

ND FIRST Project Team Charter

North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

ND FIRST Overview

[Senate Bill 2254](#), signed into law in April 2023, mandates a rigorous and robust intervention process aimed at supporting North Dakota's consistently lowest-performing schools. This bill specifically targets schools previously identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools, ensuring they receive enhanced support to improve performance. The bill's policy provisions are scheduled to go into effect in September 2025. The bill outlines three potential interventions in identified schools, including

- “Funds to be held in escrow for the school or school district or spent as designated by the superintendent of public instruction.
- Changes to curriculum, training, instruction, assessment, or the school calendar in the school or school district.
- Reassignment or hiring of school or school district staff to fill roles associated with school or school district needs.” [Section 1.2 of Senate Bill 2254](#)

In June 2023, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) began collecting input from public school staff, community members, and other relevant education partners across the state. This consultation process was not required by the legislation itself but helped inform the design of a statewide system of support for schools in their second cycle of CSI. The fundamental tenets of NDDPI's proposed system of support were to ensure that districts with low-performing schools:

- Engage in purposeful school renewal processes.
- Address school- and district-level systemic improvement.
- Engage multiple stakeholders or “partners” in the school renewal process.

The system of support established under SB 2254 to perform these tenets is called North Dakota Fostering Improved Results for School Transformation (ND FIRST). ND FIRST is positioned within the broader school improvement infrastructure that supports ND public schools. **Appendix TBD** provides a detailed overview of the steps and decision points within ND FIRST, which will be referred to as the Process Map. Schools in their second cycle of CSI will enter ND FIRST, through which they receive an additional layer of oversight and support not offered to schools under Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) or the first year of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). Although these are additional supports, ND FIRST allows schools and districts to build on the work that began in their original TSI/CSI designations. Throughout the multi-year process, schools undergo continuous evaluations with the goals of tracking progress, adapting strategies, and eventually exiting ND FIRST designation based on success metrics co-developed between the school or district and NDDPI. A Collaborative Partnership Agreement (MOU) (see **Appendix TBD**) will be established between NDDPI and each identified school or district, setting

clear expectations for improvement. Schools and districts will also be required to participate in a leadership program designed to enhance governance and ensure accountability as they work towards better outcomes for their students. These processes, set to take effect in September 2025, will provide a structured and supportive framework to help North Dakota's lowest-performing schools succeed.

This document, the Project Team Charter, provides a broad overview of the ND FIRST process. It is designed to help second-cycle CSI schools understand the purpose and strategic framework of ND FIRST, the entities responsible for its implementation, and the process that ND FIRST schools and districts will follow. Furthermore, the Project Team Charter includes the:

- ND FIRST Strategic Framework
- Roles and responsibilities of the entities implementing ND FIRST
- Collaborative Partnership Agreement (MOU) development
- Review of goal attainment

Strategic Framework

Theory of Action

NDDPI's Theory of Action is grounded in a clear understanding of the challenges partnership districts face and the opportunities that result from genuine continuous improvement.



Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of ND FIRST is to provide a comprehensive system of support for second-cycle CSI schools and to improve outcomes for all students. To accomplish this mission, NDDPI is committed to achieving the following objectives:

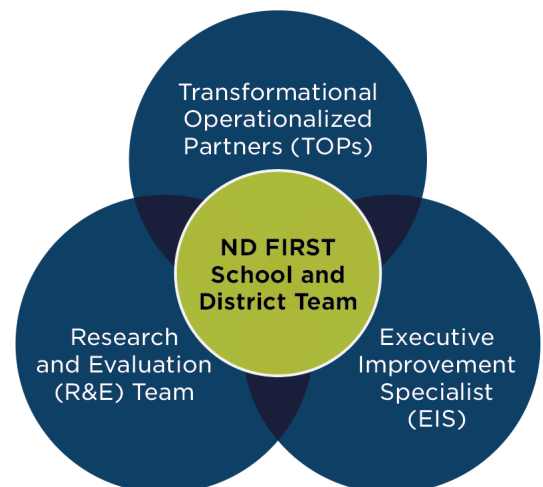
- ▶ **Collaborate** with ND FIRST schools and districts using best practices and highly customized supports.
- ▶ **Design, deploy, and implement** a system for disbursing and evaluating the use of federal funds that support ND FIRST schools and districts.
- ▶ **Develop** resources and technical assistance programs, services, and guidance that are utilized by ND FIRST schools and districts.
- ▶ **Develop** a multi-faceted evaluation system that will reliably and validly measure the effectiveness of ND FIRST.
- ▶ **Develop and implement** methods, tools, and mechanisms for determining district and school-level readiness for implementation of evidence-based practices and research-based policies.
- ▶ **Design, deploy, and implement** a leadership coaching contractor pool that builds capacity for ND First schools and districts.
- ▶ **Ensure** transparent and appropriate communication and consultation with families.
- ▶ **Recognize and prioritize** the local beliefs, values, and behaviors of ND FIRST schools and districts.

ND FIRST Team

There are three entities responsible for implementing ND FIRST. Together, these entities form the **ND FIRST Team**:

1. Executive Improvement Specialist (EIS)
2. Transformational Operationalized Partners (TOPs)
3. Research and Evaluation (R&E) Team

The ND FIRST Team executes and operates statewide supports for ND FIRST schools and districts while working collaboratively with and being overseen by NDDPI. As documented in the Process Map (see [Appendix TBD](#)), all ND FIRST schools and districts will establish a project management plan that outlines the entities executing implementation of ND FIRST in the initial 18 months (Year 1 & Year 2). Each entity (EIS, R&E, and TOPs) is tasked with implementing multiple strategic actions which support the goals and objectives of ND FIRST. Below is an overview of the scope of services and primary purpose of each entity. More detailed responsibilities are included in Appendices A-C.



Scope of Services

Team	Purpose
Executive Improvement Specialist (EIS)	The primary purpose of the EIS is to provide intensive, individualized support to identified ND FIRST schools and districts. The EIS employs a focused approach on outcomes by eliminating duplicate services and providing timely and effective support while taking into consideration the unique context and needs of each ND FIRST school and district. The EIS is the primary point of contact between the school/district and NDDPI. See Appendix A for more information on the EIS' role and responsibilities.
Transformational Operationalized Partners (TOPs)	The TOPs are a group of vetted external consultants dedicated to supporting, guiding, and nurturing ND FIRST district superintendents and principals. The TOPs will be comprised of a cadre of former school and district leaders who are local and national experts. The TOPs' strategic objective is to design, deploy, and implement a pool of principal and superintendent partners who have demonstrated success in improving student performance and building leadership capacity at the district level. Their primary role is to serve as leadership coaches and mentors, with an emphasis on building capacities to support transformational leadership in ND FIRST schools and districts. See Appendix B for more information on the TOPs' roles and responsibilities.
Research & Evaluation (R&E) Team	The R&E team develops and implements the accountability and measurement systems aligned with Senate Bill 2254 and state policy. This team serves the dual role of evaluating progress of each ND FIRST school/district while simultaneously evaluating the implementation of the ND FIRST statewide system of support. See Appendix C for more information on the R&E team's role and responsibilities.

Collaborative Partnership Agreement (MOU)

Under the Collaborative Partnership Agreement, the local school district, board, and community work in partnership with the NDDPI and partners to establish a shared memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU must include the following:

- Identification of primary areas of challenge/weakness and focus goals to address these areas of challenge.
- Identification of key strategies and/or practices that will lead to desired outcomes.
- Identification of essential 18-month milestones and goals. These, at a minimum, address the accountability index score value that resulted in the identified school(s)'s inclusion in the ND FIRST system of support.
- Identification of education partners to include in the MOU:
 - ND FIRST districts must include the following partners as signatories:
 - Local School Board/Board of Directors

- NDDPI and the ND FIRST entities defined above
- At least one additional community partner (e.g., higher education institution, parents, local foundations, tribal council)

NDDPI will provide templates to help guide ND FIRST districts and schools on the required information for the Collaborative Partnership Agreement (MOU) Template (see [Appendix TBD](#)).

Review of Goal Attainment

The review of goal attainment is a collaborative review of the partnership agreement, which is designed to assess progress toward meeting interim target benchmarks. While formal reviews, outlined in **Section V of [Appendix TBD](#)**, occur at the 18- and 36-month periods, progress monitoring will occur consistently and frequently throughout the duration of the ND FIRST process. The ND FIRST Team provides technical assistance to help the ND FIRST school or district prepare for ongoing monitoring and formal reviews.

Appendices

Appendix A

Note that Appendix A is still under development.

Executive Improvement Specialist (EIS) Primary Responsibilities
Connect with the former NDREA Coaching liaison to ensure a continuation of the school improvement framework as developed by NDDPI and approved in ND ESSA plan.
<p>Intensive Support for Implementation of the Collaborative Partnership Agreement (MOU)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Execute effective management/monitoring of school improvement initiatives/projects, making sure to include strategic collaboration with relevant stakeholders (e.g., special education staff/units, teaching staff, etc.).• Execute effective fiscal resource management.• Promote strategies leading to effective recruitment and retention of staff.• Collect and analyze data on leadership role and responsibilities (working at the top of your license).• Maintain high engagement in the community served.• Identify local, regional, state, and federal resources to support ND FIRST school and district needs.
<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate consistently and appropriately with relevant stakeholders at every stage of the project planning process.
<p>Fiscal and Schoolwide Programs Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct comprehensive fiscal and program reviews of district, state, and federal funding utilization.• Provide ongoing and timely reports and updates of funding utilization.• Identify additional resources for school or district renewal/improvement.• NDDPI makes all final decisions related to investments.
<i>Additional responsibilities to be determined.</i>

Appendix B

Note that Appendix B is still under development.

Transformational Operationalized Partners (TOPs) Team Primary Responsibilities
<p>Critical Thinking Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Serve as trusted thought partners who advocate for, guide, and nurture ND FIRST superintendents and principals.• Promote the following principles for developing and sustaining leadership capacity:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Trust○ Relationship○ Reflective Practice○ Collaboration○ Confidentiality○ Commitment and Passion for Teaching and Learning
<p>Change Agents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anchor their guidance in the goals outlined within the Collaborative Partnership Agreement (MOU).• Encourage courageous conversations leading to change.• Incorporate knowledge of culturally relevant practices.• Report directly to the EIS and NDDPI in consistent 3-6-month check-ins.
<p><i>Additional responsibilities to be determined.</i></p>

Appendix C

Note that Appendix C is still under development.

Research & Evaluation (R&E) Team Primary Responsibilities
<p>Evaluation of ND FIRST Process and Goal Attainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify resources for school or district renewal/improvement.• Utilize research-based methods and practices to design and implement the scope and sequence of readiness process for each ND FIRST school or district.• Lead the design and implementation of a developmental evaluation process for NDDPI and the ND FIRST statewide initiative.
<p>Review and Evaluate Collaborative Partnership Agreement Goal Attainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify resources for ND FIRST school or district renewal/improvement.• Utilize research-based methods and practices to design and implement the scope and sequence of readiness process for each ND FIRST school or district.
<p>Lead the Comprehensive Evaluation Process at 18 and 36 months of ND FIRST Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of the ND FIRST school or district's past three years of data will be integral in determining goals outlined in the MOU.
<p>Review Impact of Federally Funded Programs and/or Interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate the impact of federally funded programs and/or interventions by collecting and analyzing effectiveness data in ND FIRST schools and districts.
<p>Provide for State-Level Support from NDDPI</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead the development and accountability measures for the ND FIRST statewide system of support.• Coordinate and collaborate with research partners (ND University System).• Collect and report out on perceptual data from ND FIRST school and district participants.• Identify "bright spot" practices in high performing ND schools with similar demographics.• Provide expertise and tools for program evaluation.• Coordinate with relevant NDDPI offices/departments and any other relevant state partners.
<p><i>Additional responsibilities to be determined.</i></p>