentorship through the ND RISE program for teachers within their first three years in a new position. This mentorship program would include measurable outcomes and be results-based through annual public reporting.**

Mentorship is crucial to the retention of new teachers in their first three years. Research shows that [teacher retention](#) rates drop significantly in the first two years, and the third year is a notable predictor for teachers deciding to stay in the profession. Specifically, [lack of teacher support](#) is cited as a top reason for leaving the profession.

Mentorship programs are designed to help teachers in their first three years to develop [self-efficacy](#), effective teaching strategies and better classroom management. Data indicates that teachers who participate in NDRISE have [higher retention rates](#) compared to teachers not in the program. By expanding this program, new teachers can develop their presence in the classroom, increasing their likelihood of staying in the educational field.

**B. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund the development and facilitation of an administrator mentorship program with an emphasis on supporting teachers by improving working conditions, including but not limited to student behaviors, teacher voice and parent concerns. This mentorship program would include measurable outcomes and be results-based through annual public reporting.**

School administrators play a crucial role in supporting student and staff success by shaping the vision of their school community, fostering a positive culture and effectively managing resources. Research shows [dissatisfaction](#) with school leadership is one of the leading factors why educators choose to leave the profession. Alternatively, educators who are involved in decision-making and feel a greater sense of autonomy in their roles are more likely to remain in the classroom and feel a stronger sense of connection to their school communities. Teachers identify the quality of support from school administration as more important than salary. Additionally, support quality has a [strong relationship](#) to teacher turnover.

## RECOMMENDATION #5. FUND EDUCATOR PATHWAYS

**A. The Task Force recommends state agencies and the legislature adjust the reimbursement rate to 100% for schools offering CTE courses leading to a career in education.**

Strengthening early career pathways for high school students is a strategy used to recruit teachers within local communities. Currently, CTE educator programs receive the [lowest rate](#) of reimbursement from the state of North Dakota. Programs that target students for educator candidates have the potential to address teacher shortages in key areas and [diversify](#) the educator workforce. Local teacher programs may also address [teacher retention and effectiveness](#) by drawing on their support network and connection to the surrounding community. As the number of degrees in education continues to [decline](#), strengthening pathways into the profession offers opportunities to improve retention and recruitment.





## **B. The Task Force recommends the legislature incentivize local and state initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher leadership opportunities.**

Providing teachers with leadership opportunities can [improve teacher retention](#) by enhancing job satisfaction, reducing burnout and expanding professional growth. However, increasing leadership opportunities should encourage teachers to remain in the classroom rather than pulling them into administration. Teachers who are involved in decision-making are [more likely to stay in the profession long-term](#). [Shared decision-making](#) is one of the top cited working conditions that impact teacher retention. Opportunities for enhancing teacher leadership may include supporting existing [Teacher Leadership Academies](#), exploring opportunities for strategic staffing such as [Next Education Workforce](#), or implementing [advanced or lead teacher](#) models.

## **RECOMMENDATION #6. MAXIMIZE BENEFITS FOR EDUCATORS**

**The Task Force recommends related state agencies partner with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the Bank of North Dakota, the Teachers' Fund for Retirement (TFFR), the North Dakota Teacher Support System and other appropriate organizations to offer comprehensive financial planning resources and training. These resources should include information on the salary matrix framework, differences in health insurance plans, contract benefits, 457 deferred plans, TFFR plans and other related benefits. These resources should be made available to preservice providers and schools for the benefit of preservice teachers, new district hires and teachers within their first three years in the profession.**

The Task Force unanimously approved this recommendation for strengthening training for teachers regarding total benefits and compensation packages available to them. This support enables new educators to understand and manage the benefits associated with the transition into the profession. This information also builds capacity for long-term career training for educators with the potential for improving educator retention. Financial literacy is shown to [decrease financial strain](#) and improve long-term financial planning and decision-making, which is particularly impactful for educators.

## **RECOMMENDATION #7. OPTIMIZE EDUCATOR EARNINGS**

**The Task Force recommends a legislative study to explore the feasibility, impact and process of:**

- **Creating a health insurance pool for school employees**
- **Analyzing compensation structures to maximize lifetime earnings.**

**This study should include a cost-benefit analysis, plan designs and coverage, administrative structures, an analysis of the impact on educator salaries, and a comparative analysis of similar approaches in other states.**

This recommendation proposes a legislative study to examine opportunities for maximizing benefits for educators. Competitive health benefits and compensation structures are critical for attracting and retaining quality educators. By exploring options for insurance pools and shifts in pay structure, legislators will receive information on promising practices from other states and current research on improving benefit options for educators and maximizing return.



Established in 2001, [The Hunt Institute](#) honors the legacy of James B. Hunt, Jr., the former governor of North Carolina who distinguished himself as an ardent champion of education.

The Hunt Institute brings together people and resources to inspire and inform elected officials and policymakers about key issues in education, resulting in visionary leaders who are prepared to take strategic action for greater educational outcomes and student success.

In 2016, The Hunt Institute became an independent, nonprofit entity and joined forces with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to pursue research, educational partnerships, and events related to improving education policy.

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