

# North Dakota: Leading the Way on Educator Retention

Retaining Educators and Administrators by Making Schools Great Places to Work

HB 1013

House Appropriations - Education & Environment Division

January 24th, 2025 - Vital Network: Nathan Eklund, M. Ed., Erin L. Raab, Ph.D.



## Why Educator Retention?

Educator Retention is Essential for a World-Class Education System for North Dakota's Students



According to the 2024 **North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Taskforce Report**, despite North Dakota being ranked in the top 25% nationally for teaching attractiveness, **61% of schools reported being unable to, or finding it very difficult to, fill teacher vacancies.**



3

Turnover of one teacher costs **up to \$20,000 & 1/2 year of student learning.**



4

Vital Network is on a mission to ensure that every school is an **exceptional workplace** that **retains its talent** and contributes to a brighter future for the profession.



5

When schools are great places to work, they are **excellent places for learning.**



6

*"As a rural school district that struggles with finding qualified teachers when we have openings, **we know that teacher retention is important to our ability to have a quality school.***

*One of the aspects we appreciate so much about our work with Vital Network is that the work is focused on positivity and moving our school forward.*

***Vital Network is helping us become the best school we can be and that is very inspiring."***

Phil Leitner, Superintendent  
Montpelier Public School

7

## How does Vital Network Improve ND Educator Retention?

Vital Partners with Districts and Schools to Create  
**Workplace Environments Where Educators Want to Stay**



"Our district, like many others, struggles with retention and recruitment of qualified educators and other key staff members. By making Vital Network a part of our district, our educators feel like they have a voice and are being heard, something they have not always felt before.

Our Vital partnership opens the door to meaningful conversations and collaboration between our administrators and educators to create strategies to improve all these areas.

In our time with Vital, we have already seen improvement in employee morale and well-being. We are excited to continue our work with Vital Network."

Amanda Denevan, Assistant Human Resources Director  
Williston Basin School District

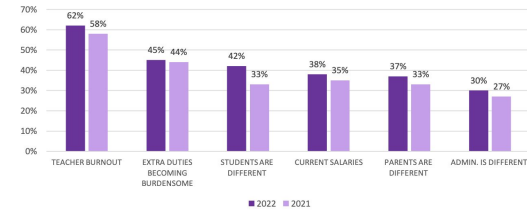
## ND Teacher Retention Task Force Finding

### Workplace Environment and Burnout: Leading Causes of Attrition

NORTH DAKOTA EDUCATOR RETENTION  
North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force



CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO TEACHER ATTRITION IN NORTH DAKOTA | 2021-2022



## From BURNOUT...

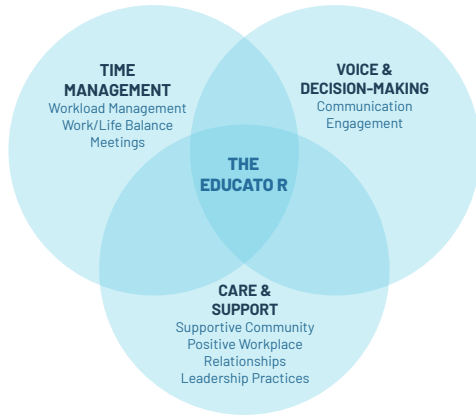
A state of prolonged exhaustion caused by negative external conditions that no level of self care can overcome.



## ...To VITALITY

The purpose and energy experienced when working in an empowering community.





### Vital's Approach Aligns with the Teacher Retention Task Force Recommendation #3: Understand Supportive School Culture

"The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Job satisfaction is influenced by factors which maintain or encourage people in their role.

By incorporating employee satisfaction data in strategic goal setting, **schools and districts will identify key factors related to educator retention in plans for continuous improvement aimed at ensuring supportive school culture.**"

Furthermore, **the alignment of Vital Network's efforts with the North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force** recommendations is evident.

By focusing on **improving working conditions and fostering a supportive school culture** through regular data collection and actionable insights, the JPS is proactively addressing key factors in teacher retention and recruitment, such as mentorship, workplace satisfaction, and professional development.

# What Has Been Achieved this Biennium?

We had an extremely successful pilot 2023-2025.



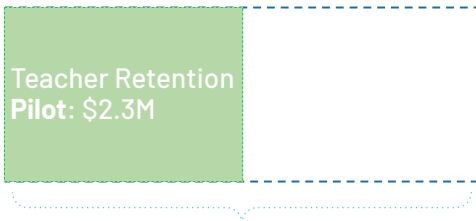
## Initial Vision: Retention at Scale

House Appropriations - Education & Environment Division  
Supported \$4.3 for the 2023-25 Biennium

**Initial Plan: Statewide Teacher Retention Initiative: \$4.3M**

## Actuals

Appropriated Funds for the Current 2023-25 Biennium



\$2.3 out of the initial \$4.3 budgeted was ultimately allocated, which rescope'd the initiative as a pilot.

## 2023-25: North Dakota Invested in a Successful Pilot



### Building Partnerships

**Key Achievement:** 44% of ND educators being served (5,000+ across 128 schools in 20+ districts) joined the Vital Pilot.

**Next Goal:** Expand to reach 100% of educators by the end of 2026-27.



### Improving Working Conditions

**Early Results:** Partnering schools show initial improvements; full data available Fall 2025.

**Medium-Term Impact:** Significant results expected by the end of 2026-27.

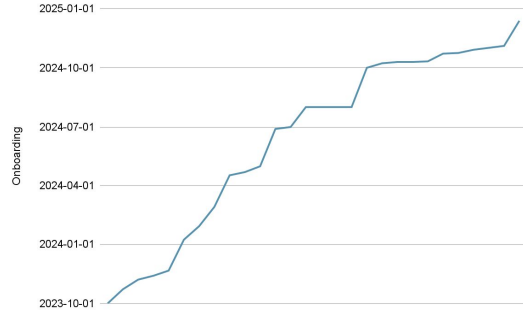


### Boosting Educator Retention

**Baseline Data:** Established partnership with NDDPI for comparing retention between participating and non-participating districts.

**Medium-Term Impact:** Retention trends will be assessed at the end of 2026-27.

## Building Partnerships: District Engagement Momentum



## Early Improving Workplace Environment Outcomes

from North Dakota Partners through the pilot



**Strategic commitment to the working conditions of adults:** School and district-level reframing of priorities to support daily experiences of educators.



**Targeted improvements in day-to-day operations:** For some schools this is a reduction in meetings, for others, the creation of better building leadership team practices.



**Greater alignment between district leadership and school-level teams:** Improved district-level practices to respond to needs and voice of principals and teacher leaders.

## Boosting Educator Retention: Explore Early Findings



[www.vitalnetwork.com/ndakota](http://www.vitalnetwork.com/ndakota)

**The work Vital has done thus far has exceeded our expectations. They are a true partner and fully understand a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for recruitment and retention of staff.** They recognize each organization has a unique culture and they have went above and beyond to understand our context.

During the fall of 2024, Vital Network engaged Central Cass, Maple Valley, and our district in a cohort to do this work together. This cohort has provided us with thought partners and resources. We knew the districts before but now we are truly partners in this work. **Before, we competed. Now, we work together to do what is best for our communities, educators, and learners. Vital Network was the catalyst for this unique partnership.**

Vital Network has helped us focus our attention on key areas to build a world class culture. **With their vast resources, network of districts, and high quality staff, they are helping us to become the best version of ourselves.**

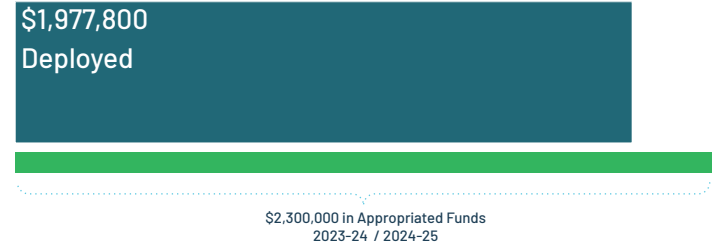
Dr. Cory J. Steiner, Superintendent  
Northern Cass School District

# What's Next?: Building From the Successful Pilot

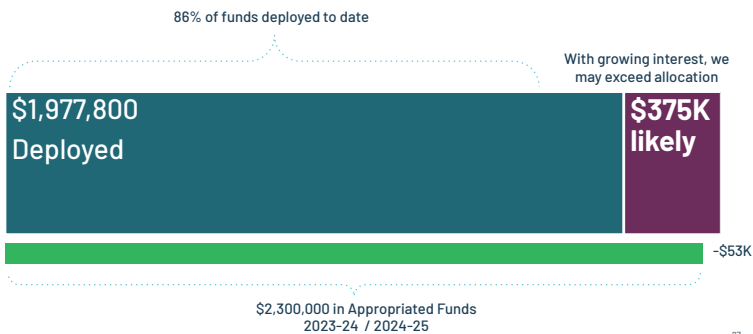
Opportunity to Elevate North Dakota Education  
through Statewide, System-wide Impact



## Actuals: Nearly \$2M Deployed by December 2024



## Actuals: District Interest Continues to Rise



## Goals for the Next Biennium

Make ND  
*the leader* in the  
nation solving  
educator burnout.

1. **Scale educator retention impact statewide** by moving beyond the pilot to equip all 168 North Dakota districts with access to support and resources to make their schools great places to work.
2. **Increase retention of great school leaders** by piloting an administrator retention effort.
3. **Deepen partnerships with DPI, Higher Ed, and other entities** to improve the wider ecosystem in which K-12 leaders work.



## Goal 1: Scale Educator Impact Statewide

- Expand to reach 100% of North Dakota's educators.
- Build state capacity to sustain this work by training REAs to deliver Vital-powered support to rural and small districts.
- Build state-level data systems and leadership in teacher retention and well-being.

### RECOMMENDATION: Fully Invest in Educator Retention

For system-wide implementation that truly lifts all boats, we need to reach and improve the workplace environment of 100% of North Dakota schools and educators. If the pilot school districts continue to improve and be excellent in this work, they will get better at recruiting and retaining - potentially to the detriment of non-participating districts.

As noted in the 2024 *North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force Recommendations and Report*, "Teachers are the number one factor influencing student growth and achievement" and "retaining a high-quality educator workforce is pivotal for enhancing the well-being of North Dakota's students."

*"Vital Network has created a system for North Dakota schools to understand and promote teachers' voices in our schools.*

*Having already customized support particularly well for larger districts, Vital developed and began implementing a plan to **partner with the REAs to reach ND teachers in our smallest and most rural districts. Their presence in ND creates the opportunity for every teacher to be a part of the solutions in their school.***

Luke Schaefer, CEO  
Central Regional Education Association

*"Vital Network's work with schools leverages high-quality survey methods and objective teacher retention data to identify and foster the workplace factors that retain North Dakota's educators.*

*The collection of such high-quality data also enables strong evaluation of Vital Network's programming and the reporting of outcomes to the legislature."*

Dr. Ellie Shockley, NDUS Institutional Researcher  
Supporting NDDPI



## Goal 2. Increase Retention of Great School Leaders

There is a crucial connection between school administrator retention and teacher retention. A key ingredient to improving working conditions for teachers and retaining teacher talent is the presence of effective and consistent school administrators.

**Yet more than 1 in 3 North Dakota principals are expected to leave the profession in the next 3 years.<sup>3</sup>**

- Pilot to reach 50% of North Dakota's school leaders.
- Align teacher and administrator retention strategies to maximize impact.
- Build strategic partnerships with other North Dakota entities invested in principal and leader development.

### RECOMMENDATION: Invest in Administrator Retention Pilot

Given the growing body of research that empirically links teacher and principal retention, any effort seeking to retain teachers should also include parallel support for school administrator retention and development.

As noted in the *2024 North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force Recommendations and Report*, "School administrators play a crucial role in supporting student and staff success." Teacher retention strategies would benefit from Vital's additional layer and depth of support for school administrators.

## Responding to Partner Request for School Leader Retention

*"Beyond their exceptional work with our educators, I am excited to share that our district is partnering with Vital Network to roll out our first survey designed specifically for building leaders. In a district as large as BPS, it's essential to ensure that our building leaders feel heard and valued, with a clear voice in shaping the direction of the district. This leader-focused process aims to break down barriers of isolation and provide a platform for our leaders to share their perspectives, fostering stronger connections and alignment across the district."*

**BPS and I remain steadfast in our support of Vital and their mission. Thank you for joining us in recognizing and supporting the incredible impact of their work."**

Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent  
Bismarck Public Schools

## Goal 3: Greater State Systems Impact

- Deepen partnerships with other organizations serving educators and leaders (e.g. NDCEL and ND RISE).
- Explore innovations in HR and school board level supports that contribute to retention and well-being.
- Explore partnerships with Higher Education institutions.

The partnership between NDCEL and Vital Network has been instrumental in addressing the critical issue of teacher retention by aligning our shared commitment to supporting educators and school leaders.

With our established relationship and shared vision, there was an inherent level of trust from the start, which allowed administrators to confidently embrace the program. This trust not only facilitated a smoother implementation process but also created an environment where administrators felt supported in adopting new strategies to retain and empower their teachers.

**Together, we are making meaningful strides in ensuring that North Dakota's schools remain strong and well-staffed for the future.**

Dr. Aimee Copas, Executive Director  
North Dakota Council of Education Leaders

37

## Requesting \$6.6M to Make North Dakota the #1 State Solving Educator Retention

Make ND  
**the leader** in the  
nation solving  
educator burnout.

1. **Scale educator retention impact statewide** by moving beyond the pilot to equip all 168 North Dakota districts with access to support and resources to make their schools great places to work.
2. **Increase retention of great school leaders** by piloting an administrator retention effort.
3. **Deepen partnerships with DPI, Higher Ed, and other entities** to improve the wider ecosystem in which K-12 leaders work.



38

## Requested Funds for 2025-27 Biennium

Teacher Retention Pilot (Continuation): \$2.3M <i>(to reach 50% of ND educators)</i>	Teacher Retention Expansion: \$2.3M <i>(to expand to 100% of educators in ND)</i>	Administrator Retention Pilot: \$2M <i>(to reach 50% of administrators)</i>
--	---	---

\$6,600,000 Ask

39

## HB 1013's Current Recommendation For the 2025-27 Biennium

Teacher Retention Pilot Continuation: \$2.3M	
---	--

\$2.3M out of the requested \$6.6M

40

## What we can do with \$2.3M?

### Sustain Pilot-Level Work

- **Pilot-Level Teacher Retention**
  - Maintain ongoing educator retention work with current partners.
  - Small expansion to reach around 50% of North Dakota's educators.
- **No Administrator Retention**
  - N/A
- **Some Systems Impact**
  - Continue partnership with DPI to track outcomes.
  - Maintain relationships with other organizations serving ND educators.

## What can we achieve with a \$6.6M investment?

### Maintain, Expand, and Innovate to Make North Dakota the #1 State for Retention

- **Scale Teacher Retention**
  - Reach 100% of North Dakota's educators.
  - Build state capacity to sustain this work by training REAs to deliver Vital-powered support to rural and small districts.
  - Build state-level data systems and leadership in teacher retention and well-being.
- **Pilot Administrator Retention**
  - Reach 50% of North Dakota's administrators.
  - Develop and implement an administrator retention program with a continued emphasis on supporting teachers by improving working conditions.
- **Deepen Systems Impact**
  - Deepen partnerships with other organizations serving educators and leaders (e.g. NDCEL and ND RISE).
  - Explore innovations in HR and school board level supports that contribute to retention & well-being.
  - Explore partnerships with Higher Education institutions.

What becomes possible  
when we create a culture of retention?



**Nathan Eklund**  
Founder &  
Chief Executive Officer  
[nate@vitalnetwork.com](mailto:nate@vitalnetwork.com)



**Dr. Erin Raab**  
Chief Strategy &  
Impact Officer  
[erin@vitalnetwork.com](mailto:erin@vitalnetwork.com)

