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**NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

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Governor Burgum,

In July, [Executive Order 2020-38](#) allowed for the continuation of distance learning in North Dakota. The order also required the ND Department of Public Instruction to evaluate the implementation of distance learning occurring across the state to ensure continuity of education for all students. The following report synthesizes, through an executive summary of the reviewers findings, the results of these evaluations. In addition, individual school evaluations can be requested.

In total, fifteen districts were randomly selected to be reviewed for fidelity of implementation to their distance learning plans. A list of the fifteen districts, along with the NDDPI program staff assigned to review each district's implementation, is posted on the NDDPI website at <https://www.nd.gov/dpi/district-distance-learning-plan>. Districts were notified via email of the selection process, then a live webinar was conducted to explain the process, followed up with a personal reach out between the NDDPI and the district contact.

Each internal NDDPI reviewer utilized the following tools to conduct their reviews:

- Desk audit submissions
- Virtual class observations
- Recorded sessions
- Phone conversations
- Board meeting minutes

Throughout this process, districts had the flexibility to document and demonstrate their implementation in ways that best met their needs. The review process was completed on **November 30, 2020**. At that time, the NDDPI team collaborated to synthesize the findings and put together this report.

As I reflect upon the current educational environment and the pivot teachers and administrators had to make to offer a distance learning option, there are a few points that rise to the surface. First, many ND students have had limited time in distance learning while others have been in a distance learning environment the majority of the time since last March. And, while innovative approaches and exemplars have occurred throughout the state, it is also clear that distance learning plans and expectations need to be personalized to each community and continually adjusted based on stakeholder input and feedback.

In addition, educators and community partners have been making extraordinary efforts to connect with students and families and, yet, student motivation remains a challenge. ND educators have been asked to teach in several learning modalities (i.e., face to face, hybrid, and at a distance) at the same time, underscoring the challenge that exists for teachers to manage individual students' academic and social emotional needs. Learning loss and an ever-widening achievement gap is evident, hitting our special populations more severely, and will be an ongoing challenge.

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Despite best efforts and multiple attempts to employ different interventions and strategies to engage the disengaged, family and student challenges (i.e., loss of employment, depression, addiction, etc.) occurring in the home continue to impact learning. These challenges have made it more difficult for many students to engage in academic rigor during this time. However, in some ways, the pandemic has also illuminated hidden inequity which is resulting in increased efforts around community partnerships to focus on solution-based approaches.

To close, this report should not serve as a comprehensive view of the entirety of the distance learning approaches that have been implemented within the state; rather, it provides a glimpse into a representative sample of distance learning offered in our ND schools. To this end, NDDPI is collaborating with NDUS to conduct a state-wide survey to gather additional feedback from multiple educational stakeholders, so we can continue to learn from the experiences from across the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirsten Baesler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kirsten Baesler



## Distance Learning Implementation Evaluation: Executive Summary

### Representative Sample Process and Information

The NDDPI collaborated with Dr. Ellie Shockley to create a fair and equitable representative sample selection process. Enrollment information in this report reflects 2019-2020 data, because, at the time of the review process commencement, 2020-2021 school enrollment data was not completed. A decision was made to utilize the below data to come up with a fair number based on enrollment.

#### North Dakota Enrollment Facts:

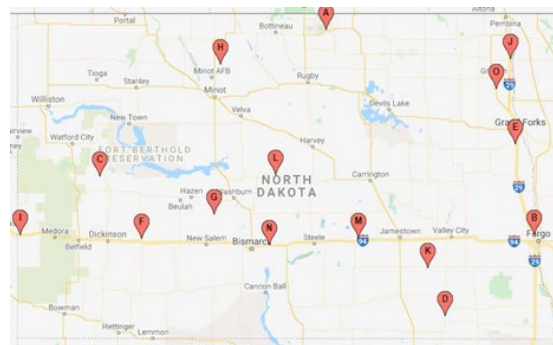
- 173 public school districts
- 15 districts with 1,000+ students (8.67% of districts)
- 48 districts with 300-999 students (27.75% of districts)
- 110 districts with <300 students (63.58% of districts)

A representative sample of 15 districts out of the 173 districts required the following:

- 1 to 2 districts with 1,000+ students (preferably one *enormous* district and one *merely big* district)
- 4 to 5 districts with 300-999 students
- 9 to 10 districts with <300 students

After the number of districts were decided, Dr. Shockley utilized [random.org/lists](https://www.random.org/lists/) to randomly select 15 districts. After, she incorporated a quasi-random methodology to modify the list, to ensure geographic diversity (see ND map below. This final quasi-random method gave us:

- 2 districts with 1,000+ students (one *enormous* district and one *merely big* district)
- 4 districts with 300-999 students
- 9 districts with <300 students



School District	Enrollment	# of students accessing distance learning at time of review
Fargo	11,382	1763
Belcourt	1,600	1557
Killdeer	584	60

School District	Enrollment	# of students accessing distance learning at time of review
Thompson	571	25 (16 were full-time distance learners, 9 were distance learning due to isolation or quarantine)
Oakes	498	25 (11-16-20 there were 5 students distance learning and 20 out for quarantine/isolation; on 11-23-20 they moved to 56 students)
Richardton-Taylor	329	128
Center-Stanton	243	18
Glenburn	238	24 (9 students were full-time distance learners, 15 were distance learning due to isolation or quarantine)
Beach	253	11
Drayton	175	16 distance learning due to quarantine/isolation periods on 11-17-20; school district then moved to full distance learning due to community concern during the week of Thanksgiving and beyond
Litchville-Marion	120	18
McClusky	86	1
Medina	165	3
Minto	278	83
Menoken	45	8

**Informal Survey Information**

The survey information (to what degree column) served as a tool to help inform the executive summary of the distance learning plan review and evaluation. Answers are subjective, but based on evidence gathered via interviews, review of submitted documents and evidence, and publicly available data. For reference, the rating scale can be loosely interpreted as follows for the majority of the questions:

To what degree...	Implementation Results
Level 3	Active implementation; multiple examples/evidence of adjustments provided
Level 2	Opportunities to implement and adapt; evidence provided
Level 1	Plan provided, but few opportunities to implement
N/A	Responses were left BLANK if an area was not applicable

**Review of Distance Learning Design and Development**

Plan Development and Design:

*NDDPI will review processes and procedures utilized to inform the development and revision of the distance learning plan.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
80% Level 3 20% Level 2	Distance Learning Plan design was representative of multiple stakeholder groups (i.e., leaders, students, families, parents, community, educators)
73% Level 3 27% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Procedures are in place to gather stakeholder feedback, information is reviewed, and adjustments have been made accordingly to improve distance learning experience
73% Level 3 27% Level 2	Plan adheres to North Dakota K-12 Smart Restart expectations (regarding distance learning) and has been adapted as state guidelines have adjusted

**Strengths:**

- In many schools’ plans, students, teachers, and parents are actively involved
- Plan designs often involved parents and other community stakeholders and continually seeks ongoing feedback from communities on a wide range of issues/topics

**Challenges:**

- Some schools struggle to get students actively involved on planning teams but received feedback through surveys; time is a factor in receiving this feedback
- Teachers have been expected to go above and beyond and teach in several learning modalities at the same time; it is challenging to manage each students’ needs with the ongoing change and process of switching back and forth

**Educational Staff Expectations:**

*NDDPI will review professional learning supports, human resource (HR) policies, and communication strategies to verify educator support and engagement is prevalent.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
73% Level 3 27% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Professional development was provided regarding transition to distance learning environment and continue
47% Level 3 53% Level 2	Processes are in place to deliver employee support services <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HR policies reflect flexibility and adherence to health guidance</li></ul>
53% Level 3 33% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Regular communication regarding distance learning and opportunities for input and improvement exist for staff, including feedback loops with district/school administration and colleagues

**Strengths:**

- Almost all schools met rubric/plan expectations; informed teachers of leave and distance options available
- Teachers and school leaders have had to collaborate more, and many have more robust and active professional learning communities (PLC’s)
- More social emotional learning (SEL) and mindfulness training has been put into place to help address increased concern and stress
- Professional development and training have occurred to assist and support teachers

**Challenges:**

- New informal procedures but not any new policies
- Technology tools are often complex; tech-savvy individuals fared better, while many teachers/paraprofessionals/students/parents struggle with the various platforms and tools
- School leaders have not been able to be as strategic with professional development practices and goals

## Review of Implementation

### Engagement and Attendance:

*NDDPI will review attendance procedures, district processes, and data sets to verify that distance learning plan is being delivered as locally designed.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
60% Level 3 27% Level 2 13% Level 1	Attendance plans and practices adhere to North Dakota K-12 Smart Restart expectations (regarding distance learning) and have been adjusted as needed
73% Level 3 27% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Students are afforded regular access to educators in distance environment
47% Level 3 47% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Student attendance, participation and engagement is measured and informs practices (classroom, school, and district)
67% Level 3 33% Level 2 13% Level 1	Student attendance is considered for all subgroups and special populations
20% Level 3 67% Level 2 13% Level 1	Actionable interventions exist for students who are failing, not participating, or disengaged

### Strengths:

- All schools made continuing efforts to reach out and engage students; a high amount of evidence existed in the form of home visits and other connection methods
- New technology tools and or software programs have been put into place to address non-participation and to monitor distance learning
- Increased communication exists among teachers to assist with student engagement ideas
- Learning centers and/or tutors have been added to help struggling learners
- Consistent use and training of learning management system (LMS) to aid communication and lessen technology issues
- Individualized program decisions and accommodations were evident; a small school was able to offer a safe (yet distant) place within the school building to learn at school
- Schools established a variety of approaches to deliver and pick up distance learning materials

### Challenges:

- Schools are attempting many different interventions to engage the disengaged, yet many distance learners remain disengaged
- Multiple technology and software platforms and programs confuse students and parents who must navigate it all when distance learning
- Outsourced distance learning programs and/or assessments are not always on par with classroom practices and sometimes lack a local teacher connection
- Despite best efforts, parent/family/student issues occurring in the home continue to affect learning (i.e., depression, addiction, etc.)

**High-Quality, Effective, Standards-Based Education:**

*NDDPI will review documentation of instructional practices, student supports, family engagement strategies and progress monitoring practices, which may include virtual observation of distance education courses.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
73% Level 3 27% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Students have access to devices; reliable, high-speed internet; assistive technology, etc. as applicable and necessary
47% Level 3 13% Level 2 20% Level 1 20% N/A	Regular communication and additional support are provided to all families, including those families whose native language is not English
73% Level 3 27% Level 2 >1% Level 1	High-quality, standards-based skills and instruction are prevalent for all students in distance learning environments
53% Level 3 40% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Academic progress monitoring occurs on a regular basis and informs instructional practices and student supports
33% Level 3 47% Level 2 >1% Level 1 13% N/A	Strategic interventions are provided to students when inadequate progress is made by student(s)
53% Level 3 40% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Clear and consistent practices for assessing and evaluating student progress exist (i.e., mechanisms for assessing student learning, and giving feedback, and providing grades)

**Strengths:**

- Community partnerships helped to provide internet and device access
- Schools utilized technology and translation software to aid with communication to English learners and their families
- Schools tapped into existing relationships and partnerships to involve new American families
- Curriculum and instruction are focused on grade-level content, standards, and skills
- Teachers and paraprofessionals utilize “breakout” rooms for students who struggle and to provide enrichment
- Teachers establish individual meeting times with students outside of whole-class instruction to strengthen understanding; Fridays are often a day used to address student needs rather than to provide new instruction
- Teachers used team planning times to develop lessons and progress monitor using common formative assessments
- SEL has been woven through multiple content areas

**Challenges:**

- Although distance learning plans are in place, many schools (especially some of the smaller schools) have not had many opportunities to implement at the time of the review

- Internet access and device issues exist, most often in homes with multiple students learning at the same time
- Teachers lack a toolkit of evidence-based, virtual teaching methods
- Differentiation and adjusting instruction to meet individual needs is made even more difficult by teachers having to teach in multiple learning modalities with many different students at the same time
- Using assessment and progress monitoring data to inform instructional practices is rare
- Classroom management is difficult, due to multiple online and home distractions

Ensuring Equitable Services: Special Education, English Learners, Federal Title Considerations  
*NDDPI will review documentation of procedures and practices for all students, but in particular for students included in the below subgroups.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
53% Level 3 33% Level 2 13% Level 1	Student unique needs and learning styles are considered when designing distance learning plans across all grade levels, classes, and courses
40% Level 3 20% Level 2 13% Level 1 27% N/A	Individual considerations and accommodations exist and are implemented for students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
27% Level 3 40% Level 2 >1% Level 1 27% N/A	Individual considerations exist and are implemented for students on 504 Plans
53% Level 3 >1% Level 2 20% Level 1 20% N/A	Plans are consistent with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the NDDPI Office of Special Education guidelines
33% Level 3 27% Level 2 40% N/A	English learner students are continually identified, even after the start of school (within 30 days of the first day of school or within 30 days mid-year enrollment)
27% Level 3 27% Level 2 >1% Level 1 40% N/A	Instruction is scaffolded for English learners to ensure accessibility to content
>1% Level 3 33% Level 2 >1% Level 1 53% N/A	Language instruction educational program (LIEP) is adapted for distance learning
40% Level 3 40% Level 2 20% Level 1	Appropriate instructional strategies are provided to ensure accessibility to content, dependent on federal title designation (i.e., schoolwide, targeted, private school services)

**Strengths:**

- Educators use modified choice learning boards and structured teaching methods



- Schools continued to offer support services and interventions to students, even if students don't have an IEP/504/Title designation
- Schools have been linking teachers, families, and students together with several high-quality services, including external community resources
- Video training, software applications, and a strong personnel structure exists to provide referrals and supports
- Dedicated educators are employed to reach out to disengaged students and families
- Schools utilized technology and translation software to support English learners and their families
- Learning centers have been set up to provide supports, such as technology training and tutoring services, to all families, but especially those who are considered at-risk
- Teachers utilize Fridays and other outside of class time to meet individual needs
- Paraprofessionals assigned to each class to offer help and enrichment during distance learning instruction

**Challenges:**

- Attendance concerns and a lack of student motivation exist, despite repeated reach out/IEP/Title /504/Homeless service
- Numerous IEP/504 meetings are in the weekly schedule
- Maintaining similar supports (i.e., Title services) as in a typical school year, even though the needs and learning structure has changed drastically has not always been effective
- Distance learning is not always offered in a developmentally appropriate manner

**School Counseling Services:**

*NDDPI will review SEL instructional and programmatic supports to students.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
60% Level 3 27% Level 2 13% Level 1	School counseling services, including social and emotional learning supports, are provided to students

**Strengths:**

- Schools used funds to add counselors/social workers to aid in SEL and check in with students, including making home visits and offering tutoring services
- Counseling, SEL, and mindfulness lessons have been integrated within all content areas

**Challenges:**

- A need exists for increased collaboration and support between multiple agencies (i.e., DHS, tribal services, and other community partners) to meet students' needs
- Schools find it more difficult to identify specific needs for distance learners

**Assessment and Grading Practices:**

*NDDPI will review the district’s assessment and grading practices used to monitor engagement, learning, and participation.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
53% Level 3 33% Level 2 13% Level 1	Students are able to demonstrate ongoing understanding and growth toward academic proficiency in grade level or advanced grade level content
73% Level 3 20% Level 2 >1% Level 1	Clear and consistent practices for assessing student learning, documenting progress, and assigning grades/scores are in place
93% Level 3 >1% Level 1	All K-12 students were assessed within the first four weeks of the school year

**Strengths:**

- All districts made an effort to assess students within the first four weeks, in a variety of manners
- Educators use multiple software and technology tools to provide feedback
- Learning data is discussed and reviewed in PLCs
- Professional development and training have been provided on subjects such as assessment, instruction, and feedback

**Challenges:**

- Lack of adjustments to grading practices; regular classroom procedures at a distance seems to be the norm for the most part
- Progress monitoring exists but doesn’t always affect changes to classroom procedures
- Schools continue to see an increase in a widening of the achievement gap
- Some schools were not able to assess all students, especially in the middle and high school grades
- Remote assessments for distance learning students may have affected the validity of the results

**Review of Data**

**STARS Submissions:**

*NDDPI will verify information provided on district website and reported to the state are current, in alignment, and have school board approval.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
100% Level 3	Health and Safety plan link is functional; evidence of board approval
73% Level 3 13% Level 2 13% N/A	Distance Learning Plan link is functional; evidence of board approval

**Strengths:**

- Majority of schools had an updated plan and board approval on file
- Evidence exists that many schools made necessary updates and changes as needed and these changes are communicated to stakeholders

**Challenges:**

- Not all plans were updated or had the opportunity to be fully implemented

**Reporting:**

*NDDPI will verify the instructional models implemented are in alignment with the district plan and there is not great discrepancy or non-reporting of information.*

To what degree...	Elements of Implementation
80% Level 3 13% Level 2 >1% Level 1	The reporting of face to face, hybrid, and distance learning in PowerSchool is accurate and the numbers provided have been validated
73% Level 3 27% Level 2 20% Level 1	The reporting of COVID-19 numbers to NDDPI is accurate and processes allow for timely reporting

**Strengths:**

- Majority of schools maintain accurate records and complete reporting in a timely manner
- Accurate reporting has increased over time

**Challenges:**

- Sometimes cases were reported to the school, but school was not always accurate or timely in adding real time COVID-19 data to PowerSchool
- Internal communication issues occurred between school personnel and school leaders

**Report Completed:**



\_\_\_\_\_  
Amanda Peterson, Director Educational Equity & Support  
Date: 12/4/2020

**Report Reviewed:**

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Kirsten Baesler, State Superintendent  
Date: 12/5/2020