

**HB 1510**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Senator Todd Beard, chair**  
**March 19, 2025**  
**Room 216, State Capitol**

Good morning, Chairman Beard and members of the Senate Education Committee. For the record, my name is Maria Neset and I serve as Chief of Staff to Lt. Gov. Michelle Strinden and Senior Advisor to Gov. Kelly Armstrong. I am here to provide testimony that supports the Teacher Retention & Recruitment Task Force report and the funding requested to support our educators.

First, I would like to provide some background on the launch of the task force and the final report. And we would like to extend our gratitude to all the members on the task force who shared their expertise and time.

In the summer of 2023, Gov. Burgum received an emergency rules request from the Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB) related to teacher shortages. The solution provided from some administrators was to give school districts additional flexibility that temporarily allowed expanded use of student teachers. It was shared that the teacher shortage had been a common concern for administrators in the summer as they were hiring for the start of the school year.

While not an ideal situation, Gov. Burgum granted the request for emergency rule making with the caveat that a task force related to teacher retention and recruitment to study the larger issue would be initiated. [Executive Order 2023-08](#) established the task force, and members were appointed from across various stakeholder groups. The task force met multiple times throughout the next several months to determine focus areas and finalized a report with recommendations to be delivered to the Governor and State Superintendent for consideration by the 69<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

I will quickly walk through the recommendations and specifically discuss the programs funded in the Armstrong executive budget proposal. The recommendations are a combination of policy, studies and budgetary requests. Please see the handout titled "[North Dakota Teacher Retention & Recruitment Task Force Report.](#)"

The task force supported seven recommendations:

- Provide a safe and supportive environment for educators and learners in every building.
- Reduce barriers for schools that wish to provide child care.
- Understand supportive school culture.
- Fund mentorship for educators and administrators.
- Fund educator pathways.
- Maximize benefits for educators.
- Optimize educator earnings.

I will now walk through the sections of the bill and explain how each section of House Bill 1510 connects to the report recommendations. Rep. Schreiber-Beck has suggested amendments for clarity and intent. If it is acceptable to the committee, I will walk through the Christmas tree version as I discuss each section (version 25.1177.02001).

## **Section 1**

The language in this section is intended to align with the "Maximize benefits for educators" recommendation. We heard from many around the task force that school districts are investing thousands of dollars above a salary in different areas on behalf of staff, and many times staff may not be aware or have not had the opportunity to truly understand how to maximize their benefits. This would ask for resources to be developed, such as handouts, webinars, in-person trainings, individual finance sessions or marketing materials for all schools, along with teacher preparation programs to use when explaining overall benefits and district investments. This would help new teachers entering a district understand the value of what is available to them and being invested in them. This is an opportunity to support financial literacy for every teacher in North Dakota, as all could have access to the resources. Once the resources are made available, we will partner with the Department of Public Instruction to distribute and

share – specifically ND Rise, which can include this during its mentorship training sessions.

The amendment clarifies the intent, who is involved and the action needed for the necessary parties. We need to market the profession of education to future workforce and improve understanding about not only the incredible rewards of teaching but the financial benefits as well.

## **Section 2**

Child care has been and continues to be a focus for the Armstrong/Strinden Administration. This section demonstrates a commitment to be a partner in supporting school districts to provide onsite child care. We see this as a tremendous tool for districts to recruit and retain educators in their communities.

The amendment provides clarity that this is happening in a school setting and that our intent is to work with schools to ensure that health, safety and high-quality early childhood experiences are central to future conversations.

## **Section 3**

During the task force, we engaged in a session led by Edunomics that focused on maximizing every dollar spent, including when funding stays at current levels or increases at a minimal rate. This section is intended to support a study that looks at different opportunities to maximize dollars related to cost of health care and long-term earnings for teachers. Senator Rummel, a task force member and 20 year-plus member of the Education Factfinding Commission, is truly a wealth of knowledge in this space. We look forward to engaging in this conversation and thinking differently about how dollars are spent.

Both sections 4 and 5 were removed as the appropriations are now in House Bill 1013. However, I do want to emphasize the two investments that are key to the task force recommendations.

The task force was committed to making the work environment a key focus. We recognize work is already underway to drive improvements through a

statewide effort. The Armstrong budget included \$2 million for DPI to continue the statewide teacher retention program. This program is making remarkable efforts in districts across the state, and we need to sustain the support. Vital Networks has powerful data and impact that can already show how their work in North Dakota is paying off. Our learners thrive when teachers and leaders are in a supportive work environment.

The task force recognized the long-standing impact from the teacher mentorship program, formerly known as the Teacher Support System, now known as ND Rise. Administered through ESPB, this program shows measurable outcomes that are driving educator retention efforts. We have seen firsthand the importance of mentorship beyond just the first year. Knowing this, the Armstrong budget proposed a \$2 million appropriation to DPI (above its base allocation of \$2.5 million) as a pass-through grant to support ND Rise. The program shall include supports and resources for all first- to third-year teachers who meet the requirements outlined in NDCC or program guidance, as determined by ESPB.

Rep. Schreiber-Beck already presented the additional study language that is also key to ensuring licensure processes are streamlined, current and not a barrier to workforce participation in North Dakota.

At its core, House Bill 1510 represents a strong show of support for retaining and recruiting educators. As was stated at the start of the task force, there is no quick or easy solution. It will take all of us to advocate and demonstrate support for teachers across the state, step by step. We urge you support our educators by giving a do pass to HB 1510 with the provided amendments. Thank you for your time.



**THE NORTH DAKOTA  
TEACHER RETENTION AND  
RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE**

*Recommendations and Report*

OCTOBER 2024



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## LETTER FROM THE GOVERNOR

North Dakota has the opportunity to lead the nation in providing world-class learning experiences for all K-12 students in our great state. Our administration recognizes the importance of quality educators in delivering relevant and personalized education to ensure all students graduate choice-ready for college, career or the military with the knowledge, skills and disposition to be successful in life, work and community.

The Office of the Governor received a request in July 2023 from the state Education Standards and Practices Board to approve emergency rules that would allow an undergraduate student who has yet to complete their student teaching experience and higher education degree to be considered a teacher of record for a semester. The Governor has the authority to approve emergency rules, and our administration supported that request. This request was seen as a quick, short-term fix and did not address broader issues regarding retention and recruitment within the field of education.

This emergency rule provided the launching point for the North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force led by our office in partnership with appointed members and stakeholders. Recognizing that our future workforce is fostered and inspired by educators and school district staff, this Task Force underscores the critical importance of our current and future education workforce as essential to the state's economy and success.

This Task Force represents a range of experts across the educational landscape: school board members, teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, teacher support staff and other critical voices. The work of this Task Force was not designed to provide “the” solution to teacher retention and recruitment but rather to spark a conversation about steps we can take to best support our education workforce.

The Task Force met four times as a full group with stakeholder listening sessions and working groups to take a deeper dive into specific focus areas. Executive Order 2023-08 established the Task Force and required a report of recommendations to the Office of the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

We look forward to sharing this list of prioritized recommendations and encourage policymakers to partner on solutions with long-term impact to the retention and recruitment of educators.

We are deeply grateful for the dedication and tireless work of the Task Force members. Through their passion for ensuring the success of our students and educators, they have achieved what we strive to do every day in state government: Empower People, Improve Lives and Inspire Success.

With Gratitude,



**Governor Doug Burgum**

**(2016–Current)**



## A SPECIAL THANK YOU

Significant consideration was given to ensure teacher voices were incorporated into the Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force recommendation process. Thank you to the Task Force members and the participants of the listening sessions, especially the teachers who made this possible.

### North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force Members

- **The Honorable Kirsten Baesler**, Superintendent of Public Instruction | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
- **The Honorable Steve Swiontek**, State Representative | Fargo, North Dakota
- **The Honorable Dean Rummel**, State Senator | Dickinson, North Dakota
- **Maria Neset**, Senior Policy Advisor | North Dakota Office of the Governor
- **Luke Schaefer**, CEO of the Central Regional Education Association | Minot, North Dakota; Task Force Chair
- **Patti Stedman**, School Board Member | West Fargo, North Dakota; Education Standards and Practice Board Member
- **Bret Dockter**, Middle School Teacher | Harvey, North Dakota; 2022 State Teacher of the Year
- **Ashley Seykora**, Instructional Coach | Rugby Public Schools, North Dakota
- **Abby DuBord**, Elementary School Teacher | Bismarck Public Schools, North Dakota; 2023 State Teacher of the Year Finalist
- **Dr. Robert Lech**, Superintendent | Jamestown Public Schools, North Dakota
- **John Porter**, Executive Director of South East Education Cooperative; Co-Director of the South Valley/Rural Cass Special Education Units | Fargo, North Dakota
- **James Green**, High School Principal | McKenzie County Public Schools, Watford City, North Dakota
- **Dr. Sherry Tandeski**, Elementary School Principal | St. John Public Schools, North Dakota
- **Jenny Bladow**, Director of Teacher Education | College of Education & Human Development, Northwood, North Dakota; Education Standards and Practice Board Member
- **Erin Jacobson**, Coordinator of the North Dakota Teacher Support System | Bismarck, North Dakota

### Listening Session Organizations

- North Dakota State Teacher of the Year
- North Dakota United
- North Dakota School Board Association
- North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders





# TEACHER RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT: A CALL TO ACTION

In recognition of the impact teachers have on student growth, Governor Doug Burgum decided to address the issue of teacher retention and recruitment in the state of North Dakota. Teachers are the [number one factor](#) influencing student growth and achievement. Yet, across the country, district and school leaders [struggle](#) to retain educators and fill vacant classrooms. In many states, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated educator attrition, leading states to examine not only how to fill vacancies, but how to strengthen and diversify weakened educator pathways.

North Dakota is not immune to these challenges, despite the Roughrider State being ranked in the top [25 percent](#) of states for teaching attractiveness. [61 percent](#) of schools reported being unable or finding it very difficult to fill teacher vacancies. The North Dakota University System reported a [six percent](#) shortage of qualified educators across disciplines.

Retaining, and by extension, recruiting, a high-quality educator workforce is pivotal for enhancing the well-being of North Dakota's students. Evidence shows that highly effective educators can alter the trajectory of a child's future. When evaluating the most influential factors related to student performance in reading and math assessments, teachers were found to have a [two to three times](#) greater influence than any other aspect of schooling, including services, facilities, and school leadership. Students assigned to highly effective teachers are [more likely](#) to pursue higher education, earn higher salaries, and less likely to experience early parenthood. Students who benefit from teachers focused on improving behavior and other hireable skills display [increased rates](#) of high school graduation, SAT participation, and intentions of college attendance.

To address the educator retention crisis in the state, the Governor issued an [Executive Order](#) to create the [North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force](#) (the Task Force) to provide recommendations through a final report to the Governor and the Superintendent of Public Instruction no later than September 30, 2024. The recommendations must include pathways to:

- ➔ Increasing recruitment to the teaching profession;
- ➔ Improving teacher preparation programs across the state;
- ➔ Reviewing and evaluating current pathways to licensure and a review of new opportunities around teacher licensure;
- ➔ Reevaluate teacher compensation and contracts;
- ➔ Enhancing working conditions and supports to improve retention in the teaching profession;
- ➔ Identifying best practices from other jurisdictions and potential impact to long-term positive outcomes related to teacher recruitment and retention.

The Task Force will also identify partners to sponsor legislation based on the report's recommendations during the 69th Legislative Assembly and conduct stakeholder meetings and roundtable discussions across the state to gather feedback from pertinent stakeholder groups.



# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

This report aims to provide insight into the current state of teacher recruitment and retention in North Dakota, highlighting successes and identifying opportunities for strengthening policy and practice. Based on this understanding, the Task Force developed the following recommendations to guide key education stakeholders in supporting a high-quality educator workforce in North Dakota that is able to effectively provide all students with an opportunity to succeed.

## **Recommendation #1: Provide a Safe and Supportive Environment for Educators and Learners in Every Building**

The Task Force recommends state agency leaders and education stakeholders collaborate to address system gaps, leverage opportunities and activate a continuum of support to create safe, supportive environments for educators and learners in every building, as measured by a statewide system of student behavior metrics.

## **Recommendation #2: Reduce Barriers for Schools that Wish to Provide Child Care**

The Task Force recommends the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services collaborate with education stakeholders to streamline regulations and reduce barriers for schools that wish to offer on-site child care.

## **Recommendation #3: Understand Supportive School Culture**

The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Further, the Task Force recommends school boards include employee satisfaction in driving their strategic goals.

## **Recommendation #4: Fund Mentorship**

- a. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund a graduated mentorship through the ND RISE program for teachers within their first three years in a new position.
- b. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund the development and facilitation of an administrator mentorship program with an emphasis on supporting teachers by improving working conditions, including but not limited to student behaviors, teacher voice and parent concerns.

## **Recommendation #5: Fund Educator Pathways**

- a. The Task Force recommends state agencies and the legislature adjust the reimbursement rate to 100% for schools offering CTE courses leading to a career in education.
- b. The Task Force recommends the legislature incentivize local and state initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher leadership opportunities.

## **Recommendation #6: Maximize Benefits for Educators**

The Task Force recommends related state agencies partner with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the Bank of North Dakota, the Teachers' Fund for Retirement (TFFR), the North Dakota Teacher Support System and other appropriate organizations to offer comprehensive financial planning resources and training.

## **Recommendation #7: Optimize Educator Earnings**

The Task Force recommends a legislative study to explore the feasibility, impact and process of:

- a. Creating a health insurance pool for school employees.
- b. Analyzing compensation structures to maximize lifetime earnings.



# TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATION #1. PROVIDE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS IN EVERY BUILDING

**The Task Force recommends state agency leaders and education stakeholders collaborate to address system gaps, leverage opportunities and activate a continuum of support to create safe, supportive environments for educators and learners in every building as measured by a statewide system of student behavior metrics.**

This recommendation aims to support a safe and supportive working environment for all North Dakota educators. The Task Force specifies measuring improvement in addressing system gaps, leveraging opportunities and activating continua of support by utilizing statewide data systems focused on student behavior. Positive school cultures and healthy learning environments have a significant impact on student outcomes and [educator retention](#). Strong school environments result in higher engagement and attendance for students and staff, reduced office referrals and decreased teacher [turnover](#). Safe and supportive learning environments may be measured through student metrics such as risky or unsafe behavior which are shown to be [reduced](#) within positive learning environments.

## RECOMMENDATION #2. REDUCE BARRIERS FOR SCHOOLS THAT WISH TO PROVIDE CHILD CARE

**The Task Force recommends the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services collaborate with education stakeholders to streamline regulations and reduce barriers for schools that wish to offer on-site child care.**

North Dakota is [home](#) to 64,000 children under 5 years of age, with around [10,000](#) babies born in the state every year. For children, [the earliest years of life are a critical window](#) of development with long-lasting implications for their success in school and life. For North Dakota parents and employers, however, lack of quality, affordable and available child care poses a threat to workforce participation. With [72 percent](#) of North Dakota's parents in the workforce, the Task Force recommends improving access to quality, affordable child care as part of efforts to remove workforce barriers across schools, especially in areas of critical need.

## RECOMMENDATION #3. UNDERSTAND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

**The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Further, the Task Force recommends school boards include employee satisfaction in driving their strategic goals.**

This recommendation aims to increase awareness and planning to support employee satisfaction through data collection. Job satisfaction is influenced by factors which maintain or encourage people in their role. This recommendation supports data collection to inform planning and improvement of workplace satisfaction including [factors](#) such as compensation, school policies and relationships. This includes achievement, recognition and career advancement. 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.



## RECOMMENDATION #4. FUND MENTORSHIP

**A. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund a graduated mentorship through the ND RISE program for teachers within their first three years in a new position. This mentorship program would include measurable outcomes and be results-based through annual public reporting.**

Mentorship is crucial to the retention of new teachers in their first three years. Research shows that [teacher retention](#) rates drop significantly in the first two years, and the third year is a notable predictor for teachers deciding to stay in the profession. Specifically, [lack of teacher support](#) is cited as a top reason for leaving the profession.

Mentorship programs are designed to help teachers in their first three years to develop [self-efficacy](#), effective teaching strategies and better classroom management. Data indicates that teachers who participate in NDRISE have [higher retention rates](#) compared to teachers not in the program. By expanding this program, new teachers can develop their presence in the classroom, increasing their likelihood of staying in the educational field.

**B. The Task Force recommends the legislature fund the development and facilitation of an administrator mentorship program with an emphasis on supporting teachers by improving working conditions, including but not limited to student behaviors, teacher voice and parent concerns. This mentorship program would include measurable outcomes and be results-based through annual public reporting.**

School administrators play a crucial role in supporting student and staff success by shaping the vision of their school community, fostering a positive culture and effectively managing resources. Research shows [dissatisfaction](#) with school leadership is one of the leading factors why educators choose to leave the profession. Alternatively, educators who are involved in decision-making and feel a greater sense of autonomy in their roles are more likely to remain in the classroom and feel a stronger sense of connection to their school communities. Teachers identify the quality of support from school administration as more important than salary. Additionally, support quality has a [strong relationship](#) to teacher turnover.

## RECOMMENDATION #5. FUND EDUCATOR PATHWAYS

**A. The Task Force recommends state agencies and the legislature adjust the reimbursement rate to 100% for schools offering CTE courses leading to a career in education.**

Strengthening early career pathways for high school students is a strategy used to recruit teachers within local communities. Currently, CTE educator programs receive the [lowest rate](#) of reimbursement from the state of North Dakota. Programs that target students for educator candidates have the potential to address teacher shortages in key areas and [diversify](#) the educator workforce. Local teacher programs may also address [teacher retention and effectiveness](#) by drawing on their support network and connection to the surrounding community. As the number of degrees in education continues to [decline](#), strengthening pathways into the profession offers opportunities to improve retention and recruitment.



## **B. The Task Force recommends the legislature incentivize local and state initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher leadership opportunities.**

Providing teachers with leadership opportunities can [improve teacher retention](#) by enhancing job satisfaction, reducing burnout and expanding professional growth. However, increasing leadership opportunities should encourage teachers to remain in the classroom rather than pulling them into administration. Teachers who are involved in decision-making are [more likely to stay in the profession long-term](#). [Shared decision-making](#) is one of the top cited working conditions that impact teacher retention. Opportunities for enhancing teacher leadership may include supporting existing [Teacher Leadership Academies](#), exploring opportunities for strategic staffing such as [Next Education Workforce](#), or implementing [advanced or lead teacher](#) models.

## **RECOMMENDATION #6. MAXIMIZE BENEFITS FOR EDUCATORS**

**The Task Force recommends related state agencies partner with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, the Bank of North Dakota, the Teachers' Fund for Retirement (TFFR), the North Dakota Teacher Support System and other appropriate organizations to offer comprehensive financial planning resources and training. These resources should include information on the salary matrix framework, differences in health insurance plans, contract benefits, 457 deferred plans, TFFR plans and other related benefits. These resources should be made available to preservice providers and schools for the benefit of preservice teachers, new district hires and teachers within their first three years in the profession.**

The Task Force unanimously approved this recommendation for strengthening training for teachers regarding total benefits and compensation packages available to them. This support enables new educators to understand and manage the benefits associated with the transition into the profession. This information also builds capacity for long-term career training for educators with the potential for improving educator retention. Financial literacy is shown to [decrease financial strain](#) and improve long-term financial planning and decision-making, which is particularly impactful for educators.

## **RECOMMENDATION #7. OPTIMIZE EDUCATOR EARNINGS**

**The Task Force recommends a legislative study to explore the feasibility, impact and process of:**

- **Creating a health insurance pool for school employees**
- **Analyzing compensation structures to maximize lifetime earnings.**

**This study should include a cost-benefit analysis, plan designs and coverage, administrative structures, an analysis of the impact on educator salaries, and a comparative analysis of similar approaches in other states.**

This recommendation proposes a legislative study to examine opportunities for maximizing benefits for educators. Competitive health benefits and compensation structures are critical for attracting and retaining quality educators. By exploring options for insurance pools and shifts in pay structure, legislators will receive information on promising practices from other states and current research on improving benefit options for educators and maximizing return.





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