

2023 | NORTH DAKOTA LEGISLATORS RETREAT

ISSUE BRIEF

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Mixed Delivery Systems and Access

24%

Families living in child care deserts

[Source](#)

22%

*Percent of income-eligible children
served by Child Care Assistance
Program (child care subsidy)*

[Source](#)

In order to increase access to high-quality early learning, states have increasingly supported the implementation of [mixed delivery systems](#). These systems provide state funding to a diverse array of early childhood service providers (both public and private) to promote parental choice and ensure accessible, high-quality care options for all families. Mixed delivery systems capitalize on the expertise and physical capacity of existing providers, making them both a cost-effective and sustainable method to deliver high-quality education and care to all children. Providers in mixed delivery systems routinely include licensed center-based and family child care programs (often including faith-based providers), Head Start, Early Head Start, public schools, and community-based organizations.

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded, early education program that provides comprehensive education, nutrition, and other services to infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children from low-income families. In

[2022](#), about nine percent of eligible ND infants and toddlers were served by Early Head Start and about 36 percent of eligible children ages three to five had access to Head Start preschool services in North Dakota. Grantees in North Dakota are also funded to serve American Indian/Alaska Native children.

1,949 (36%)

Eligible Children Enrolled in Head Start

736 (9%)

Eligible Children Enrolled in Early Head Start

[Source](#)

■ Best in Class Program (Four-Year-Olds)

930

Children Enrolled in Best in Class 2021-2023

[Source](#)

Best in Class is a competitive grant program designed to provide four-year-old children with high-quality early childhood services during the year before kindergarten entry. During its first two years of operation, the program supported early childhood programs in 37 communities and served [930 children](#). A proposed expansion of the program currently being sought by ND DHHS would support services to 1,800 children by the end of the 2023-25 biennium.

The [National Institute for Early Education Research](#) (NIEER) currently ranks North Dakota 33rd in the nation for access to state-funded preschool among four-year-olds and 45th in state spending.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ What are some ways mixed delivery systems can increase access to child care for working North Dakota families?
- ❓ How will expanding the Best in Class program support high-quality early experiences for children in North Dakota?
- ❓ How can policymakers support increased access to child care for North Dakota's working families?

ENSURING SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT

Accountability Systems

Accountability systems enable states to measure and hold districts, schools, and educators accountable for raising student achievement and provide education stakeholders data on where additional supports and improvements may be necessary. From 2002 until late 2015, states were held accountable to standards laid out under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which emphasized student assessment scores and tied results to educator and school evaluation and measures of quality, leading to a culture of “high-stakes” testing. The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA), which replaced NCLB, removed many accountability requirements tying student performance to teacher evaluation, leaving the decision on whether to do so largely up to the states.

Under ESSA, all states are required to hold schools accountable for the achievement of all students. Major requirements for state accountability systems include:

- States must set goals for improving student performance on state assessments and graduation rates for all students and for each student subgroup. These goals must be more ambitious for groups of students who are further behind.
- States must assign ratings to schools based on how they perform against these goals.



North Dakota

In September of 2022, Governor Doug Burgum [announced](#) a framework for legislation to address the availability, affordability, and quality of child care services in North Dakota to support working families. The proposal came after 14 months of work with child care providers, business leaders, the Workforce Development Council, legislators, and other key stakeholders staffed by The Hunt Institute.

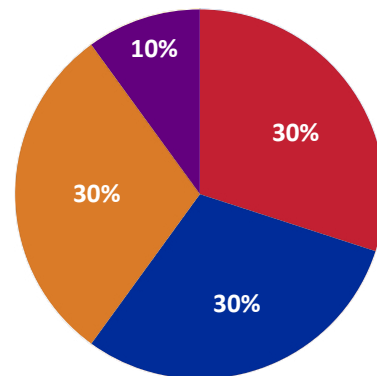
- School ratings must be based on how schools are doing in relation to each metric chosen for inclusion under the state ESSA plan, for both the student population as a whole as well as for each student subgroup.
- States must identify three types of schools for support and improvement, all of which must have a formalized plan for improvement. School categories include:
 - ⬅ Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)
 - ⬅ Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI)
 - ⬅ Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI)
- States must develop a “State Report Card” that provides parents, families, and other education stakeholders with relevant student data including reading, math, graduation rates, absenteeism, and more.

North Dakota utilizes an [index-rating system](#) for quantifying school quality and performance, in which schools receive “points” across a variety of metrics. North Dakota measures school quality with the [following metrics](#) in mind:

- Graduation Rate
- Completer Rate
- Growth in English-Language Arts and math
- English Learner Proficiency Growth
- Student engagement
- State assessment proficiency
- [Choice Ready Rate](#)
- School Support



■ Elementary (K-8)* Accountability Model



- State Assessment Achievement Growth
- Climate/Engagement
- State Assessment Achievement
- English Learner Proficiency

[Source](#)

**For accountability purposes, grades 7 and 8 are included with the elementary report, except for large districts with an approved middle school.*

School Turnaround

Under ESSA, states are [required](#) to develop and implement a school-level support and improvement plan for CSI, TSI, and ATSI-designated schools. These schools receive [additional supports and interventions](#), including professional development for educators, technology supplements, support meeting school improvement goals, assistance with the collection and interpretation of student achievement data, expanded curricular offerings, and more. Schools are also eligible for school improvement grants, ranging from \$60 - \$75,000 depending on school enrollment, which may be used for evidence-based interventions or any of the aforementioned supports. North Dakota provides detailed descriptions of both TSI and CSI-designated schools.

TARGETED SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT

- Schools that constantly underperform or feature low performance across any of the following subgroups:
- Economically disadvantaged students, children with disabilities, English learners, white students, American Indian or Alaska Native students, African American students, Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students, and Hispanic or Latinx students

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT

- The lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools statewide (utilizing the accountability framework over no more than three years).
- All public high schools that graduate less than 67 percent of their students.
- Any school identified as TSI that fails to meet exit criteria after three years.

Per an [emergency order](#) signed by the Governor in April 2023, the North Dakota Century Code has been [amended](#) to require the following intervention by the superintendent of public instruction for a chronically low-performing school or school district:

01. The superintendent of public instruction shall conduct an assessment and a review of past interventions of a chronically low-performing school or school district to identify areas of insufficient performance and develop an improvement plan. An improvement plan under this section may include a directive from the superintendent of public instruction requiring:
 - a. Funds to be held in escrow for the school or school district or spent as designated by the superintendent of public instruction.
 - b. Changes to curriculum, training, instruction, assessment, or the school calendar in the school or school district.
 - c. Reassignment or hiring of school or school district staff to fill roles associated with school or school district needs.
02. A memorandum of understanding must be entered between the department of public instruction and a chronically low-performing school or school district.
03. A chronically low-performing school or school district shall complete a school board leadership program as required by the department of public instruction.

04. The superintendent of public instruction shall report annually to the state board of public school education, the education standing committees of the legislative assembly during a legislative session, and an interim committee of the legislative management when the legislative assembly is not in a legislative session regarding the implementation of this section.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ Does the state accountability system present data in a way that is accessible and understandable to all stakeholders, particularly parents and families?
- ❓ Is the state accountability system transparent around where equity gaps exist?
- ❓ Does the state accountability system account for multiple measures of success?
- ❓ Does the state accountability system balance support for improvement and intervention to ensure all students are learning in a high-quality environment?

EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF SCHOOL CHOICE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

School choice refers broadly to families' ability to "choose" the school their child attends and draw on public funding to do so. The term encompasses public school options – such as charter schools, magnet schools, and inter- and intra-district transfers – as well as private school options, including vouchers, tax, credits, and education savings accounts. On one hand, school choice offers families more voice in their children's education. Advocates claim choice programs provide opportunities for new and different education models to develop and create competitive pressures to push traditional schools and districts to innovate and improve. On the other hand, critics argue that some school choice options funnel students – and funding – from the traditional public schools that continue to serve the vast majority of students, and potentially create mechanisms that "cream skim" the strongest students and those with the most involved parents. Still others emphasize that the key question is not which entity operates schools, but rather how a community can create enough high-quality seats to serve the diverse needs of all students living in a particular community.

School Choice Options

Public School Choice

Public choice options are funded by federal, state, and local dollars or a combination of these sources. While the structure varies by state and choice option, generally a portion of the per pupil funding that would typically go to the student's assigned traditional public school is allocated to their school of choice. Students do not pay tuition to attend public schools of choice. North Dakota only has one type of choice program, and it's open enrollment.

- **Charter Schools:** Charter schools are publicly funded, but independently managed. In order to operate, the founder(s) are required to develop a plan and receive approval from an authorizer.

Charter schools have greater operational autonomy than traditional public schools over areas like staffing, curriculum, and time. In exchange, charter schools are also supposed to face greater accountability; they must meet the expectations included in their charter contract, or their authorizer can close them. Though most charter schools are brick-and-mortar buildings where students and teachers meet in person, some charter schools are also virtual.

- **Magnet Schools:** Magnet schools are public schools that allow students to focus on a specific learning track, such as engineering, language immersion, or the performing arts. Unlike traditional district schools or charters, magnet schools can use a selective admissions process, such as testing requirements. As of the 2019-20 school year, there are 3,497 magnet schools across the country serving a little over five percent of the student population.
- **Open Enrollment:** Open-enrollment policies allow families to choose a district-operated school other than the one they are assigned to depending on where they live. These policies may pertain to district schools within a district (intra-district) or to district schools across districts (inter-district). As of 2022, 43 states have some form of open-enrollment policies, with only 11 states having mandatory policies requiring districts to offer open-enrollment policies under state law.
- **Home Schooling:** Beginning in the late 1970s, families began opting to teach their children at home. While the number of families choosing this option had seemingly plateaued from 2012 - 2016 at three percent of students nationwide, the most recent numbers from 2022 reveal that number has climbed to five percent nationally.

Private School Choice

Private schools are schools that are privately owned and funded. As such, they are not subject to the same rules and regulations of public schools. Private schools fall into five categories that are based on religious affiliation: Catholic, conservative Christian, affiliated religious, unaffiliated religious, and nonsectarian. In

2019, approximately nine percent of all K-12 students were enrolled in private school nationally.

- Vouchers: Voucher programs are designed to provide some or all the public funding that would support a student's schooling to families to apply towards private school. While the concept of a voucher is not new (Maine and Vermont have voucher programs dating back to the 19th century), they have grown in popularity and are the most commonly used private school choice mechanism. Data on the impact of voucher programs on academic performance is mixed, though there is evidence that attending a private school may improve parent or student satisfaction.
- Tax Credits and Deductions: Tax credits or deductions are similar to vouchers in that they provide families with the option of using public funds to send their student to a private school. But they differ in their funding source, with individuals or corporations directly funding them rather than the government.
- Tax Credit Scholarships: In some states, individuals and businesses can receive a tax break for donations to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships. The specifics surrounding tax credits vary from state to state. For instance, Florida provides a 100 percent credit to businesses that support the program while Indiana only provides a 50 percent match for donations. Eligibility for these programs also differs across states. Montana's tax-credit scholarship is available to every student without qualification. On the other hand, only low-income students are eligible for Arizona's scholarship program.
- Individual Tax Credits and Deductions: In 2017, the federal government expanded the 529 college savings plans that allow families to invest dollars for college tuition and related expenses in state-administered mutual funds that grow tax-free to also include elementary and secondary education. This expansion allows families to use up to \$10,000 per year in 529 funds to pay for private school tuition and related expenses. All 50 states and the District of Columbia sponsor a 529 plan, and, in

some states, families can receive an additional tax credit or deduction to their individual state tax returns for approved educational expenses, such as private school tuition, books, supplies, computers, tutors, and transportation.

- Education Savings Accounts: Education savings accounts (ESAs) allow parents to withdraw their child from public or charter schools and receive public funds to be used for expenses associated with learning programs. ESAs are a relatively new private school choice option, with Arizona becoming the first state in the nation to adopt an ESA policy in 2011. ESAs act like a more flexible version of the voucher concept; the state deposits a portion of the per-pupil expenditure into a restricted-use bank account that families can use for education products and services, including private school tuition, as well as a range of educational services and tools, such as tutoring, supplies, college tuition, and other learning services and materials. Funds in ESAs also typically roll over from year to year.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ How will school choice programs be held accountable for student outcomes and quality of education?
- ❓ How will school choice programs be funded and sustained over time?
- ❓ How will school choice programs affect equity and access to education for all students, particularly those from low-income families or underserved communities? Will these programs exacerbate existing inequalities or help to address them?

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF NORTH DAKOTA'S STUDENTS

Youth suicide has been on the rise for the past decade and is the [second leading cause of death](#) among children ages 10-14 and the [third leading cause of death](#) among individuals ages 15-24. In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the [proportion](#) of children between the ages of five and 11 visiting an emergency department because of a mental health crisis was 24 percent higher than the same time period in 2019; among 12- to 17-year-olds, that number increased by 31 percent. Ultimately, [37 percent](#) of high school students reported experiencing poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

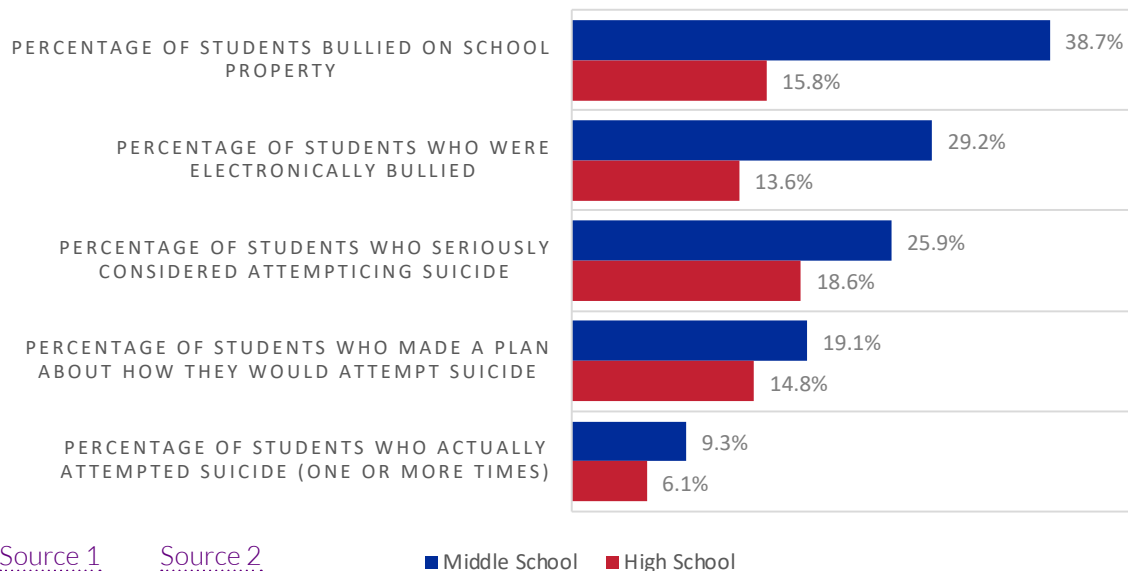
While limited data exists to measure the mental health status of K-12 students, North Dakota allows students in grades 7-12 to participate in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. This survey captures a variety of metrics related to student mental health and bullying, as well as other "risky" behaviors.

Schools must consider the unique needs of each student, starting with their need to feel safe, to effectively address mental health's impact on student learning. The [figure below](#) highlights the key student needs that must be met to effectively close the persistent achievement gap:

Caring for the mental health needs of students requires the development of a robust infrastructure that goes beyond learning, as students must have their behavioral and mental health needs met to feel safe, succeed academically, and be the best version of themselves. Many methods designed to focus on those needs fall under what are known as [wraparound services](#).

Wraparound services feed into the philosophy of caring for the "[whole child](#)", meaning that states and districts must go beyond meeting just academic needs to address emotional, behavioral, and health needs as well. States and districts throughout the country are working to find ways to generate and target investments for student wraparound services. These approaches vary from calls for targeted investments in after-school programs to establishing [community schools](#).

North Dakota Youth behavioral risk survey | 2021





Under Senate Bill 2265, every school district in North Dakota is required to provide a minimum of eight hours of professional development on youth behavioral health to educators and administrators at all grade levels. Each school within a district is also required to designate a staff member as a “Behavioral Health Resource Coordinator.” This individual is responsible for facilitating the intake of behavioral health resources – with schools having discretion for how to utilize the resources provided.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ In what ways can policymakers support communities across North Dakota to leverage their strengths in supporting parents, schools, and students?
- ❓ What additional information is needed to best support the mental and behavioral health of North Dakota’s student population?
- ❓ How can North Dakota better enlist local and regional agencies to provide behavioral health assistance and support to students?

EMBEDDING THE SCIENCE OF READING IN TEACHER PREPARATION AND CLASSROOMS

There is perhaps no skill more essential than the ability to read. Students who lack reading proficiency by the end of the third grade are [four times](#) more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers – and the number is even higher for students living in poverty. Early literacy proficiency is [critical](#) to later success, both in academics and in life. The science of reading represents the collection of evidence-based practices learned from decades of research across various disciplines including education, psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience. As the [Defining Movement Coalition](#) explains, the science of reading is “a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing.” The notion of the science of reading is relatively new, growing out of the 1997 [National Reading Panel](#); as a result, other practices for teaching literacy are still widely used.

The number of states [embedding](#) evidence-based reading instruction in legislation has grown and the practice of aligning reading instruction to the science of reading has gained traction nationally. Best practices from states like [Mississippi](#), [Arkansas](#), [Colorado](#), and [North Carolina](#) include:

- Aligning state literacy standards to the science of reading
- Funding professional development for teachers in the science of reading
- Requiring that reading interventions for students be aligned with the science of reading
- Working to align teacher licensure exams with the science of reading
- Requiring educator preparation programs to include coursework in the science of reading

Following these best practices, North Dakota enacted legislation in [2021](#), offering statewide professional development learning opportunities in scientifically

based reading instruction practices. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has incorporated the [Foundations of Reading and Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling \(LETRS\)](#), evidence-based professional learning designed to prepare educators for explicit reading instruction. Additionally, teacher candidates can only receive their [licensure](#) by demonstrating mastery through training in accredited or approved programs that have embedded the science of reading in coursework. Complementary to professional development for teachers, North Dakota also requires that teachers universally use scientifically based core curriculum and assessments to diagnose and monitor students’ reading ability. Intervention and supplemental materials for students with unique needs must also be evidence-based. North Dakota’s prioritization of the science of reading in their policies can potentially lead to greater proficiency in reading across the state.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ What are some recommendations for aspiring teachers who might encounter faculty or universities who have not yet embedded the science of reading in coursework?
- ❓ What state policies can support schools and districts so that there is a smoother transition incorporating evidence-based reading instruction in professional development and curriculum?
- ❓ How can North Dakota sustain professional development programs geared towards evidence-based reading instruction after the depletion of ESSER funding?

BUILDING GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS TO STRENGTHEN NORTH DAKOTA'S TEACHER PIPELINE

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs [recruit teachers](#) from members of the community, working to identify potential teaching candidates as early as middle school and/or to recruit existing paraprofessionals and career changers to become certified teachers. These programs serve to increase a state or district's local pipeline of future teachers and can also support the increased diversity of the local educator workforce. There is also [evidence](#) to show that teachers hired from within low-resourced communities tend to teach long term in the communities that originally hired them.

States [utilize](#) GYO programs because they offer several benefits in both the short and long term. First, the design of GYO programs help address teacher [shortages](#) in high-needs schools and districts by offering financial assistance in the form of stipends or student loan grants and tailored training to become qualified teachers in the region. Additionally, the design of GYO programs creates a sustainable pipeline of qualified teachers, which [evidence](#) suggests can save districts money by reducing the costs associated

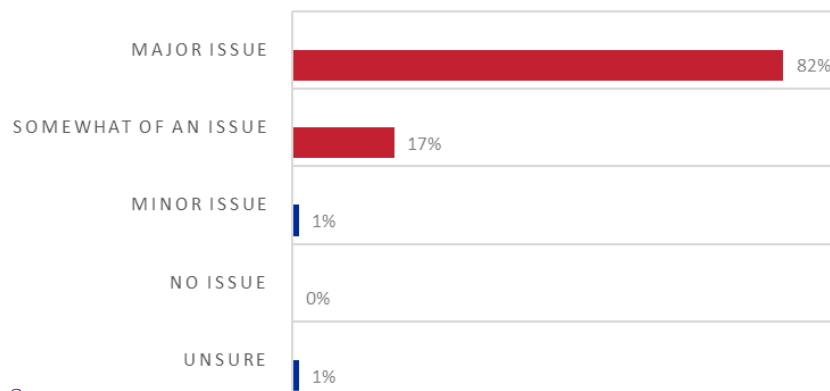
with recruiting and hiring teachers from outside the community and by reducing teacher turnover rates, which can also be costly.

Beginning in 2020, North Dakota allocated a portion of their [ESSER funds](#) to establish GYO programs focused on supporting paraprofessionals in obtaining full teacher licensure at three universities:

- [Minot State University Special Education Paraprofessional to Teacher Pathway](#)
- [University of Mary Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education Online Program](#)
- [Valley City State University Transition to Teaching Program](#)

These programs provide adults who are already working in classrooms with an opportunity to have their tuition paid for and to gain classroom teaching experience under a mentor's supervision while they earn their full teaching license. To provide further support for these programs and to expand to additional institutions of higher education, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction has applied to the U.S. Department of Labor to be recognized as a sponsor of [Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs](#), which will establish eligibility for supporting

Percentage of Teachers in North Dakota Who Believe Teacher Retention is an Issue for the 2022-23 School Year



Source

federal funds. In addition, [SB 2032](#) was introduced during the 2023 legislative session and, if passed, will provide an appropriation from the legislature to the Department of Public Instruction to be allocated for grants to accredited institutions of higher education to establish additional paraprofessional-to-teacher GYO programs.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ Are there eligibility criteria for the program to promote the most effective results? How will the program effectiveness be measured and evaluated?
- ❓ How can GYO programs be designed to promote collaboration between schools, districts, and teacher preparation programs? What role can partnerships and collaborations play in supporting the program's success and creating a pipeline of highly qualified teachers for local schools and communities?
- ❓ How can GYO programs be designed to be flexible and adaptable to local contexts and needs? What role can local stakeholders, such as school boards, community organizations, and teacher unions, play in shaping and implementing the program to best meet the needs of their communities?

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS

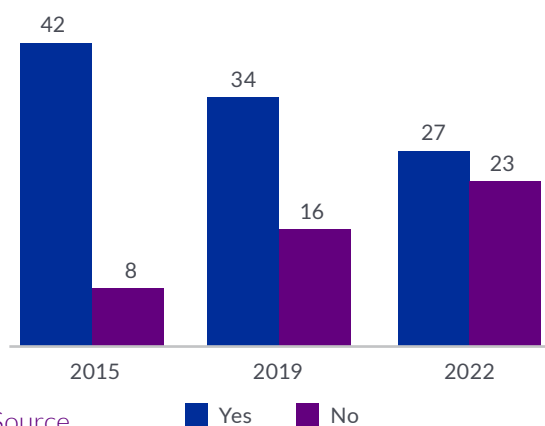
School leaders play a critical role in ensuring the success of students, teachers, and the entire school community. School leaders are [responsible](#) for setting the school's vision and goals, creating a positive school culture, and managing resources effectively. Additionally,

they provide instructional leadership by supporting teachers' professional development and ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with state standards. Research [indicates](#) effective school leadership is associated with improved student outcomes, including higher academic achievement and graduation rates, and lower rates of suspension and absenteeism.

To ensure accurate measures of school leader quality, [some states](#) have moved away from using student test scores as a measure of principal effectiveness. One reason is student test scores can be influenced by factors outside of a principal's control, such as student demographics or teacher quality. As a result, [other measures](#) of principal effectiveness have been implemented, such as school climate and teacher retention rates. This approach allows for a more holistic evaluation of a principal's performance and may provide a more accurate picture of their impact on the school.

The state of North Dakota [requires](#) all principals to be evaluated at least annually. During the first three years of employment, two performance reviews are required per year. Beginning in the fourth year, only one review per year is required. Student growth measures are not included in the state's principal evaluation.

States That Require Measures of Student Growth in Principal Evaluations



State Examples:

- **Missouri:** The Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) is a [program](#) designed to provide aspiring school leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to become effective principals or administrators. The program includes a series of leadership modules and assessments, as well as a year-long internship with a mentor principal.
- **Idaho:** The state [conducts](#) an annual survey of K-12 administrators to gauge how well they implement various evaluation requirements. This includes:
 - ⌚ Two documented observations of the staff member's professional practice, the first of which must be completed before January 1st.
 - ⌚ One additional measure of professional practice, which may be based on student input, parent/guardian input, or a portfolio.
 - ⌚ One measure of student achievement and/or indicator of student success.
- **Colorado:** The state offers an [Alternative Principal Preparation](#) program for individuals from outside the educational community to develop the skills and experiences necessary to successfully lead a public school and qualify for an initial Colorado principal license. The program authorizes school districts to design and implement individualized alternative principal programs approved by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) if the district meets the following [requirements](#):
 - ⌚ There is a demonstrated need for the principal or assistant principal position in the partnering Colorado school district
 - ⌚ An employment agreement for the position exists; and
 - ⌚ An individualized principal plan has been developed and vetted by CDE/Educator Development as meeting established indicators.

Policy Considerations

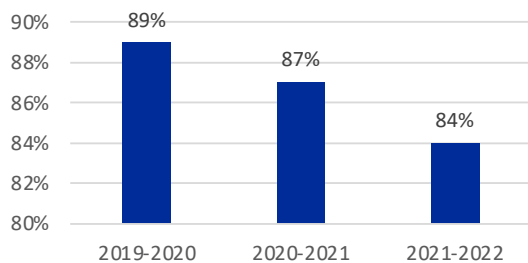
- ❓ What kind of evaluation and support systems should be put in place to help school leaders improve their practice and drive continuous improvement in their schools? How can data and feedback be used to help school leaders set goals, monitor progress, and make strategic decisions about resource allocation and program design?
- ❓ What strategies can be used to attract high-quality candidates to leadership positions, and how can districts ensure that school leaders are supported and incentivized to remain in their roles over time?
- ❓ How can policymakers ensure that all students, regardless of their background or circumstance, have access to effective school leaders who can support their academic and social-emotional growth and development?

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

In a 2019 national survey, [75 percent](#) of human resource professionals stated they had difficulties recruiting candidates for a vacancy because the candidate pool lacked the requisite skills. In North Dakota, 10,862 people were unemployed as of February 2023, despite over 20,657 job vacancies listed online alone. This growing gap and employer's challenges hiring workers with the proper training and skills necessary to work has become known as the [skills gap](#). However, while the [majority](#) of jobs across the nation do require education and training beyond high school, [52 percent](#) of jobs require only skills training – education and technical skills that falls between a high school diploma and a conventional four-year degree

- compared to 32 percent of jobs that require at least a four-year degree and just 16 percent requiring only a high school equivalent.

North Dakota 4-Year graduation Rate



Source

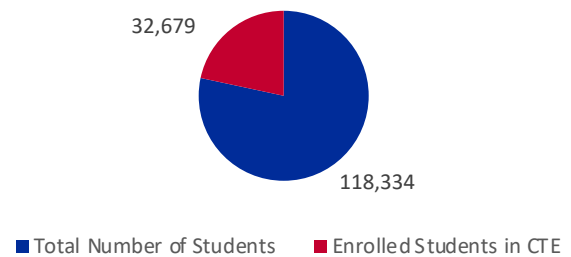
To remain competitive and ensure that students graduating from high school are set up for success, North Dakota has implemented the [Choice Ready framework](#). Choice Ready is an accountability tool that measures whether the graduating student possesses the skills to be college or career ready, and thus “choice ready.” The framework also identifies trends within schools to evaluate the overall performance of the graduating class. In 2020-21, [45 percent](#) of North Dakota students in 12th grade were Choice Ready and in 2021-22, [61 percent](#) of students were Choice Ready. While the 16 percent growth is substantial, nearly 39 percent of students were considered unprepared after high school. Thus, the importance of equipping students with the skills for postsecondary education or workforce after high school is clearer than ever.

CTE PROGRAMS

Career and technical education (CTE) courses focus on workplace competencies and hands-on experiences that provide students with the skills, knowledge, and training to succeed in future careers. In secondary institutions, these programs prepare students for

skilled positions in the workforce after graduation. At the postsecondary level, these programs also serve adult learners returning to school to complete a degree or shift careers. As a component of the United States education system, CTE programs improve the labor market and meet the needs of a changing economy. CTE programs vary across states and districts, from job shadowing opportunities to specialized technical training and apprenticeships, all aiming to equip students with the academic and technical skills, knowledge, and training necessary for success in their careers.

CTE Secondary Enrollment 2019-20



Source

There are two ways North Dakota can leverage CTE to improve educational attainment, including [reduced](#) dropout and increased graduation rates. The first is to provide secondary students with meaningful access to CTE programs. Many high school CTE programs result in industry certification upon graduation, immediately providing graduates with the opportunity to access middle-skill jobs. High school CTE programs also provide a direct pathway into postsecondary certification or an associate degree or bachelor’s degree program.

The second opportunity is making CTE programs available to those already in the workforce without a postsecondary credential. Slightly less than [12 percent](#) of the national workforce has some type of postsecondary education but no degree; similarly, North Dakota’s workforce has [13 percent](#) of people

with some college coursework. Consequently, millions of Americans would benefit from additional career and technical training, allowing them to pursue advanced career opportunities in today's labor market.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ In what ways can policymakers support innovative college and career preparation in classrooms across the K-12 continuum?
- ❓ How can North Dakota strengthen its college and career preparation programs across the state, such as youth apprenticeship programs, work-based learning, and other CTE initiatives?
- ❓ How can North Dakota continue to strengthen its CTE pipelines to ensure that all students have access to training and resources necessary to thrive in the 21st century?

INCREASING ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Higher education, also known as postsecondary education, is the bridge that many individuals choose to cross between their K-12 education and entry into, or advancement within, the workforce. Though there was a time when a high school diploma could secure stable employment that enabled workers to buy homes and support families, the modern economy typically requires employees to have some form of education beyond high school to have similar opportunities in today's economy. By 2027, 70 percent of all jobs in the U.S. are expected to require some form of education beyond high school, making higher education more important now than ever. As a result, North Dakota has

developed a statewide postsecondary attainment goal of 65 percent of North Dakotans between the ages of 25-64 completing a degree or credential by 2025. As of 2021, 56.5 percent of residents ages 25-64 had a postsecondary degree or credential.

One critical component to meeting the state's postsecondary attainment goal is closing racial equity gaps in attainment. For decades, the United States Department of Education has worked to increase postsecondary attainment rates for Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Indigenous students. An integral component of this work is Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), who serve students from any racial/ethnic background, but are eligible for federal funding to intentionally support their student population. Over 30 percent of North Dakota's student population identifies as American Indian or Alaskan Native. As a result, North Dakota is home to five Tribal Colleges and Universities, or institutions of higher education who are being controlled and operated by federally recognized American Indian tribes. Studies have shown that MSIs are drivers of economic mobility, as low-income students attending an MSI have two to three times higher economic mobility rates than students at non-Minority-Serving Institutions.

As the demographics of higher education and workforce needs continue to change, there is a growing recognition of the value different types of credentials provide for students. Postsecondary pathways are the varying opportunities students may pursue to become college and career ready. The full scope of postsecondary pathways includes:

- Workforce Training Programs: Programs that offer students new and/or improved skills often aligned to a specific industry. Technical trade programs are often workforce training programs but may also fall into industry credentials based on state and federal regulations.
- Industry Credentials: Vocational certifications, licenses, or badges that are recognized by local, state, or national business and industry partners. Industry credentials help prepare individuals to work in a specific industry, often in an entry-level

position and/or advance their career through skill mastery. These credentials typically are not for college credit but may be evaluated by colleges and universities for awarding credit for prior learning.

- **Certificates:** Awards that usually require less than one or two years to complete and prepare individuals for middle-skill jobs (such as nurses and welders). These short-term credentials quickly prepare individuals for jobs that are important to local economies. Many certificates can be applied toward a higher-level certificate or degree, such as an associate degree. These credentials build, or stack, upon one another, which allow students to use prior knowledge and continue their education at their own pace.
- **Postsecondary degrees** include associate, bachelor's, and graduate degrees that provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that can be used toward employment or further study.

North Dakota is projected to increase long-term employment by over 10 percent by 2030 and include substantial growth in industries such as healthcare, entertainment and recreation, and tech services. As the nature of work continues to change at an accelerated pace, the workforce will need new skills to meet the challenge at all levels of education. Currently, North Dakota hosts numerous workforce development programs, including operation interns, apprenticeship programs, and technical skills training grants. As North Dakota considers avenues to bolster workforce development opportunities, it is critical that these pathways build upon one another to ensure credit mobility for individuals who may consider continuing their education throughout their careers.

State Examples:

- **Indiana:** The Indiana Commission for Higher Education (IN-CHE) offers the Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready grant for Indiana residents who have completed their high school diploma but have not attained a postsecondary degree or credential. The grant covers the tuition and fees for students participating in eligible high-value certificate

programs at select institutions of higher education. The grant is available for students for two years and covers the certificate program's course credit requirements. Programs included in the grant are based on employer demand, wages, job placement rates, and program completion rates, including advanced manufacturing, building and construction, health sciences, IT & Business Services, and transportation and logistics. Additionally, since Ivy Tech Community College has developed a non-credit-to-credit crosswalk, students have the credit mobility to obtain credentials that support their educational ambitions and career goals to ensure family- and life-sustaining wages in both the short and long-term.

- **Tennessee:** In Tennessee, two institutions of higher education have developed partnerships with business and industry to meet workforce needs while providing students with opportunities to pay for their education. In 2017, TCAT Murfreesboro and Nissan partnered to create the Smyrna Campus, a technical training center representing a public-private partnership between Nissan and the College System of Tennessee to create educational opportunities that are closely aligned to current workforce needs in the region. This partnership also created the Work Study Scholarship, where accepted students are able to work for Nissan while earning their credential, with built-in promotions and raises as the student progresses through their coursework. When they graduate, students are offered a full-time job through Nissan. In 2021, BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee and East Tennessee State University partnered to develop the BlueSky Tennessee Institute. Each year, Tennessee has over 4,000 IT job openings and only 1,000 qualified graduates to fill them. As a result, the Blue-Sky Tennessee Institute was developed to provide students with an accelerated program for students to earn a Bachelor of Science in Computing in two years, while gaining hands-on work experience. After completing their degree, students earn a job offer from BlueCross BlueShield.

Policy Considerations

- ❓ In what ways can policymakers connect workforce development opportunities to affordable postsecondary pathways? What is the role of business and industry in this connection and what incentives are currently offered to leverage their role?
- ❓ How can North Dakota strengthen its workforce development opportunities to ensure credit mobility for participating students?
- ❓ How can North Dakota continue to strengthen its workforce development pipeline and retention of individuals who complete a postsecondary pathway?





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.

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