



ND FIRST Project Team Charter

Organization Name: NDDPI
Project Title: ND FIRST Project

ND FIRST Overview

Senate Bill 2254, signed into law on April 24, 2023, establishes 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 policy and shared agreements outlined in the bill are scheduled to go into effect in September 2025, providing a structured framework for intervention and support in these schools.

In June of 2023, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) began collecting feedback from public school staff, community members, and other relevant education partners across the state to help inform the design of a statewide robust intervention process to support the second cycle of CSI schools. The fundamental tenants of the proposed intervention were to ensure that districts with low performing schools:

- engage in purposeful school renewal processes
- address school and district level systemic improvement, and
- engage multiple stakeholders or “partners” in the school renewal process

Additionally, focusing NDDPI’s involvement on reducing barriers in communication, identifying resources, and providing oversight will best support the implementation and success of the ND FIRST school and district.

This project team charter document serves as a comprehensive overview of the:

- ND FIRST Strategic Framework
- Framework and Operations for ND FIRST teams
- MOU and Collaborative Partnership Agreement development
- Review of goal attainment

Strategic Framework

Theory of Action

IF the ND FIRST teams reduce barriers and connect partnership districts to resources, **THEN** every partnership district can achieve identified student outcomes. 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

ND FIRST's primary objective is to develop DPI's robust intervention response to second-cycle CSI schools to improve student outcomes for all children.

ND FIRST's Strategic Objectives

- Design, deploy, and implement a leadership coaching contractor pool that builds capacity for ND First schools and districts.
- 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.

ND FIRST Teams

There are three teams dedicated to executing the functions to support the ND FIRST project. These teams include:

1. Targeted and Intensive Support Team (TIST)
 - a. ND FIRST Executive Leader
 - b. Collaborative Partnership Agreement Liaison (CPAL) limited term
2. Research and Evaluation Team (R&E)
3. Transformational Leadership Partners (TLPs)

Each team is tasked with implementing multiple strategic actions which support the goals and objectives of ND FIRST.

Scope of Services

Targeted and Intensive Support Team (TIST)

The primary purpose of the TIST is to provide intensive, individualized support to identified ND FIRST schools and districts. The TIST team employs a focused approach on outcomes by eliminating duplicate services, providing timely and effective support, while taking into consideration the unique context and needs of each ND FIRST school and district, the community they serve, and the needs of each and every learner. The TIST team utilizes a team approach, working at the district and school level.

| Primary Responsibilities | Roles | Primary Organization |
|---|---|----------------------|
| <p>The TIST employs a Collaborative Partnership Agreement Liaison (CPAL) at a satellite office near identified ND FIRST district. The role of the CPAL is to serve as a navigator, communication broker, onboarding external facilitator and brings a 3rd party perspective to the TIST. CPALs are intentionally and purposefully assigned to work for a limited term at the ND FIRST district's expense to ensure alignment in usability of TIST recommended strategies and programs. Additionally, the CPAL can support the TIST team in conducting empathy interviews to gather meaningful feedback from ND FIRST school teams. This feedback is used to further inform TIST strategy and objectives.</p> | <p><i>Limited term:</i> Collaborative Partnership Agreement Liaison (CPAL)</p> | <p>TBD</p> |
| <p>Intensive assistance in supporting the implementation of the ND FIRST school's Collaborative Partnership Agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Execute effective management/monitoring of school improvement initiatives/projects • Execute effective fiscal resource management • Promote strategies leading to effective recruitment and retention of staff • Maintain high engagement in the community served • Identify local, regional, state, and federal resources to support ND FIRST school and district needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Leader • Locally-based consultants | <p>TBD</p> |
| <p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication occurs more consistently and frequently—faster turnaround time. | | |
| <p>Fiscal and Program Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct comprehensive fiscal and program reviews of district, state, and federal funding utilization. | | |

| Primary Responsibilities | Roles | Primary Organization |
|---|-------|----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing and timely reports and updates of funding utilization. • Identify additional resources for school/district renewal/improvement | | |

Research and Evaluation Team (R&E)

The R & E team develops and implements the accountability and measurement systems aligned with Senate Bill 2254 legislation and state policy. The R&E team leads the Review of Goal Attainment, Evaluation of Collaborative Partnership Agreement processes, and federal funding accountability processes. 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 intervention. The R&E team remains data-driven in the ND FIRST collaborative partnership work.

| Primary Responsibilities | Roles | Primary Organization |
|--|------------------------|----------------------|
| Evaluation of ND FIRST Intervention Process and Goal Attainment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify resources for school/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/district. • Lead the design and implementation of a developmental evaluation process for NDDPI and the ND FIRST statewide initiative. | External Consultant(s) | TBD |
| Review and evaluation of ND FIRST School/District Collaborative Partnership Agreement Goal Attainment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify resources for school/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 and/or district. | | |

| Primary Responsibilities | Roles | Primary Organization |
|--|-------|----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the design and implementation of a comprehensive evaluation process for ND FIRST schools at 18, 24, and 36 month increments. | | |
| Review Impact of Federally Funded Programs and/or interventions <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. | | |
| Provide for State-Level Support from NDDPI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the development and accountability measures for the ND FIRST statewide intervention 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. | | |

Transformational Leadership Partners (TLPs)

The Transformational Leadership Partners are a group of external consultants dedicated to supporting, guiding, and nurturing ND FIRST district superintendents and principals. The TLP's 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. This resource is available to ND FIRST schools and districts throughout the duration of their Collaborative Partnership Agreements.

| Primary Responsibilities | Roles | Primary Organization |
|--|--|----------------------|
| <p>Critical Thinking Partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve as a trusted thought partner that advocates for, guides, and nurtures 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>Comprised of a cadre of former school and district-level leaders.</p> <p>A separate pool consisting of both local and national experts.</p> | TBD |
| <p>Change Agents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchored in the goals outlined within schools Collaborative Partnership Agreements • Encourage courageous conversations leading to change. | | |

The ND FIRST Process

Following the passage of Senate Bill 2254, which mandates a rigorous intervention process for North Dakota's lowest-performing schools, ND FIRST was established to ensure these schools receive targeted support. ND FIRST specifically focuses on "chronically low-performing schools" and districts, defined as those identified for comprehensive support and improvement under the Every Student Succeeds Act for more than one cycle. These schools are characterized by inadequate educational services, such as academic underperformance, low student engagement, resource mismanagement, teacher inefficiency, chronic absenteeism, and persistent opportunity gaps for student subgroups.

To address these issues, the NDDPI State Superintendent of is required to assess each chronically low-performing school or district and develop an improvement plan. This plan may involve directives, including placing funds in escrow, modifying curricula and instructional methods, or adjusting school calendars. Additionally, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) will be established between the 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 interventions, set to take effect in September 2025, will provide a structured and supportive framework to help North Dakota's lowest-performing schools succeed.

The **ND FIRST process map [future link]** provides a detailed overview of the steps and decision points involved in the ND FIRST intervention. This structured approach is designed to support schools identified as chronically low-performing through comprehensive and targeted interventions. The process begins with general support for all public schools, guiding them through strategic planning and school improvement initiatives. As schools enter into accountability status, they receive increased oversight and support from NDDPI. The level of oversight and support for ND FIRST schools includes progress reviews, collaborative partnership agreements, and customized improvement plans. Throughout the multi-year process, schools undergo continuous evaluations, with the goals of tracking progress, adapting strategies, and eventually exiting the ND FIRST intervention based on success metrics co-developed by school communities and NDDPI. This map outlines the ongoing collaboration, shared accountability, and targeted interventions that ensure schools are on a path toward sustained improvement.

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) inclusion in the ND FIRST intervention.
- 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 relevant partners
 - One additional community partner (i.e., higher education institution, parents, local foundations, tribal council).

The NDDPI will provide templates to help guide ND FIRST districts and schools on the required information for the Collaborative Partnership Agreement/**MOU Template [future link]**

Review of Goal Attainment

The review of goal attainment is a collaborative review of the partnership agreement, designed to assess progress toward meeting interim target benchmarks. The ND FIRST Teams provide technical assistance to help the ND FIRST district and school prepare for the review.

18-month Review Process and Status

The review process includes three key activities (see **Appendix XX** for details):

1. Documentation of Evidence

- ND FIRST schools and districts have **six weeks** to submit evidence of progress toward interim target milestones.
- ND FIRST schools and districts must upload evidence of strategy implementation and milestone target status.
- ND FIRST schools and districts must complete a self-assessment.
- ND FIRST Teams will review district-submitted evidence and complete a report assessing progress; they may also submit evidence.
- ND FIRST Teams will send the district and school a summary of the milestone assessment.

2. Structured Conference

- Hosted by the district with attendees including key stakeholders, signatory partners, and others as appropriate.
- The agenda will include:
 - ND FIRST team-led review of interim target milestones.
 - District presentation of progress, strategy adjustments, evidence, barriers, and celebrations.
 - Collaborative discussion informed by preliminary assessments and submitted evidence.
 - Preliminary determination of milestone status by signatory partners.
- ND school accountability measure results contribute to the final status.

3. Next Steps

- The district superintendent and ND FIRST Team will agree on next steps, including meetings and strategy adjustments.
- ND FIRST Team will provide a final report within **20 business days** of the conference.
- The district will present the final report summary to the school board within **60 business days**.

36-Month Academic Outcome Evaluation and Report

This meeting occurs at the end of the three-year partnership agreement for ND FIRST districts and schools. The district, ND FIRST Teams, and NDDPI will:

- assess evidence to determine whether academic goals/outcomes related to accountability measures have been achieved; and
- discuss end target outcomes, growth opportunities, and next steps for sustaining progress in student achievement.

Reporting to the Board of Education/Community

Following the Academic Outcome Evaluation, the district superintendent and school leader will present the results to the Board of Education or community at the next regularly scheduled meeting. The superintendent and/or school leader must inform the assigned ND FIRST Team members of the meeting details.