

# North Dakota: Leading the Way on Educator Retention

Retaining Educators by Making Schools Great Places to Work

**HB 1013**

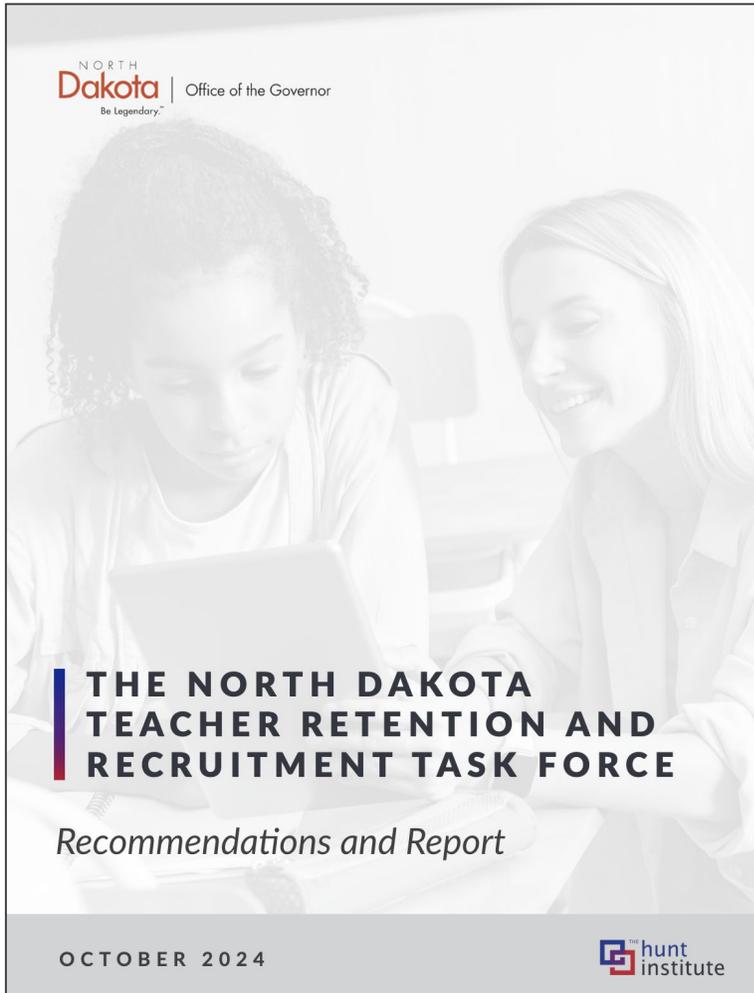
**Senate Appropriations - Education & Environment Division**

**March 10, 2025 - Vital Network:** Erin L. Raab, Ph.D., Chief Strategy & Impact Officer



# 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 Task Force Report— despite ND 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.**

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

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.

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

Collaborative and systematized guardrails have been the centerpiece of Vital Network's work with **Grand Forks Public Schools**.

There is authenticity in their approach and infinite reflection from school-level to district-level alignment. **Vital Network's approach is open and honest and is a "walk with you" perspective that is refreshing and difference-making.**

Dr. Terry Brenner  
*Superintendent*  
**Grand Forks Public Schools**

Fargo Public Schools is pleased to continue our partnership with Vital Network for the second consecutive year.

Their expertise in administering the survey and supporting the implementation of the data has been instrumental in enhancing our staff's well-being. **We highly recommend Vital for their professionalism and dedication to improving organizational health.** They are more than a vendor; they are a true partner in the work!

Dr. Jeff McCanna, *Chief Human Capital Officer*  
**Fargo Public Schools**

Vital has been instrumental in supporting Jamestown Public Schools' strategic goals by providing valuable insights into staff perceptions of care and support, time management, and voice in decision-making. What makes the Vital Network process different is the framework and consultation that is embedded into ensuring staff voice is heard and action plans are collaboratively developed with a focus on improving the working and learning environment. JPS saw **measurable increases in all key areas between our baseline survey in December 2023 and the October 2024 survey, and we attribute that to Vital Networks processes and supports.**

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.

Dr. Rob Lech, *Superintendent*  
**Jamestown Public Schools**

# How does Vital Network Improve ND Educator Retention?

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

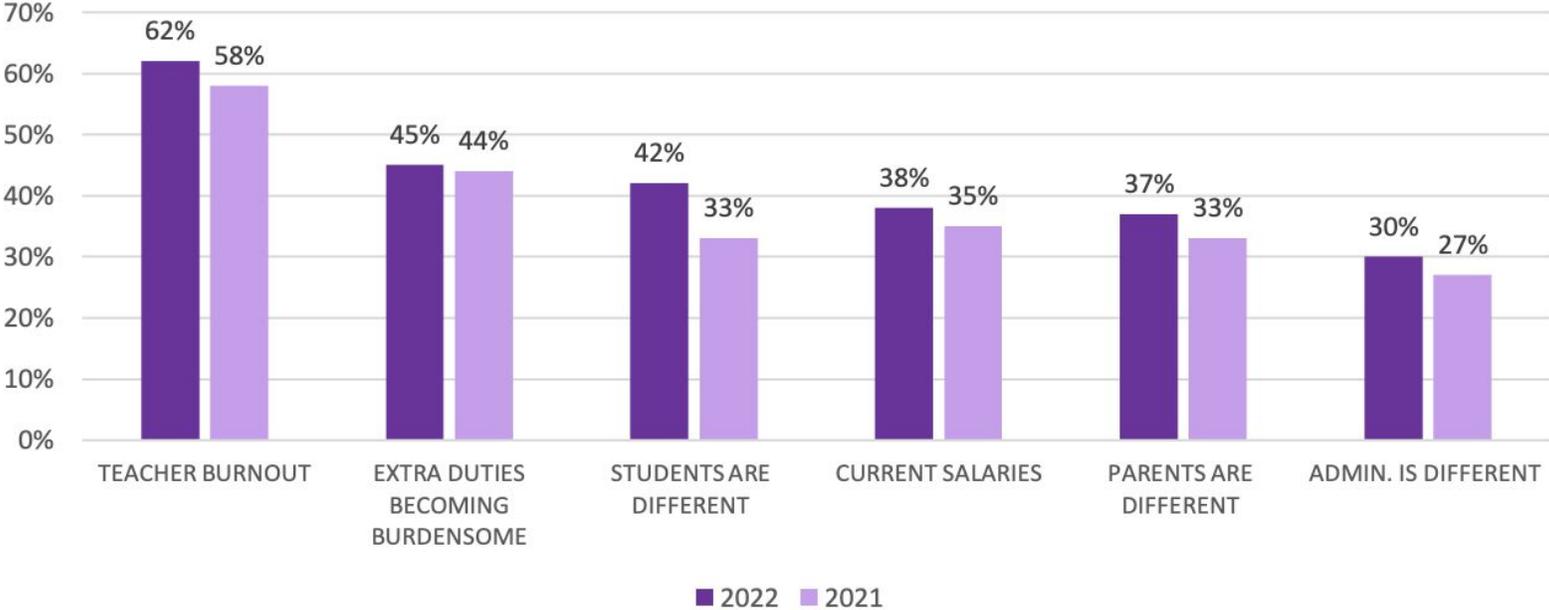
# ND Teacher Retention Task Force Finding

## Workplace Environment and Burnout: Leading Causes of Attrition

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

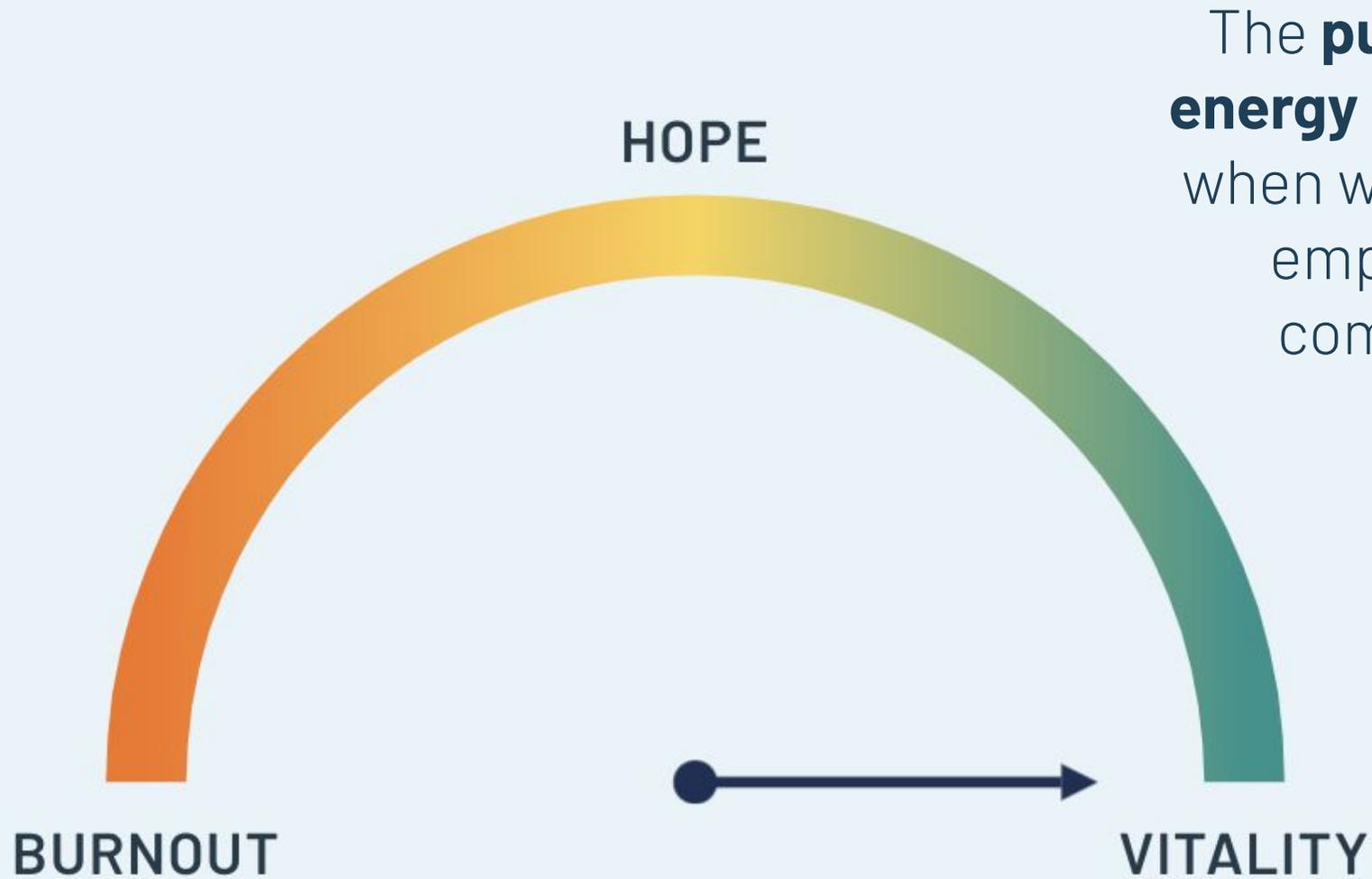


**CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO TEACHER ATTRITION IN NORTH DAKOTA | 2021-2022**



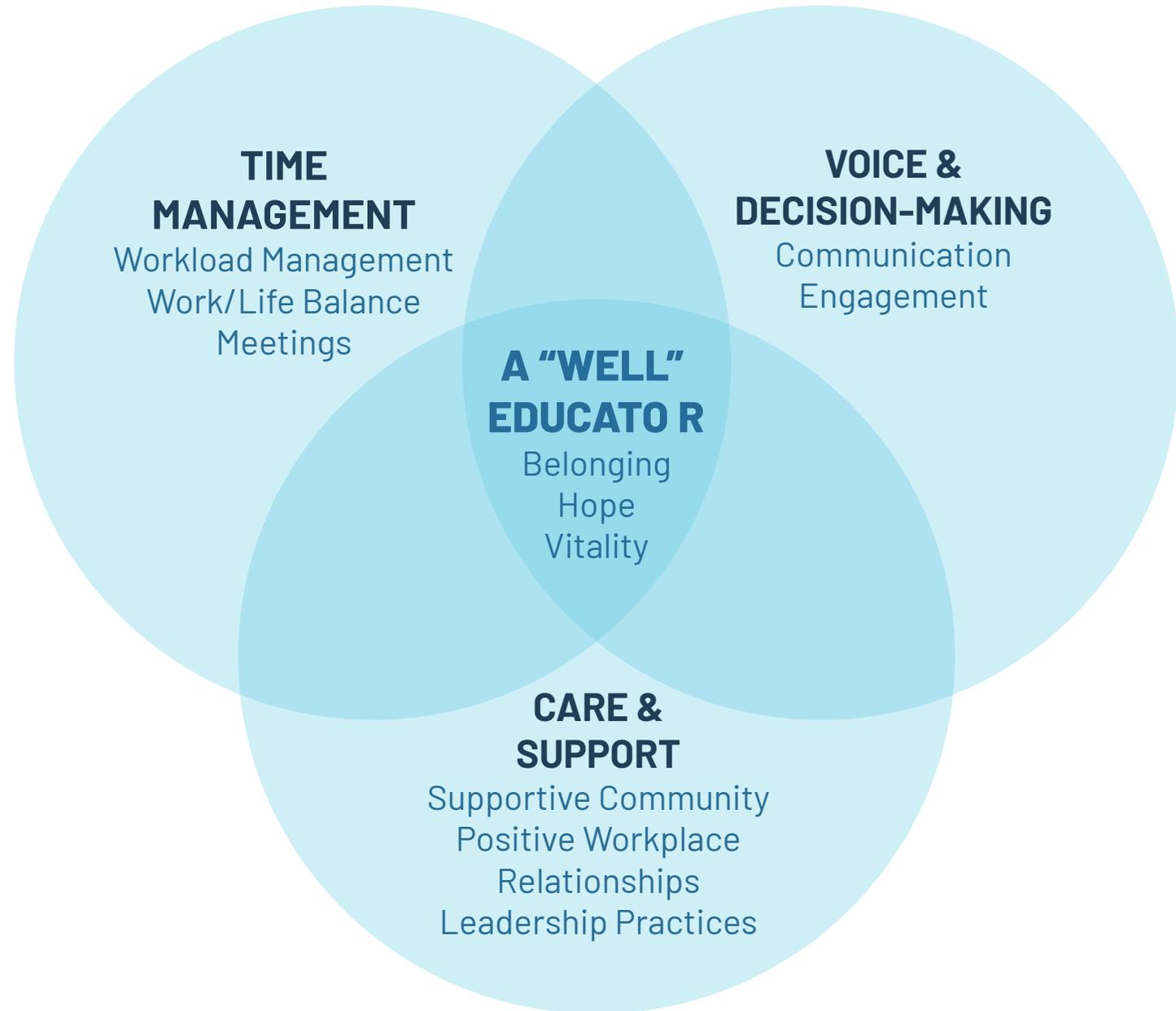
A state of prolonged exhaustion caused **by negative external conditions** that no level of self-care can overcome.



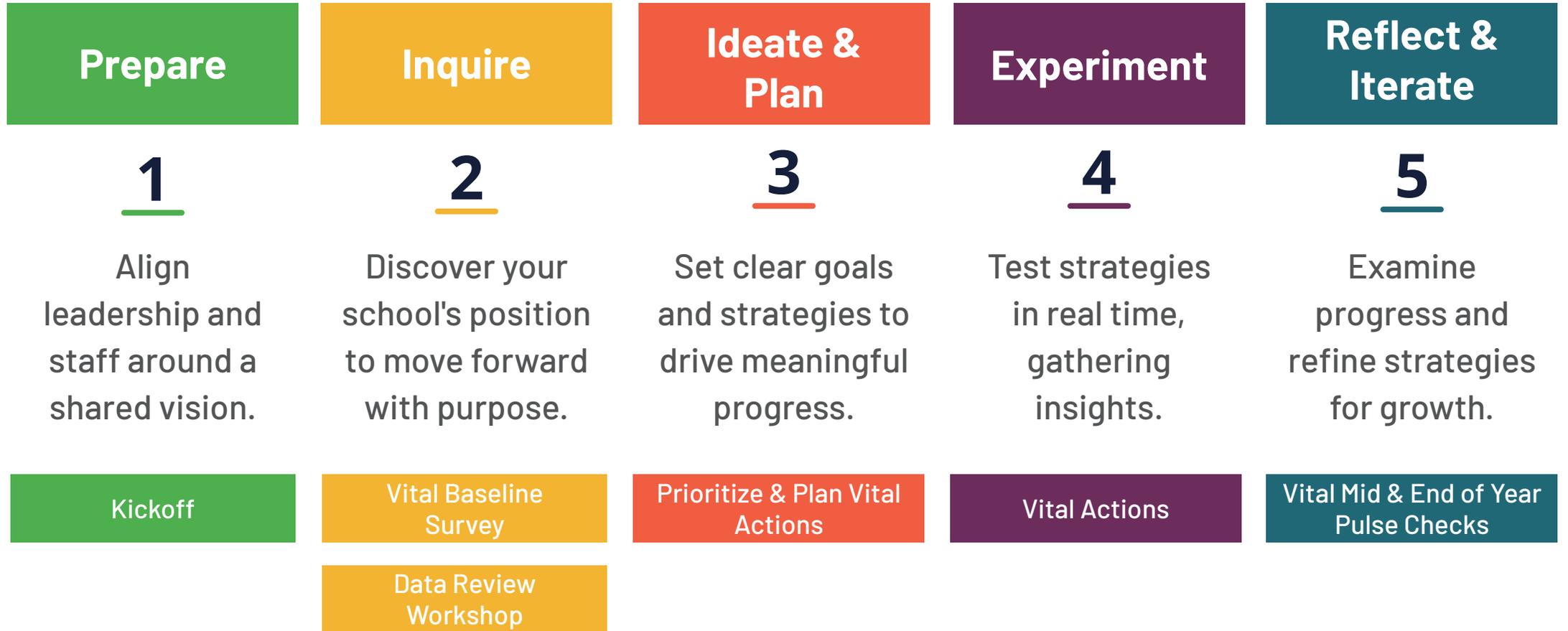


The **purpose and energy** experienced when working in an empowering community.

# Conditions for Retention



# Phases & Activities at a Glance



# Aligned to Recommendations #3 and #4 of the Teacher Retention Task Force

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

#3) “The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction.”

#4) “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.”

## WE PROVIDE

- Annual Survey that measures educators’ experiences of the workplace conditions that research says matter most to retention and well-being.
- Data and continuous improvement tools that help administrators improve working conditions.

# What Has Been Achieved this Biennium?

Reflections on the successful pilot.

## **Initial Vision: Retention at Scale**

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

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

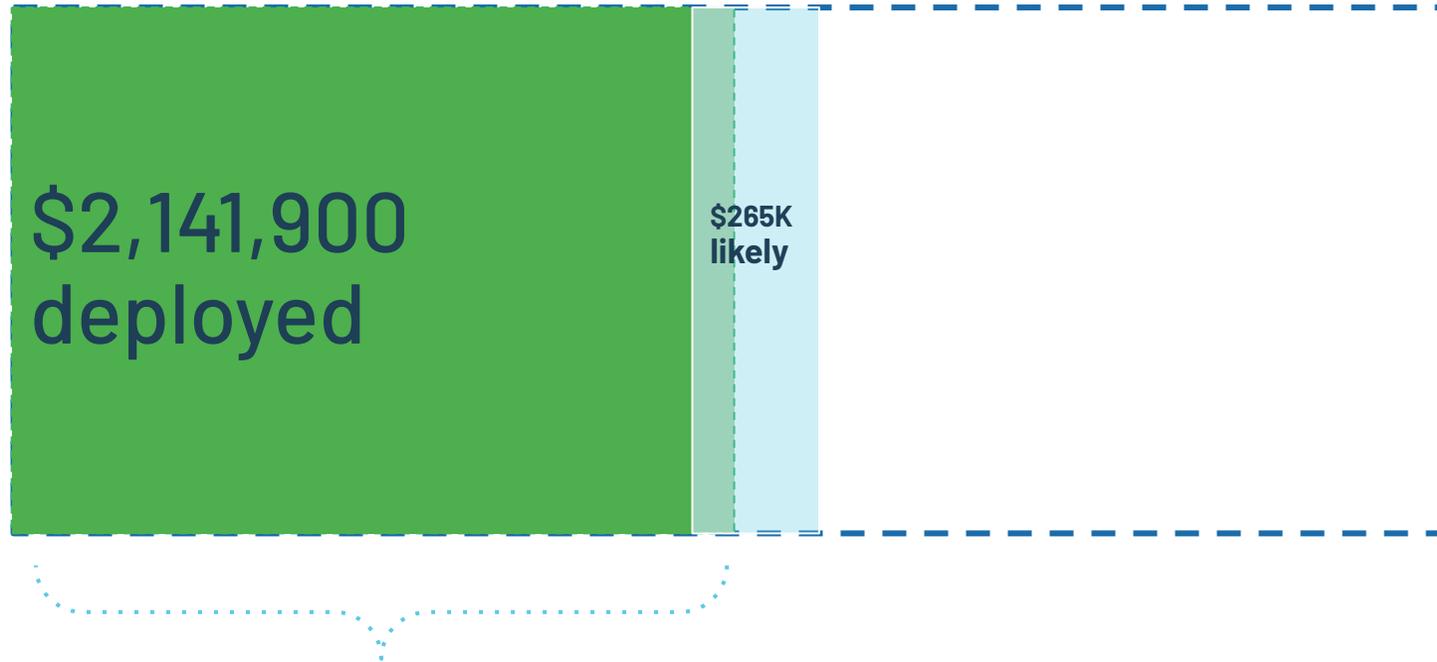
# Actuals

Appropriated Funds for the Current 2023-25 Biennium



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

## Actuals: 2.14M Deployed *(as of 3/7/25)*



93% of the \$2.3M allocation has been deployed.  
With an additional \$265,000 likely - exceeding allocated funds.

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



## Building Partnerships

**Key Achievement:** 55% of ND educators being served (5,000+ across 199 schools in 30+ 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 a 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.

# Successful Pilot

Engaged more than half of the state's educators



**54% Teachers**

**4,940 of 9,100**

**52% Students**

**70,800 of 135,000**



**40% Schools**

**199 of 509**

**20% Districts**

**34 of 168**

# North Dakota District & Regional Partners

Last Updated March 3, 2025

**Alexander Public Schools**

**Apple Creek Elementary School**

**Belfield Public School**

**Bismarck Public Schools**

**Bowbells Public School**

**Central Cass School District**

**C.R.E.A**

**Devils Lake Public School District**

**Dickinson Public Schools**

**Divide County School District**

**Ellendale Public Schools**

**Fargo Public Schools**

**Grand Forks Public Schools**

**Glenburn Public School**

**Jamestown Public Schools**

**Lake Region Special Edu. Unit**

**Little Heart Elementary**

**Mandan Public Schools**

**Manning Elementary School**

**Maple Valley School District**

**McKenzie County Public Schools**

**Menoken Elementary School**

**Minot Public Schools**

**Mohall-Lansford-Sherwood**

**Montpelier Public School**

**Naughton Elementary School**

**New England Public Schools**

**NESC**

**Northern Cass School District**

**Pingree-Buchanan Public**

**Schools**

**Ray Public Schools**

**Richardton-Taylor**

**Richmond #44**

**SEEC**

**Sterling Elementary School**

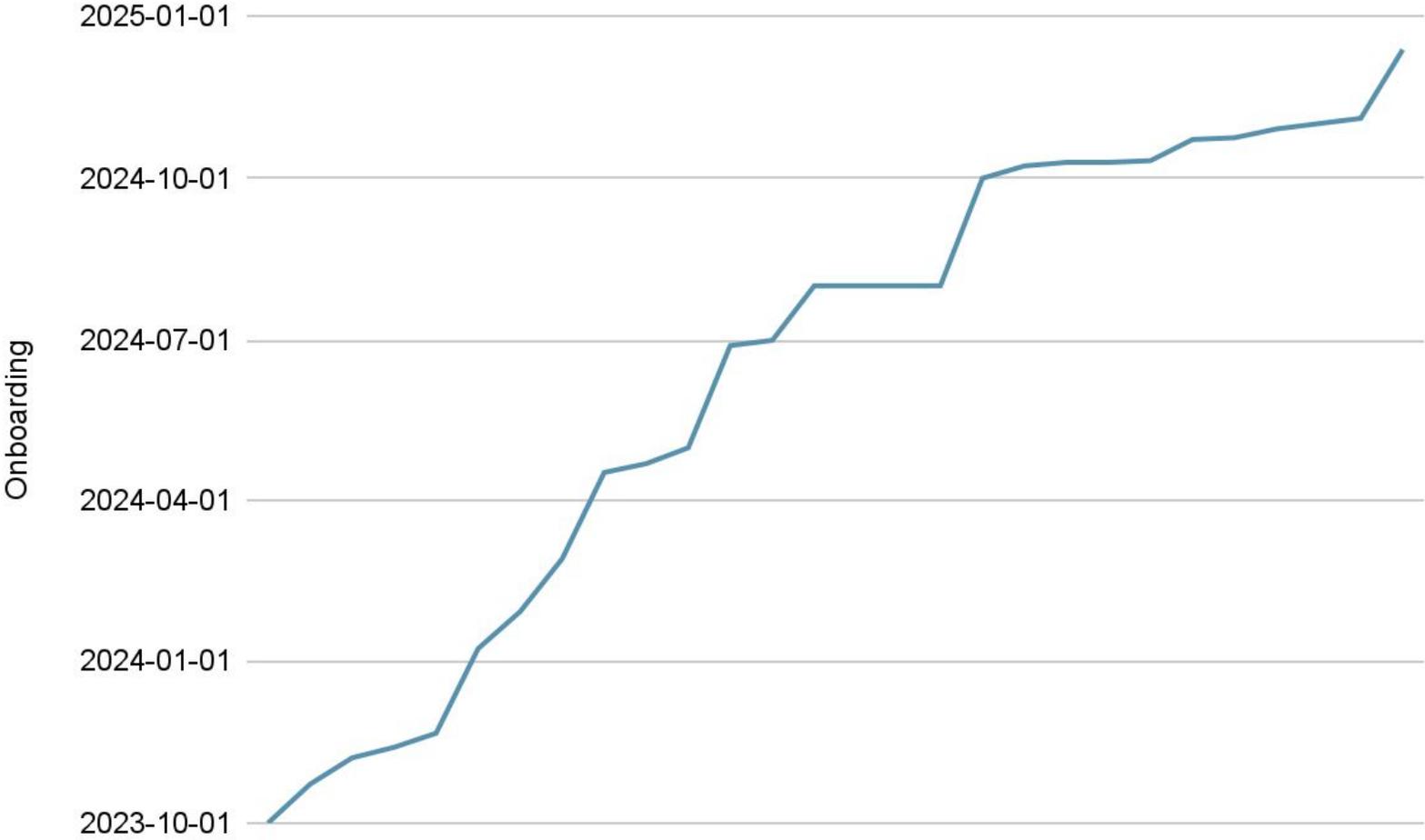
**Sweet Briar 17**

**Wahpeton Public Schools**

**WERC**

**Williston Basin School District**

# 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 the needs and voice of principals and teacher leaders.

# Boosting Educator Retention: Explore Early Findings on the North Dakota Microsite

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



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

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

# 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 support & retention of great school leaders** who keep great educators teaching.
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."*

# 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 School Leader 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.

# We are 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. DPI data team, NDCEL, ND United, ND School Boards Association, and ND RISE, among others).
- Explore innovations in HR and school board level supports that contribute to retention and well-being.
- Explore partnerships with Higher Education institutions.

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

Make ND  
**the leader** in the  
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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.
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# What we can do with \$2.5M?

## Sustain Pilot-Level Work + Minimal Expansion



Teacher Retention Pilot Continuation:  
\$2.5M

\$2.5M out of the requested \$6.6M

- **Pilot-Level Teacher Retention**
  - Maintain ongoing educator retention work with current partners.
  - Small expansion to reach around 60% of North Dakota's educators.
- **No School Leader Retention**
  - *N/A*
- **Some Systems Impact**
  - Continue partnership with DPI data team to track outcomes.
  - Maintain relationships with other organizations serving ND educators.

# What we can do with \$6.6M?

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

Statewide Expansion of Teacher Retention Program

*(to reach 100% of ND educators)*

School Leader Retention Pilot

*(to reach 50% of school leaders)*

Deepen Partnerships to create an entire system that fosters & measures retention.

\$6,600,000 Ask

# 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 School Leader 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. ND Rise, ND United, ND School Boards Association, and NDCEL, among others).
  - 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 North Dakota creates a statewide culture of  
educator retention?



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