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## **I. Need for the Project**

North Dakota is characterized by its rural landscape, with only nine cities boasting over 10,000 and 23.5% of the state's population 18 years or younger (U.S. Census Office, 2023). The educational landscape in 2023 included 118,875 students distributed across 505 schools in 168 school districts, highlighting the state's commitment to education despite its sparse population. A significant number of children in North Dakota live in poverty, face challenges with literacy skills, and are considered "at risk."

North Dakota educational leaders, especially at the building level, are eager to meet today's literacy challenges but require PD to do so effectively. It is important for school staff to have greater involvement from leaders in prioritizing literacy and developing a "culture of learning and coaching." They should also create a resource-rich environment to support instructional goals through teamwork, identify targets for systemic improvements, develop well-staffed systems to support students in transition and foster strong family and community engagement (NDDPI Needs Assessment, 2024) (Appendix A).

To support North Dakota educators, greater collaboration between higher education teacher education programs and field practitioners is essential to ensure alignment with current educational research, North Dakota content standards, and legislative expectations. Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and providing quality placement for beginning educators to refine their craft will help us understand the gaps between teacher preparation programs and classroom application.

Established educators need access to diverse and ongoing PD opportunities. Coaching strategies remain critical, especially in helping educators effectively use assessment data to tailor

instruction. This need is particularly pronounced for educators working with children as they learn to read, but ongoing support is also necessary for educators serving all grade levels.

North Dakota's students require a guaranteed and viable curriculum, ensuring that every student in the same grade or course is exposed to a consistent and challenging curriculum complemented with high-quality instructional practices. It is crucial for teams of teachers to work together to build a shared understanding of learning goals and assessments. Current assessment and response systems require review, with plans for implementing necessary improvements. To ensure progress, North Dakota needs a systematic approach for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of literacy instruction. A comprehensive evaluation plan should be developed to track individual student progress and system-level effectiveness. Regular reporting between schools and the state is necessary for effective monitoring. Successful outcomes can be measured by decreasing the number of students requiring intervention and increasing relevant staff training.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) is committed to thoroughly evaluating and addressing the needs of school instructional leaders, educators, and early childhood and K-12 students. The State Education Agency (SEA), the NDDPI, is dedicated to enhancing literacy instruction across all stages of childhood and adolescence, from birth through grade 12. The NDDPI has meticulously developed an ambitious yet attainable action plan under the Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant CFDA 84.371C to achieve this. This plan aims to bring about significant improvements in literacy for North Dakota's learners by fostering collective efficacy among building staff and increasing instructional leaders' and educators' knowledge and skills to implement best practices for literacy instruction. The NDDPI

will identify and facilitate acquiring high-quality, job-embedded PD support for early childhood and public-school educators and instructional leaders.

### Pandemic Disruption “Learning Loss”

In May 2022, the NDDPI and the North Dakota University System Institutional Research staff presented a comprehensive report to the North Dakota General Legislative Assembly. This report, mandated by law, detailed the extent of students’ learning loss due to COVID-19 disruptions and analyzed how school districts utilized emergency relief funds. The study tracked individual students’ proficiency longitudinally, from the pre-pandemic Spring of 2019 to one year after the disruptions in the Spring of 2021. It also examined cohorts from before the pandemic to estimate what their proficiency levels would likely have been without the disruption, offering a refined understanding of the impact on learning.

The analysis focused on statewide summative assessment data collected during the undisturbed period of Spring 2017 to Spring 2019, primarily involving students in grades 3-8, where the English Language Arts (ELA) assessments could be consistently compared. Students’ proficiency was categorized into four levels: Novice, Partially Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced. Furthermore, a detailed analysis was conducted on the mode of learning delivery—whether face-to-face, distance education, or hybrid—during the 2020-21 academic year.

The findings indicated significant differences in proficiency between students who experienced traditional face-to-face education and those who engaged in any form of distance education during the 2020-21 school year. Specifically, among students who were not proficient in ELA before the pandemic, those with no distance education during 2020-21 were overwhelmingly less proficient, with a high percentage remaining at the novice level.

Conversely, students who continued face-to-face education showed slightly better proficiency outcomes, aligning closely with expected levels had there been no pandemic disruption.

For students who were proficient in ELA in 2019, the disruption had a uniformly negative impact, regardless of the mode of education during the pandemic. These students generally displayed lower proficiency levels in 2021 than predicted based on pre-pandemic trends. This suggests that the disruptions had lasting motivational impacts, particularly for students who previously enjoyed and thrived in school settings, and these impacts persisted despite a return to face-to-face education.

Additionally, the report highlighted that the negative impacts of the pandemic were more pronounced among students from low-income families, Native American students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted and effective literacy instruction to address the heightened needs of these vulnerable student groups, emphasizing the critical role of tailored educational interventions to mitigate the long-term effects of the pandemic on educational outcomes.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, students' average reading performance has experienced a notable decline. North Dakota, however, managed a relatively swift transition back to face-to-face learning compared to other states. This prompt return has mitigated the severest academic impacts of the pandemic for North Dakotan students, yet the repercussions on reading proficiency remain apparent. In contrast, students in grades 6-12 have shown more resilience and recovery in their writing and language skills post-pandemic disruptions. This recovery suggests that while there are improvements, the need for intensive reading support persists, especially among younger students. For students in grades five and below, and extending from birth

through age 5, all aspects of literacy require significant attention and resources to address ongoing deficits and ensure a well-rounded educational recovery.

### Professional Development

Between fall 2020 and fall 2023, four comprehensive surveys were conducted to assess the experiences and needs of school and district staff regarding PD related to literacy instruction. The participants, drawn from 27 districts across North Dakota, provided insights into their PD experiences over the past school year and expressed their future needs. The surveys sought detailed information on various themes of literacy-related PD, including Leadership, Instruction and Intervention, Educational State Content Standards, Assessment and Evaluation, and Family and Community Engagement.

Respondents were also asked about their participation and interest in these PD themes through various formats such as webinars, seminars, workshops, conference sessions, classes, courses, professional learning communities (PLCs), mentorships, professional observations, book studies, instructional coaching, and accessing information independently through professional readings or internet sources.

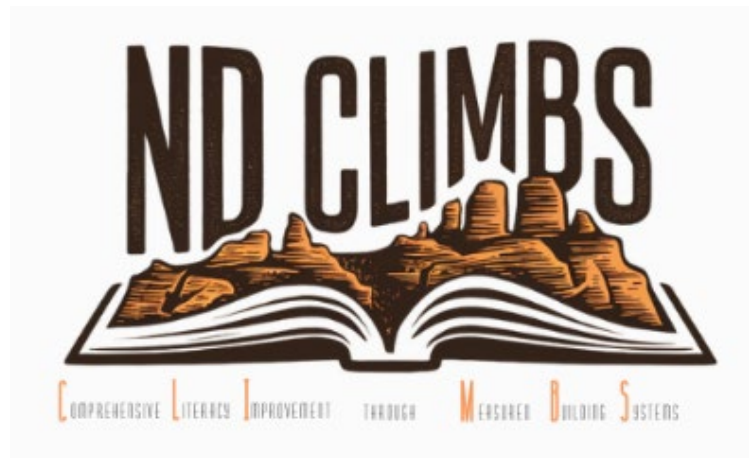
The findings revealed that literacy-related PD is prevalent, with 87.9% of respondents participating. However, the distribution of PD across the themes was uneven. The most common focus was instruction and intervention, as 69.7% of respondents reported. This was followed by assessment and evaluation (39.5%) and educational state content standards (29.3%). Professional development on family and community engagement was the least frequent, occurring in only 24.3% of cases, and its prevalence has decreased. Leadership-focused PD was also relatively uncommon overall, reported by 25.1% of respondents, though it was more frequent among administrators (57.7%).

The survey also explored the respondents' interest in receiving additional PD in literacy-related themes. The highest demand was for PD on instruction and intervention (53.5%) and assessment and evaluation (39.0%). These were the themes most accessed by the respondents, indicating some alignment between available PD and actual demand.

Interestingly, the third most in-demand theme was family and community engagement (28.5%), despite being the least common area of PD. This gap suggests a significant unmet need for PD that leverages family and community engagement to enhance literacy outcomes. Additionally, the declining trend in family and community engagement PD in recent years highlights an area where the demand is not adequately addressed. Finally, 22.1% of respondents expressed interest in PD focused on state content standards, while 21.0% were interested in leadership development. These findings underscore the necessity of broadening and diversifying the themes and formats of PD to meet the evolving needs of educators in North Dakota.

## II. Quality of Project Design

The NDDPI has assigned this grant opportunity an operational nickname of ND CLIMBS (North Dakota Comprehensive Literacy Improvement through Measured Building Systems) to



emphasize continuous measurement of building systems improvement as the main driver. This initiative underscores the importance of systematic evaluation and data-driven decision-making to enhance literacy outcomes. By focusing on

measured building systems, ND CLIMBS aims to create a structured and accountable framework

for comprehensive literacy improvement across the state, ensuring that all efforts are aligned with evidence-based practices and continuously monitored for effectiveness.

To effectively support school buildings in systems improvement work, it is imperative that NDDPI utilize the early months following notification of a SEA grant award for the development and identification of high-quality programs and resources, followed by communication and education on the grant application opportunity, with targeted communication to schools with a high percentage of disadvantaged students. The careful design and awarding of contracts and subgrant awards will ensure that the buildings demonstrating the greatest need also receive the highest quality of carefully designed services. This phase is projected to be about six to nine months of development. The LEA subgrantees will be awarded four funded years for implementation. Within the four years, each awarded building will take specific steps to reach milestones in building collective efficacy for reaching system effectiveness by training and supporting building administrative leaders and educators in implementing high-impact instructional strategies in literacy and designing and implementing elements of a local literacy plan that drive continuous improvement to reach high levels of student proficiency in literacy.

#### Goals and Performance Measures of the ND CLIMBS Grant

The North Dakota PK-12 Education Strategic Vision (Appendix B) aims to create a robust and equitable educational system by focusing on several key objectives that align with the goals of CFDA 84.371C. These objectives include increasing the number of students who enter kindergarten prepared to learn, enhancing the proficiency of students in grade 3 reading, and ensuring that students achieve expected learning gains each year. Additionally, the vision emphasizes increasing student engagement in learning, preparing students to graduate ready for

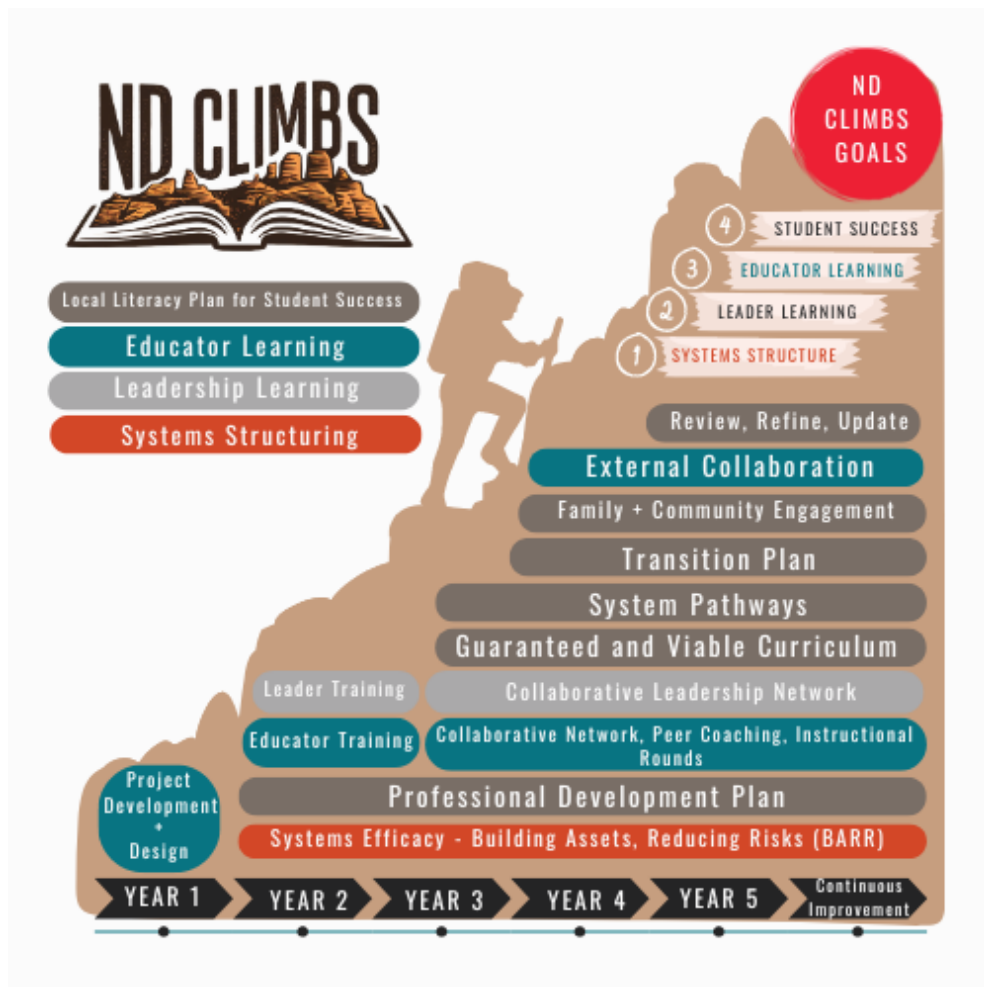


their chosen paths, and reducing the achievement disparity for students in poverty and Native American students.

The NDDPI intentionally utilizes resources and designs comprehensive guidance to support the realization of the North Dakota PK-12 Education Strategic Vision. The goals, objectives, and projects outlined in the North Dakota Comprehensive Literacy State Development (ND CLSD) grant have been meticulously selected to leverage evidence-based literacy improvement strategies to meet these objectives and address needs from birth through grade 12.

**Figure 1**

*ND CLIMBS Visual Goals*



To maximize the impact of these efforts, the NDDPI has established four overarching goals for the ND CLIMBS grant as shown in Table 1. These goals are strategically prioritized with a central focus on systemic improvements. Each goal is further supported by specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives, projects, and activities. To ensure the effective implementation and completion of these goals, the Implementation Management Plan includes a series of comprehensive activities. These activities are meticulously designed to support each objective and are assigned to various individuals and teams, each with a clear timeline for completion. This structured approach guarantees that all initiatives are aligned with the overall mission of the ND CLIMBS grant, promoting accountability and ensuring measurable progress toward the set goals.

**Table 1**

*ND CLIMBS Goals and Objectives*

<b>ND CLIMBS Goals and Objectives</b>	
<b>Goals</b>	
1.	All systems are established to sustain collaborative conditions for the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction.
2.	All administrative building instructional leaders (ABIL) are equipped to create and sustain collaborative conditions for educators to deliver high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction.
3.	All educators are prepared and continually supported to deliver high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction to students.
4.	All students receive high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction to achieve proficiency in literacy skills.
<b>Objectives</b>	
1.	School team members plan and manage effective literacy systems. The state will identify support structures for local school teams to build collective efficacy to establish and improve data-informed systems to achieve student proficiency in literacy.
2.	Administrative building instructional leaders learn and improve ELA leadership practices. The state will identify high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities appropriate for leadership personnel and contract to design, develop, and facilitate a high-quality, job-embedded, ongoing leadership network.
3.	Educators learn and improve instructional practices. The state will identify high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities appropriate for educator roles and align

with the science of reading and contract to design, develop, and facilitate a high-quality, job-embedded, ongoing network learning community.

4. School team members deliver effective instruction. The state will contract to provide support structures for educators to deliver high-quality, evidence-based instruction that leads to student proficiency in literacy skills. The support structures will help schools build implementation plans aligned with the North Dakota Literacy Plan.

<b>GOAL 1</b>
<b>All systems are established to sustain collaborative conditions for delivering high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction.</b>
<b>Objective</b>
School team members plan and manage effective literacy systems. The state will identify support structures for local school teams to build collective efficacy to establish and improve data-informed systems to achieve high student proficiency in literacy.

**Build Collective Efficacy:** Each local grantee building will employ a support framework to build collective efficacy and drive improvement actions. Elementary and secondary grantees will enter contracts with an approved vendor to establish schoolwide structures to foster collective efficacy and build systemwide processes to improve student literacy outcomes. North Dakota identifies Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) as the program schools will utilize to establish an implementation support framework. The BARR framework provides three years of PD and intensive coaching support for teams to engage in high-impact processes for systemic change. BARR is particularly well-suited to North Dakota’s needs as it aims to build the capacity of current staff. It is critical that rural and highly disadvantaged schools receive support and

resources to ensure highly effective instructional systems regardless of challenges such as staff shortages and turnover.

**Establish a Local Grant Implementation Team:** Each local grantee building will establish a local grant implementation team by identifying personnel to carry out core leadership roles and responsibilities for successful systemwide literacy implementation. These team members will carry out the required programmatic and business elements of grant implementation. This team must carry out the assurances set forth in the grant, with focal responsibilities being the leadership of the state-approved literacy plan adoption framework to map literacy improvement milestones and report on progress measures as detailed under goal #3. The framework will include developing data review and response processes to address building improvement measures systematically. Each local team is responsible for cooperating with state and federal monitoring requests.

**Early Learning Grantee Coordinators Will Participate in the Statewide Cohort:** Birth-5 community coordinators will participate in the statewide Early Learning Coordinator Cohort for skill-building and transitions, which includes participating in cohort learning events and facilitating community action based on this learning. This involves facilitating events, providing information, and fostering collaborative efforts between transitional groups, such as parents and kindergarten providers, encompassing Birth-3 information, not just preschool. The initiative will expand to additional communities as the grant timeline progresses.

**Measure Progress of Systemic Improvement:** By the end of the first school year of implementation, 100% of grantee elementary and secondary buildings will be enrolled in the BARR program to enhance collective efficacy. Annually, each building will provide evidence of schoolwide implementation through BARR site visit reports. To ensure consistent progress

toward program objectives in refining ELA instructional systems to reach target student proficiency, each building implementation team and will demonstrate progress toward completion of local literacy plan development and implementation as determined through evidence of milestones on the CLSD grant status report. Each early learning grantee will demonstrate through 75% attendance that the coordinator is engaged in the Early Learning Cohort. Each early learning grantee will demonstrate progress on communication and transition plans as determined through evidence of milestones on the CLSD grant status report.

## **GOAL 2**

**All administrative building instructional leaders (ABILs) are equipped to create and sustain collaborative conditions for educators to deliver high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction.**

### **Objective**

All administrative building instructional leaders will attend identified events to learn and improve leadership of systemic ELA delivery. The state will identify high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities appropriate for leadership personnel and contract to design, develop, and facilitate a high-quality, job-embedded, ongoing leadership network.

**Professional Development for Administrative Building Instructional Leaders:** Each ABIL will verify the completion of grant-approved high-quality professional learning in evidence-based literacy delivery system leadership. Building administrators may enter the work with different training experiences. The leadership training project contractor will work with each

leader to review grant-approved requirements and help determine appropriate and necessary training opportunities to meet this implementation requirement.

**Facilitated Improvement Network for Administrative Building Instructional Leaders:** In

years two through five, ABILs will participate in the facilitated network leadership cohort to identify, implement, and improve policy and resources critical to highly effective ELA systemic leadership. The purpose of this network is for ABILs to meet to address problems of practice, access expert facilitator and coaching support, and share resources. Minimum attendance is required but may be earned in either live or virtual events or by accessing asynchronous lessons on the North Dakota Educational Hub and completing an exit ticket. The North Dakota Educational Hub is the state's learning management system for online PD delivery.

**Measure Progress of Administrative Building Instructional Leader's Impact on Building**

**Literacy Implementation:** Within the first year of local grant implementation, 100% of designated leaders will have completed or be enrolled in project-certified literacy leadership training. By the end of year two of local grant implementation ABIL's will be engaged in system network-provided coaching to establish a consistent and effective literacy approach. The number and percentage of leaders completing the training and those participating in ongoing network support will be tracked to achieve a minimum attendance average of 70%. By providing accessible, structured training and dedicated coaching, leaders will be equipped to create and implement literacy-focused tools and processes with their teams, aiming for measurable improvements in literacy outcomes. Continuous support and evaluation will ensure ongoing development and success.

## GOAL 3

**All educators are prepared and continually supported to deliver high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction to students.**

### Objective

Each local building educator will access learning opportunities and continuously improve the delivery of evidence-based, scientifically aligned programs and practices. The state will identify high-quality, job-embedded professional learning opportunities appropriate for educator roles and align with the science of reading. The state will contract to design, develop, and facilitate peer coaching training and implementation support, followed by needs-based learning opportunities and a network structure for improvement.

**Professional Development for Educators:** Educators will verify the completion of grant-approved high-quality professional learning in evidence-based literacy instruction specific to their roles and differentiated needs. Educators may enter the work with different experiences in literacy instruction training. The educator training project contractor will work with building leads to review grant-approved requirements and help determine appropriate and necessary training opportunities to meet this individual implementation requirement. Additionally, educators will have ongoing opportunities to attend professional learning aligned with their needs, provided through grant-approved contractors. Formats may include webinars, face-to-face training, summer literacy summits, and asynchronous classes. Buildings may select specific projects to address their instructional gap needs.

**Facilitated Improvement Network for Educators:** Educators will participate in facilitated network learning to develop a peer coaching model that utilizes instructional rounds and supports the acquisition and delivery of high-impact instructional strategies. With the goal of building local staff capacity, contracted facilitators will support the training and coaching of each local building staff to learn collaborative improvement methods and employ those protocols to increase knowledge and capacity to implement high-impact strategies to help students achieve reading proficiency through increased content standard mastery. Each building administrator will identify a staff leader for this work. This role could be a current coach or an identified teacher leader. A contractor will establish the framework, including training, protocols, tools, and evaluation measures. The contractor will provide the ongoing training and implementation support structures. The contractor will ensure that a high percentage of facilitators are North Dakota Regional Education Association (NDREA) staff or local educators trained and supported through the contractor to build literacy expertise capacity throughout North Dakota for sustainable literacy support. Evidence-based, high-impact instructional learning events supporting the instruction of ND ELA content standards will utilize improvement protocols, including goal setting, implementation of evidence-based practices, and reflection to support educators in enhancing instructional effectiveness. Both synchronous and asynchronous events and resources will be developed.

**Optional School and Teacher Prep Program Collaborative Project:** This optional initiative invites elementary school applicants to partner with a North Dakota Teacher Preparation Program to create a collaborative project to improve student teaching experiences specifically related to reading instruction. This project builds on the recently updated Student Teacher Standards, crafted by a collaborative group of representatives from the Institutes of Higher



Education (IHEs) and K-12 education. The team identified a significant need to better align practices between teacher preparation programs and K-12 schools to enhance the effectiveness of student teacher placements. The goal of the project is for the partners to develop and test tools and protocols designed to align the student teacher experience by ensuring that both the IHE and the local school are informed and employing evidence-based, scientifically validated programs and practices. Participants in the project will be responsible for creating a comprehensive toolkit of guidelines and assurances that will serve as a resource that outlines best practices and provides a framework for effective collaboration between teacher preparation programs and local schools. Once completed, the toolkit will be shared statewide, providing a valuable resource to support new teacher experiences in all North Dakota teacher preparation programs.

**Teacher Prep Program Project:** IHEs will be invited to apply for state CLSD funds to provide professional reading tests to graduating early childhood and elementary education students to evaluate the quality of their teacher preparation program in literacy instruction and make adjustments to improve implementation of the newly written Standards. Educators will evaluate test results to determine the effectiveness of the newly aligned standards written and approved by North Dakota IHEs as facilitated by North Dakota's Path Forward workgroup between 2022 and 2024. This project includes a two-year testing process, evaluating results, adjusting to address weak areas, and testing the next class. Project insights and results must be shared in a report for the benefit of colleagues.

**Measuring Progress:** By the end of year one of local grant implementation, 100% of educators will be engaged in or have completed project-certified literacy instruction training. By January of year two of local grant implementation all educators will be engaged in a network model to enhance literacy strategies. The number of grantees completing project-approved training will be

tracked. Structured training and ongoing support will ensure educators are equipped to collaboratively improve instructional delivery, with continuous support and evaluation for sustained progress. Ongoing cohort attendance and exit ticket completion will be tracked and utilized for continuous improvement of decision processes. Educator perception surveys administered at the beginning and end of year, and evaluations of professional learning opportunities will inform improvement steps.

## **GOAL 4**

**All students receive high-quality, evidence-based instruction to achieve proficiency in literacy skills.**

### **Objective**

School team members deliver effective literacy instruction. The state will contract to provide support structures for educators to deliver high-quality, evidence-based instruction leading to student proficiency in literacy skills. The support structures will help schools identify team processes to build literacy plan documents that align with the North Dakota State Literacy Plan (Appendix C). Early learning grantees will develop and implement communication and transition plans that align with the ND Early Learning Standards and provide evidence of milestones on the CLSD grant status reports.

**The North Dakota State Literacy Team will Update the State Literacy Plan:** The ND State Literacy Team members are selected by competitive application (Appendix D). Their role is to research and update the State Literacy Plan annually to provide current guidance to field

practitioners. Local literacy teams use the State Plan to examine current practices and update their local approaches to implement best practices for all students.

**Increase Opportunities for Disadvantaged 4-Year-Olds to Receive High-Quality Literacy**

**Instruction:** Birth-5 grantees will increase opportunities for disadvantaged 4-year-olds to receive high-quality, explicit literacy instruction focusing on oral language, listening skills, background knowledge, letter-sound knowledge, and letter formation (or standards-aligned content) (Appendix E). Grant funds may be utilized for professional learning, coaching and improvement structure supports, parent and community connections, supplies, student scholarships to current facilities, or new instructional opportunities.

**Evaluate, Research, Revise and Implement Core Sections of Local Literacy Plan:** Each building team will utilize grant-approved resources to develop and implement an evidence-based local literacy plan that includes the following sections: Professional Development Plan, Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC), Assessment, Instruction and Intervention Pathway Plan, Transition Plan, and Family and Community Engagement Plan. NDDPI will contract support to develop guidance modules that teams can access to learn about writing and implementing each section plan. The modules will be published on the North Dakota Educational Hub, an online learning management system for PD courses. Additional training and support opportunities may also be provided.

1. **Professional Development Plan:** Identified building representatives will collaborate with the administrative building instructional leader to develop an ongoing professional learning approach that ensures continuous opportunities to meet the learning needs of new and veteran staff. The plan will identify methods for matching PD to needs,



allocating resources of time and money, setting minimum expectations for team members, and evaluating learning opportunities.

2. Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC): A GVC ensures that all students, regardless of their teacher or school, have access to a consistent, high-quality education. It guarantees that the curriculum is uniformly taught across all classrooms and is achievable within the given time frame. It also focuses on essential content and skills, ensuring every student can learn and succeed in critical academic areas. This approach emphasizes alignment with standards, equitable access to learning resources, and systematic support for teachers and students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Identified building representatives will attend training on selecting high-quality instructional materials and lead the review and refinement of resources and instructional approaches.
3. Assessment, Instruction, and Intervention Pathway Plan: Identified building representatives engage in learning and research to establish a schoolwide Multi-tiered System of Supports by selecting appropriate assessments, evaluation tools, intervention materials, and practices and collaborating with the ABIL to consider policy and resources as they develop a systemwide assessment and intervention pathway implementation plan. Critically important is the process of identifying appropriate, evidence-based intervention supports for students at all levels to address gaps in learning and accelerate skill acquisition for grade-level proficiency, effectively scheduling for high-impact implementation of identified resources.
4. Transition Plan: Identified building representatives are dedicated to implementing evidence-based practices to facilitate the smooth transition of students between different educational settings. The primary focus is on supporting disadvantaged students. By

partnering with the institutions that students are sent to and those that receive students, this team collaborates to develop effective systems and processes. These efforts aim to ensure that students are provided with consistent and comprehensive support throughout their key educational transitions.

5. Family and Community Engagement Plan: Identified building representatives engage in learning and research to understand evidence-based, effective strategies for involving stakeholders in student learning. They lead the development and implementation of a local family engagement plan, which includes training local educators on effective family engagement strategies.

**Measuring Progress**: By the end of the first semester of grant implementation, the contractor will have the support modules for PD and GVC available on the North Dakota Educational Hub for all grantees to access. All grantees can access structured support to evaluate and refine their literacy instruction systems as defined in their Local Literacy Plan. Additional modules will be completed by the end of implementation year one. The number of grantees meeting milestone indicators for literacy plan development and implementation will be tracked to ensure annually each grantee makes 25% progress toward full plan completion of core sections. Grantees can engage in structured learning sessions and access resources to systematically develop and implement their literacy plans. Grantees will strive to complete one section of the plan every six months until full implementation is achieved, aligning with the goal of improving student proficiency through evidence-based approaches.

#### Performance Measurements

A robust set of performance measures has been established to evaluate the program's effectiveness comprehensively. These measures include utilizing the North Dakota Academic

Progression of Learning and Understanding of Students (ND A-PLUS or NDA+) suite of assessments (Appendix F) to monitor student proficiency levels and to track the progress and stability of four-year cohorts. An external evaluator will play a critical role in objectively assessing the program's impact through various metrics, ensuring a thorough and unbiased evaluation. An Educator Survey will also be administered at the beginning and end of each school year. This survey aims to gather educators' perceptions of their confidence in their knowledge of content standard clusters and their ability to teach these standards effectively, leading to student mastery of skills. The survey responses will be analyzed to determine progress and identify areas of need. The results will pinpoint areas for improvement and tailor future PD to meet educators' needs, ensuring that the opportunities remain relevant and effective. The external evaluator will employ a comprehensive set of measures to assess the program's impact, including student performance data, educator retention rates, and literacy outcomes. This objective evaluation will ensure accountability and provide valuable insights for ongoing program enhancement and improvement.

#### Alignment with Priorities

The NDDPI addresses the four competitive priorities of the CLSD program by offering two pivotal opportunities for IHEs with teacher preparation programs. These opportunities are designed to enhance the design, practice, and sharing of teacher education and student teacher placement tools among various institutions involved in training and hosting student teachers, aligning with Priority 1 of the CLSD program. This initiative builds upon the existing efforts in North Dakota surrounding Higher Education Teacher Preparation Competencies. The goal is to modernize and implement updated educator preparation teaching standards. To achieve this, the NDDPI requires participating sites to focus on three additional key priorities.

Priority 2 emphasizes the need for projects that specifically address the educational setbacks caused by the pandemic, with a strong focus on supporting underserved students and the educators who serve them. This involves developing and implementing innovative strategies to mitigate learning loss and enhance educational outcomes for these students. Under Priority 3, projects are required to promote educational equity by ensuring that underserved students have adequate resources and opportunities across all educational levels, including elementary, middle, and high school. The emphasis is on creating an equitable learning environment that supports all students' academic and personal growth, particularly those who have historically been marginalized.

Priority 4 centers on building educator capacity through high-quality, job-embedded PD opportunities. These projects also aim to support students and their families during critical educational transitions, such as moving from early learning programs to elementary school and transitioning between elementary, middle, and high school. The focus is on providing continuous and comprehensive support to ensure students are well-prepared for each stage of their educational journey. The NDDPI also meets the invitational priority by requiring sites to design projects that support effective transition practices, continuity of services and supports, and aligned instruction for students as they move from preschool and other early childhood settings into kindergarten and from kindergarten into the early grades.

### Assurances

Awarded sites will receive funding of sufficient size and scope to meet the objectives of the ND CLIMBS project. To fully achieve the goals of their literacy plans, subgrantees will adhere to the following actions and assurances, as shown in Table 2:

### **Table 2**

*Local Grantee Actions and Assurances*

<b>Local Grantee Actions and Assurances</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Early Learning</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
Conduct a needs assessment for the application	Required	Required	Required
Business managers must attend program administration and financial oversight training.	Required	Required	Required
Contract with BARR for new or continuing services		Required	Required
Administer NDA+ suite of assessments.		Required	Required
Ensure a 75% minimum response to an educator survey.		Required	Required
Maintain administrative instructional leader engagement in network improvement community.		Required	Required
Maintain birth-5 community coordinator engagement in network improvement community.	Required		
Maintain educator participation in peer coaching and instructional rounds model.		Required	Required
Accomplish educators and administrative instructional leaders' achievement of professional development thresholds.		Required	Required
Four-year-old demonstration of increased opportunities for disadvantaged children plan–develop and demonstrate implementation.	Required		
Professional development plan–develop and demonstrate implementation.		Required	Required
GVC–develop and demonstrate implementation		Required	Required
Assessment, Instruction, and Intervention Pathway Plan–develop and demonstrate implementation.		Required	Required
Family engagement plan–develop and demonstrate implementation.		Required	Required
Transition plan–develop and demonstrate implementation.	Required	Required	Required
Participation in statewide evaluation measures and surveys	Required	Required	Required
Higher Ed School/Prep Program		Optional Application Opportunity	
Submit annual review and reapplication documentation.	Required	Required	Required

Schools must integrate the NDA+ suite of assessments into their student progress monitoring while establishing clear instructional pathways to support diverse learning needs. Mandatory training for business managers is essential to ensure proper program administration and financial oversight. Before applying, schools must conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify specific focus areas, including efforts to reduce disparities for disadvantaged students. Achieving over 75% participation from educators in the bi-annual educator support survey is crucial for continuous improvement and educator support. Each building must submit a report and reapplication form to justify continuing funding.



Projects aimed at bolstering literacy initiatives will include the development of an Early Learning Resource Bank and an awareness campaign to provide valuable resources and information to educators and families. Vendors and contractors will undergo vetting to ensure they meet high standards. A state literacy team will update the State Literacy Plan annually, and monthly Communities of Practice (CoPs) will facilitate discussions among educators. An annual literacy conference will be organized to showcase successes and foster collaboration. At the local level, schools must define roles, develop a local literacy plan, and engage in systemic implementation with the help of a grant-approved external consultant.

### Literature Review

The proposed project is meticulously designed to include a thorough review of pertinent literature related to school leaders, educators, and early childhood and K-12 students. This comprehensive approach ensures the project is grounded in robust, interdisciplinary research, providing a solid foundation for informed and effective educational practices.

### ***Empowering Leaders to Foster Collaborative Excellence in Education***

Administrative leaders must be equipped with the necessary skills and resources to cultivate and sustain collaborative environments that empower educators to deliver high-quality, evidence-based instruction. Establishing robust support structures is crucial for enabling local school teams to build collective efficacy. As Jenni Donohoo (2017) described, collective efficacy is the shared belief among staff members that they can positively influence student outcomes, even for those facing disadvantages. By fostering a culture of collaboration and providing the appropriate tools, these teams can develop and enhance data-informed systems that drive significant improvements in student literacy proficiency. Achieving this goal requires a dedicated effort to support educators and leaders in their quest for educational excellence, ultimately

leading to higher levels of student achievement in literacy. This effort aligns with Goal 1 of ND CLIMBS. The introduction of the BARR model serves as a strategic framework to support collective efficacy, and it is central to how ND CLIMBS addresses this objective. The BARR model provides a systematic structure that enhances collaboration and supports the development of data-driven systems, which are vital for advancing literacy outcomes and fostering educational success across the state.

A recent report titled “School Leadership that Cultivates Collective Efficacy: Emerging Insights 2022” by Elliott et al. (2022) highlights five essential leadership domains crucial for fostering collective efficacy in schools. These domains include Understanding Collective Efficacy, Systems Leadership, Change Leadership, Team Leadership, and Collaborative Capacity. The report emphasizes that effective school leadership is critical in enhancing schools' collaborative capacity, thereby enabling them to harness diverse expertise and focus on improving student learning outcomes.

The authors highlight that schools can better navigate increasingly complex and challenging contexts when leaders prioritize building collaborative capacity. This process involves aligning diverse areas of expertise toward a unified goal of enhancing student learning outcomes. Currently, the education system primarily focuses on developing individual leaders, but to foster collective efficacy, a more holistic approach is needed—one that includes the development of self-leadership, leadership of others, and leadership within systems. This comprehensive approach is integral to achieving Goals 1 and 2. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating training for leaders and underscores their active engagement in the rollout of the BARR model.

Furthermore, administrative building instructional leaders ABILs play a critical role in the successful implementation of BARR. After completing their training and engaging with the system's structure, these leaders can effectively champion the initiative and drive its success. Their involvement is essential for embedding the BARR framework into school practices, thereby fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement that is crucial for achieving long-term educational success.

Stephen Jacobson (2010) argues that although teacher quality plays the most significant role in influencing student motivation and achievement, leadership quality is crucial in motivating teachers and enhancing the quality of their teaching. Effective school leaders focus on developing the capabilities of their staff and fostering an environment where collective efficacy can flourish.

### ***Preparing and Supporting Educators for Excellence in Literacy Instruction***

To ensure that educators can deliver high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction to students, providing them with adequate preparation and consistent support is crucial. Achieving this objective requires establishing robust support structures for educators and administrative instructional leaders. These structures are essential for cultivating an environment that promotes continuous learning and effectively implementing evidence-based, scientifically aligned programs and practices. Administrators play a pivotal role in facilitating structured literacy by ensuring teachers have access to high-quality curricula and comprehensive training programs. Moreover, ongoing PD and resources are vital for enhancing the skills and knowledge of educators and leaders, ensuring they are well-equipped to address the diverse literacy needs of all students effectively. Goal 3 emphasizes the importance of high-quality teacher training, focusing on using teacher surveys to identify and meet the ongoing support needs of educators.

Additionally, the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC) project under Goal 4 plays a significant role in this framework. The GVC project requires schools to examine and align their curricula and supports professional learning focused on reviewing and improving the existing curriculum. This alignment work is essential for ensuring that all instructional practices are consistent, effective, and grounded in current research.

Instructional leadership is a collaborative effort between the school leader and the school team to understand the fundamental reasons and methodologies behind the school's improvement agenda. This agenda may encompass various elements of the curriculum or pedagogical approaches. The leader's role is not to be the ultimate authority but to act as a knowledgeable collaborator who works alongside the school team, creating an environment where continuous learning and improvement are encouraged. The research underscores the importance of establishing shared expectations as the most influential instructional practice for school leaders (Hallinger, 2005). This practice prioritizes student learning, achievement, and progress in school decision-making processes, thereby building a positive and effective school culture (Robinson & Timperley, 2007). This approach is closely related to the responsibilities of the ABIL outlined in Goal 2, reinforcing the importance of collaborative leadership in fostering educational excellence.

The more frequently administrative leaders engage with teachers on instructional improvement, the better positioned they are to provide valuable advice on best practices and help teachers stay connected to the core of their work. An effective approach to achieving this connection involves establishing support structures that promote collaboration. Collaboration is vital for enabling teachers to concentrate on instruction and enhancing their PD. When teachers work in isolation without collaborative opportunities, their chances for professional growth are

significantly reduced (Pounder, 1999). Successful collaboration requires allocated time and clear, defined goals (Friend & Cook, 2009). While teachers can influence some aspects of these factors, administrative leaders are crucial in creating the support structures necessary for effective collaboration.

One effective method for fostering such collaboration is through instructional rounds, where educator teams participate in peer coaching. This practice allows teachers to improve their craft through constructive feedback and observing their colleagues in action. The State plans to contract for work around instructional rounds to provide a structured approach that helps teams develop the skills necessary to give and receive empowering feedback and foster a culture of continuous improvement. To further support this initiative, the state will ensure that teachers are trained and equipped with the tools needed to implement a framework that aligns with their school's goals.

Additionally, the BARR system supports these efforts through structured PLCs that keep the focus on data-driven and student-centered practices. These PLCs facilitate ongoing collaboration among educators, ensuring that teaching practices are continually informed by the latest data and centered on improving student outcomes.

By building the capacity of educator teams to engage in these collaborative practices, schools can create an environment of continuous improvement and professional growth, ultimately leading to better instructional practices and student outcomes.

### ***Ensuring Literacy Proficiency Through High-Quality Instruction for All Students***

Every student deserves access to high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction to achieve proficiency in literacy skills. To accomplish this, it is crucial to establish robust support systems for educators, empowering them to deliver such instruction effectively. These support

structures enable educators to implement and sustain high-quality, evidence-based teaching practices, ultimately leading to enhanced student literacy proficiency.

Integrating evidence-based core instruction with evidence-based supplemental interventions is fundamental for students' literacy development, particularly those needing additional support (Petscher et al., 2020). This comprehensive approach ensures that foundational literacy skills are built through high-quality, research-supported teaching methods while providing targeted interventions to address specific needs. By utilizing evidence-based practices in core instruction and supplemental interventions, educators can effectively support all students, especially those struggling with literacy, creating a more inclusive and successful learning environment. This approach aligns with Goal 4 of the Local Literacy Plan project, which has a portion focused on building robust assessment and intervention pathways within the literacy plan. By integrating evidence-based strategies and ensuring continuous support for educators, we can foster a literacy-rich environment that supports the diverse needs of all students and enhances overall educational outcomes.

Researchers have identified five critical areas essential for establishing a comprehensive, school-wide focus on literacy instruction. The literacy plan project encompasses these areas through a structured approach. First, the Professional Development Plan directly prioritizes literacy by focusing on improving teachers' and administrators' skills and knowledge. This plan ensures that literacy remains a top priority in professional growth efforts. Second, the GVC ensures the delivery of evidence-based, high-quality literacy instruction to all students by aligning educators with the same standards and outcomes. This alignment guarantees that every student benefits from consistent and rigorous instruction aimed at achieving literacy proficiency. Third, the Intervention and Assessment Plan is designed to establish a balanced assessment

system that provides individualized interventions and resources for students who require additional learning opportunities. This plan ensures that students receive the specific support they need to succeed.

Fourth, the Transition Plan fosters a collective sense of responsibility for the literacy development of all children. It works with partners to support students transitioning between different educational settings, ensuring they receive the necessary supports and meet the established expectations as they move from one building to another. Finally, the Family and Community Engagement Plan enhances the capability of school teams to involve parents and community members as indispensable partners in literacy efforts and student success. This plan builds a foundation for meaningful conversations and collaborations, integrating community involvement in the drive for improved student literacy outcomes. (Taylor, 2011; Murphy, 2010). By addressing these areas, schools can create an environment that supports and promotes literacy for all students, ultimately leading to higher reading proficiency levels and academic success.

High-quality literacy instruction is rooted in consistent, evidence-based PD for teachers, further supported by effective coaching and guidance. This professional growth should be aligned with a cohesive reading program that integrates standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessments. Implementing a balanced assessment system is crucial for promoting continuous improvement, enabling schools to provide targeted interventions tailored to students' individual needs through collaborative efforts among teachers, resource educators, and specialists. Moreover, engaging families and communities is essential as it acknowledges their critical role in fostering students' identities as readers and writers and creating a supportive literacy environment both within and outside the school. These collective efforts help to advance literacy practices across the school, ensuring a comprehensive approach to literacy development (Okello,

2021). A practical method for schools to integrate peer coaching and build staff capacity is through instructional rounds. This approach allows schools to leverage the expertise of existing staff and continuously build on their learning.

### ***The Significance of Professional Development Related to Literacy Instruction***

To achieve a lasting and sustainable impact on instructional practices, quality PD must extend beyond sporadic workshops or isolated training sessions. The National Staff Development Council, in a report by Wei et al. (2009), identified several critical components for effective teacher PD. The report highlights that effective PD involves coaching that bridges the gap between formal training and practical classroom application. It emphasizes the need for ongoing, specific follow-up support to help teachers integrate new knowledge and skills into their teaching practices, both in the short term and over time. Experienced peers should conduct successful coaching, including continuous classroom modeling, constructive feedback, and targeted observations.

Furthermore, PD is most beneficial when it focuses on concrete teaching tasks rather than abstract theoretical discussions. It should aim to enhance teachers' knowledge of specific instructional methods and how to teach particular content to students effectively. Additionally, PD should emphasize student learning, equipping teachers with a clear understanding of the skills students are expected to demonstrate (Wei et al., 2009). This grant application underscores the importance of coaching through the systems coaching provided by the BARR model and the integration of peer-coaching methods via instructional rounds training for each subgrantee. The grant also aims to support schools in an ongoing manner by offering continuous support through a contracted partner in building effective instructional round tools and structures for each



subgrantee. This includes opportunities for collaboration with educators from other schools working on similar skills and goals.

Regarding literacy, PD initiatives are more effective when integrated into comprehensive school reform plans rather than as isolated, one-time workshops. As part of their local literacy plan development, teams will create a detailed and comprehensive PD plan that aligns with broader school improvement efforts. This approach ensures that PD is continuous and sustainable and directly supports the overarching goals of improving literacy outcomes across the school community. Engaging entire grade levels, schools, or departments fosters a broader base of understanding and support. This collective involvement creates a critical mass for instructional improvement, enabling teachers to support each other's professional growth and practice. Effective PD emphasizes the importance of teacher collaboration and forming CoPs within schools. These collaborative efforts create a supportive environment for inquiry and reflection on teaching practices. Teachers learn best by working with colleagues in PLCs, engaging in continuous dialogue, and critically examining their practice and student performance to develop and implement more effective instructional strategies. The research further showed that PD should include opportunities for active learning, such as modeling desired practices and allowing teachers to practice and reflect on new strategies. Active engagement helps teachers internalize and apply new skills more effectively (Sailors, 2009).

### Methodological Tools

The primary objective is for all students to achieve proficiency in reading. When students are not making sufficient progress with the core or supplemental reading supports provided, it is essential to intensify their instruction to ensure they are on the path to reading success.

Intensifying instruction for students with reading difficulties can be complex and challenging.

Numerous evidence-based strategies are available to enhance reading instruction, but determining which strategies will be most effective for each student can be a nuanced process. Tailoring the approach to meet the unique needs of each student requires careful evaluation and a willingness to adjust methods until the optimal strategy for reading success is found.

As of 2019, only 35% of fourth-grade students in the United States were deemed proficient in reading according to the National Center for Educational Statistics reading metrics (National Assessment Educational Progress [NAEP], 2019). This data also highlights a persistent and pervasive achievement gap in reading development, which disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students, as well as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and urban settings (U.S. Department of Education: IES, 2016). One significant factor contributing to this achievement gap is the insufficient use of empirically rigorous reading practices (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Castles et al., 2018; Kilpatrick, 2015; Seidenberg, 2017; Hanford, 2019).

In response to this challenge, researchers have increasingly examined reading development and achievement through the Science of Reading (SoR) framework. The SoR, an important component of North Dakota's literacy education, is a comprehensive body of empirical research conducted over 40 years across multiple disciplines, advocating for evidence-based reading techniques (The Reading League [TRL], 2022; Solari et al., 2020). The overwhelming evidence from these studies (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 2001) has established a consensus on highly effective reading instruction practices that should be adopted to address and mitigate the literacy achievement gap. By leveraging these evidence-based practices, educators can significantly improve reading outcomes for all students, particularly those historically underserved.

The body of research constituting the SoR has pinpointed five crucial areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000; National Research Council [NRC], 1998; Rose, 2006). These components, often referred to as the "Big Five," are foundational to effective reading instruction. Studies indicate that these elements should be taught through systematic, explicit, cumulative, and diagnostic methods (Kilpatrick et al., 2019; Moats, 2019; NICHD, 2000). Implementing specific instructional approaches within these five core areas has been shown to significantly enhance students' reading outcomes, ensuring a comprehensive and effective literacy education.

In response to the underperformance in student reading scores, school districts have increasingly recognized the necessity of explicitly teaching the five essential areas of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension—when working with children learning to read (Bazzaz, 2022; Fofaria, 2020). Additionally, there is a growing awareness of the need to address gaps in teacher knowledge to effectively implement these instructional strategies (The Reading League [TRL], 2022). The State plans to address this growing need within the elementary systems participating in this grant. Grant-approved training for educators under Goal 3 will first and foremost need to be high-quality and evidence-based around practices to support educators in integrating the five elements of the Science of Reading into an explicitly instructed GVC.

A valuable tool for school improvement found on WWC that will be incorporated in this grant is the BARR model, which is a comprehensive, whole-school approach designed to address the developmental, academic, and structural challenges that school systems face in building collective efficacy. BARR can be implemented across all subjects in both the elementary and

secondary levels to boost student achievement by enhancing social-emotional skills, fostering positive relationships between students and teachers, and addressing non-academic barriers to learning such as truancy and behavioral issues.

BARR schools utilize real-time data analysis to closely monitor student achievement and behavior, allowing for timely interventions and support. The model employs block or team scheduling to strengthen connections among students and teachers, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. Teachers convene regularly to discuss the progress of all students, with a particular focus on those at risk, and to develop strategic plans to tackle academic and behavioral issues.

Furthermore, the BARR model emphasizes the importance of extensive PD and coaching for teachers and school leaders. This ongoing training equips administrators and educators with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement the BARR approach effectively, ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed academically and personally. Through these comprehensive measures, BARR aims to create a positive, inclusive school culture that promotes academic achievement and well-being for all students.

The State also plans to lean on evidence from the following practice guides from WWC in guiding grantees toward literacy improvements:

- *Preparing young children for school: A practice guide*
- *Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade*
- *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers*
- *Providing reading interventions for students in grades 4-9*
- *Teaching secondary students effectively*

The strong evidence provided in the recommendations from these guides will help the State produce a rubric for determining grant-approved professional learning for grantees.

### **III. Quality of Management Plan**

The NDDPI is well-prepared and experienced in implementing federal grants. As a former recipient of the 2017 SRCL and 2019 CLSD grants, NDDPI staff are adept at managing the processes and overcoming the challenges associated with literacy improvement initiatives. Lessons learned include the importance of identifying specific, evidence-based programs and practices that are allowable and identifying requirements that engage the broad staff and, specifically, the instructional leader of a system in the improvement work. Without the support of a firm structured approach, grantees in high-needs buildings can flounder to work as a team and find specific, effective improvement approaches. Expecting high needs schools to discover and implement effective practices worthy of the change process is unrealistic. For that reason, this project is designed to identify literacy experts and proven programs for the schools, to set them on a positive path without wasting time and energy on low or no impact methods. North Dakota also learned that some buildings are ready and willing to do the improvement work within a district while others are not. Awarding the funds at the building level will eliminate the funds going to a disinterested subgrantee. These past challenges and examining successful district examples have informed the development of a multi-level improvement approach in which each grantee building will engage.

## **Management Plan for ND CLSD Grant**

### **Introduction**

This management plan outlines the structure and procedures for the administration, monitoring, and evaluation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant (CLSD) over a five-year

period. The plan ensures effective management and oversight by NDDPI and delineates the roles and responsibilities of the administrative team, partner teams, contractors, and local school buildings. (A detailed Timeline of Activities is documented in Appendix G).

### **Administrative Structure**

**Table 3**

*Organizational Team Structure* (See Appendix H for full Team Structure Description)

<b>Organizational Team Structure</b>	
<b>NDDPI Teams</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>Administrative Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee Implementation of ND CLSD activities and administrative budget</li> <li>• Work with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education to ensure grant fidelity</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee implementation of ND CLSD activities</li> <li>• Provide technical assistance to grantees</li> <li>• Monitor implementation activities</li> <li>• Manage fiscal elements</li> </ul>
<b>Partner Teams</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>Advisory Team</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure statewide support, alignment, coordination and understanding across multiple programs and departments including assessment, special education, English learners, early childhood, Indian and multicultural, Title I and other pertinent topics.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Early Childhood Collaboration Team</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide insight and recommendations to guide the Birth to 5 project design and implementation of the early childhood coordinator network.</li> <li>• Provide monitoring and technical assistance support to the CLSD implementation related to early childhood grantees.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State Science of Reading Collaboration Team</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide guidance, technical assistance, and professional development to North Dakota schools on scientifically based literacy instruction.</li> </ul>
<p><b>State Literacy Team</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide guidance and content for the North Dakota Literacy Plan annual update and related materials and duties.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Site-based Local Implementation Teams</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead the implementation of local grant activities</li> <li>• Manage local reports</li> <li>• Manage local expenses</li> </ul>

**Administrative and Implementation Teams:**

**Program Administrator:** Manages state-level grant funds and oversees the entire grant implementation. Ensures compliance with federal regulations and serves as the primary point of contact with the U.S. Department of Education. Oversees state evaluation efforts and coordinates with the external evaluator.

**Project Coordinator:** Manages the monitoring and evaluation of the grantees. Develops and implements the monitoring plan, conducts site visits, and ensures timely progress reporting. (Appendix I).



**Financial Manager and Procurement Officers:** Manages the grant funds at the state level, oversees budget allocations, and ensures expenses are allowable. Provides financial records for federal reporting purposes. Provides procurement guidance and technical support.

**Administrative Support Staff:** Assists with logistics, documentation, and communication.

**Partner Teams:** Partner teams at the SEA level will collaborate with the administrative team to provide specialized support in areas such as early childhood planning, curriculum development, resource development, professional development, and technical assistance. These teams will include experts in literacy education, disadvantaged target groups, and data analysis.

## **Contractor Procurement and Management**

**Professional Development and Implementation Support:** NDDPI will procure contractors through a competitive bidding process to provide professional development and implementation support to the grantees. Contractors will offer training, coaching, and technical assistance to school staff to ensure effective literacy instruction and program implementation. The administrative team will monitor contractor performance and ensure they meet the outlined deliverables and objectives.

**External Evaluator:** An external evaluator will be contracted to collect and analyze data, review program results, and report on the implementation of the grant. The



evaluator will work independently to provide unbiased assessments and recommendations for program improvement.

### **Budget Management**

**Fund Allocation:** Each grantee will receive funds based on their needs and proposed plans. Grantees must manage their budgets within allowable expenses as defined by the federal guidelines.

**Financial Oversight:** The Program Administrator will oversee the state allocation and use of grant funds, ensuring compliance with all federal and state regulations. The Project Coordinator will oversee the management of financial reports including claims, amendments, justification forms, and other items required from grantees to monitor expenditures and ensure fiscal responsibility.

### **Monitoring and Technical Support**

**Monitoring Progress:** The Project Coordinator will develop a comprehensive monitoring plan to track the progress of each grantee. Site visits, progress reports, and regular communication will be employed to assess program implementation and effectiveness.

**Technical Support:** The Project Coordinator will provide ongoing technical support to grantees, including guidance on best practices, troubleshooting, and resource allocation. A dedicated web portal will be established to offer continuous support, resources, and updates to grantees.

### **Data Collection and Evaluation (See Indicators in Appendix J)**

**Data Collection:** Grantees will be required to collect data on student literacy outcomes, program implementation, and professional development activities. The external evaluator will standardize data collection methods to ensure consistency and reliability.

**Evaluation and Reporting:** The external evaluator will analyze the collected data and prepare annual reports on the grant's progress and impact. These reports will be shared with the SEA, grantees, and relevant stakeholders to inform decision-making and program adjustments.

### **Communication and Dissemination**

**Communication Plan:** A clear communication plan will be established to ensure timely and effective dissemination of information to all stakeholders supported with a central website. Regular updates, newsletters, and meetings will keep grantees informed about grant requirements, deadlines, and resources. Meeting agendas, notes and written communication with team members will provide transparency and project documentation.

**Dissemination of Best Practices:** Successful strategies and practices identified through the grant will be documented and shared with other schools and districts. Workshops, webinars, and publications will be used to disseminate these best practices widely. A webpage/website dedicated to best practices for public information will be developed.

NDDPI has a detailed understanding of the steps and resources necessary to manage a high-quality project and has envisioned five phases of implementation for the grant summarized in table 4.

#### **Table 4**

*ND Grant Implementation Phases*

<b>Management and Implementation Timeline of Events</b>	
<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Preparation and Vetting</b>
Year 1	NDDPI engages in all activities to prepare for awarding subgrant funds, establishing guidance and communication processes, procuring contractors and evaluator, building team frameworks, and establishing calendar of events.
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Application and Awarding</b>
Year 1	NDDPI enacts processes to award funds to schools and early learning partners including communication of funding opportunity, guidance webinars for grant writing assistance, application collection, review processes, award selection and notification, and award calls. NDDPI establishes and enacts processes, timelines and responsibilities with teams and team members.
<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>Local Project Initiation</b>
Year 2	NDDPI provides communication, resources and technical assistance to grantees as they establish their grant processes, identify local implementation team members, budget, enter contract with systemic support provider (BARR), and begin professional development review.
<b>Phase 4</b>	<b>Implementation &amp; Improvement</b>
Years 2-5	NDDPI engages in technical assistance and monitoring activities to ensure that local grantees are informed and implementing the grant budget and programmatic requirements as established in the application phase. Opportunities for learning as well as required engagement elements will be supported in an ongoing manner. Evaluation processes will be followed, and all data will inform continuous improvement steps.

<b>Phase 5</b>	<b>Sustainability</b>
Year 5	NDDPI, with contracted support, leads evaluative activities to support subgrantees in recognizing the value gained through grant processes, identifying high impact processes, and planning for the continuation of highly effective literacy instruction systems through local resources with the completion of the CLSD project.

The grant will be overseen by SEA staff in the Office of Academic Support, with dedicated full-time equivalents (FTEs) assigned to its implementation. The administrative team will lead the consultation and collaboration with partner state offices and organizations. The team’s comprehensive list of partners highlights the range of stakeholders previously invested in the grant's implementation and their commitment to continuing this important work. With dedicated staff, strong leadership in partnerships, and effective processes for contracting professional support, the North Dakota team is fully confident in implementing this plan to benefit disadvantaged students in the state.

A critical partnership is one with the ND Regional Education Agencies (REAs). This professional development arm of state resources provides research, development, and professional learning to local educators. Additionally, they work tirelessly to provide guidance and support to schools in interpreting law and current research into actionable work. NDDPI and NDREA together established the ND Science of Reading (NDSor) work team following the setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic. North Dakota allocated a significant portion of federally available funds to literacy recovery and improvement. These funds were used to build capacity in the state through Regional Education Agencies (REAs) to design and implement professional learning services to improve literacy instruction. The partnership established with the REAs

continues to flourish. The NDSOR work team builds on and utilizes this impressive bank of evidence-based learning opportunities aligned with the science of reading in instruction, intervention, curriculum evaluation and selection, and data use to continue to serve North Dakota educators to impact student success.

The infrastructure and offerings developed through the REAs will serve as a strong asset for the grant implementation. With continued federal funding, North Dakota will maintain its commitment to providing essential training for educators and administrators in our most underserved schools. High-quality professional learning, embedded practice, and collaborative system building are critical needs for North Dakota's schools with the greatest needs.

The NDDPI will ensure timely, well-informed, and transparent execution throughout the life of the grant as the administrative lead team. These leaders are skilled and experienced at partnering with and consulting various teams and will build on partnerships developed over previous grants to ensure the completion of all activities outlined in the management plan to keep the grant on track, on budget, and in a state of continual improvement.

A contracted evaluator will provide ongoing feedback to inform the implementation process. The project administrator and project coordinator consult with NDDPI leadership and various office directors when upper-level decisions and expertise are required. To maintain transparency, the administrative team will provide information formally and informally to all stakeholders, including NDDPI leadership, partners, grantees, and the North Dakota public. Communication avenues, such as direct one-on-one communication, reports, public website postings, evaluator reports, and public notices will be used to keep all relevant stakeholders informed.

#### **IV. Quality of the Project Services**

The NDDPI has established a rigorous, high-quality, and competitive process for awarding subgrants for the ND CLIMBS project. The NDDPI will utilize a targeted funding approach, offering grants at the building level. This strategy will consist of separate and distinct categories of funding (birth-5, elementary, and secondary levels), each dedicated to specific approved activities. This approach will ensure that funding provides impactful support to buildings demonstrating a need and readiness to take on the challenging systemic improvement work this grant opportunity proposes. This approach aims to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of grant distribution and align resources with the specific needs of each applicant. In selecting eligible subgrantees, North Dakota will prioritize and provide funding advantages to those serving the highest percentages of disadvantaged children. To ensure that awards are granted to the most deserving subgrantees, the NDDPI will implement the following measures:

1. In collaboration with the NDDPI Management Information Systems department, the CLSD Administration Team will develop ranking criteria for all school buildings in North Dakota (Appendix K). This will ensure that applicants serving the highest percentage of disadvantaged children receive a personal invitation to apply for CLSD funding. Any site in North Dakota can apply, provided it submits a detailed justification demonstrating how and why its needs meet eligibility requirements.
2. Award priority points to applicants who serve large percentages of disadvantaged children, ensuring these applicants receive preferential consideration. Priority points will be assigned to high-needs applicants according to determined building needs.
3. Provide thorough training to independent reviewers to ensure they fully understand the eligibility criteria for disadvantaged children as outlined in the application.

4. Require applicants to provide specific assurances of compliance and alignment with CLSD program expectations.

#### Independent Peer Review Process

The NDDPI will implement an independent peer review process to select subgrantee recipients. Potential reviewers will sign a conflict-of-interest form before selecting to ensure objectivity. The reviewers will be experts who meet the following criteria:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of literacy research supported by various levels of evidence, as defined by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
2. Have experience in improving language and literacy practices among teachers and other instructional staff.
3. Possess English Language Arts teaching experience.
4. Have experience in instructional leadership or administration.
5. Have expertise in early childhood education.
6. Are familiar with screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and outcome literacy assessment instruments.

Reviewers will undergo training on the application's essential elements and the scoring process. This training will clearly define the terms used in the scoring rubric, ensuring a consistent and fair evaluation of all applications.

#### Subgrant Application Scoring Rubric

Grant reviewers will use a scoring template to assign points to each section of the subgrant application. Based on a 100-point scale, the total application score will determine the awards, as evaluated by the reviewers. Applications will be ranked according to the mean scores

from all reviewers. In cases where there is a significant discrepancy between reviewers' scores, the NDDPI staff will review the application to identify and address the inconsistency.

### Allocation of Funds

Funding will be allocated to approximately 30 grants per grade span each at the elementary and secondary levels and approximately 20 at the Birth to age 5 level using the established scoring formula, with consideration given to the reasonableness, realism, justification, and appropriateness of the funding requests and the availability of funds. During this phase, the NDDPI may collaborate with applicants to clarify and negotiate costs.

### Awarding of Subgrants

The following plan ensures that awards are sufficient to fully and effectively implement each local plan. The CLSD Administration Team will create a funding slate that specifies allocations based on statutory funding requirements. These allocations are as follows:

1. 15% to serve children from birth through kindergarten entry.
2. 40% to serve students in kindergarten through grade 5.
3. 40% to serve students in middle and high school through grade 12.

This allocation strategy ensures that resources are distributed equitably across different age groups, allowing for comprehensive literacy support from early childhood through the end of high school.

### Evidence-Based Comprehensive Literacy PD

Sites must demonstrate that the comprehensive literacy programs, practices, and PD they intend to implement are supported by strong evidence. NDDPI will use a procurement process to review and approve all professional development contracts.



- Early Childhood Literacy Instruction PD: This will emphasize promoting language development, including vocabulary building and verbal expression, to ensure young children are well-prepared for kindergarten.
- Elementary School Literacy Instruction PD: This will encompass evidence-based instructional strategies identified during the planning stage and applied in various contexts, grounded in the principles of responsive instruction.
- Middle and High School Literacy Instruction PD: This will feature evidence-based instructional strategies that employ direct and explicit instruction to enhance students' fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills across all content areas.

#### Grant Writing Support Provided by the NDDPI

To assist potential applicants for the CLSD grant, the NDDPI's Administration Team will conduct virtual Grant Writing webinars. These sessions will introduce the State Literacy Plan and emphasize the importance of commitment to the objectives of the funding opportunity. Each webinar will cover critical topics, such as eligibility and CLSD requirements, the development and implementation of a local literacy plan, application procedures through the NDDPI's Grants Management System, and the assessments, reporting, and evaluation processes within the CLSD grant. To ensure accessibility and inclusiveness, all webinars will be recorded and made available on the NDDPI's website. Moreover, to enhance transparency during the competitive process, the Program Coordinator will compile and update a Question-and-Answer document, which will be publicly accessible. These efforts aim to clarify the application process and foster a thorough understanding among applicants of effectively engaging with and benefitting from the CLSD program.

#### Sustainability and Impact

The NDDPI will maintain its collaborative spirit and proactive engagement with various entities, departments, and state and local resources. The quality of the project design, strategically aligned with state and NDDPI initiatives and focused on measurable outcomes, will foster sustainability, system-building, and literacy gains.

The ND CLIMBS program will significantly enhance capacity across North Dakota by offering evidence-based PD opportunities to educators and embedding continuous improvement systems that will outlast the grant period. Additionally, state capacity in literacy knowledge and implementation will increase as literacy facilitators are trained to lead the network groups and new leaders emerge from the work. The NDDPI will collaborate with various partners to ensure that project participants align literacy activities with state standards, program objectives, and initiative goals funded by other state and federal sources.

North Dakota is well-positioned to help sites integrate these diverse funding streams to create sustainable literacy programs that improve outcomes, align with the North Dakota Comprehensive Literacy Plan, address local needs, and provide high-quality PD. This coordinated approach will ensure that literacy initiatives are cohesive, impactful, and capable of producing long-term benefits for students across the state.

## **V. Quality of the Project Evaluation**

A detailed and methodical evaluation plan will be implemented to ensure the ND CLIMBS project achieves its intended goals, objectives, and outcomes. This plan will be meticulously developed in collaboration with a contractor to align with the project's goals and objectives, defining measurable outcomes that can be tracked over time. The evaluation will employ quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including pre-and post-program surveys, standardized assessments, and regular feedback from participants and stakeholders.

These methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on literacy development.

Integrating systematic data collection processes and using established tools and protocols supports the evaluation plan's feasibility. Pre- and post-program surveys will measure changes in literacy skills and attitudes, while standardized assessments will provide objective data on student progress. Regular interviews and focus groups with educators, students, and parents will offer qualitative insights into the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement. Additionally, site visits and observations will provide real-time feedback on the implementation process.

The plan will be tailored to the specific contexts of the participating sites to ensure the appropriateness of the evaluation methods. This customization will account for varying local needs and resources, ensuring that the methods used are relevant and sensitive to each site's unique challenges and opportunities. The evaluation framework will be flexible enough to adapt to ongoing feedback and changing circumstances, maintaining relevance throughout the project.

Moreover, the evaluation methods will provide continuous performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress. Data will be collected and analyzed at regular intervals, enabling the identification of trends and the timely addressing of any issues. This ongoing assessment will include interim reports that summarize findings and recommend adjustments to enhance program effectiveness. By employing these thorough, feasible, and appropriate evaluation methods, the project will ensure that it remains on track to achieve its intended outcomes, continually improving its impact on literacy development across North Dakota.