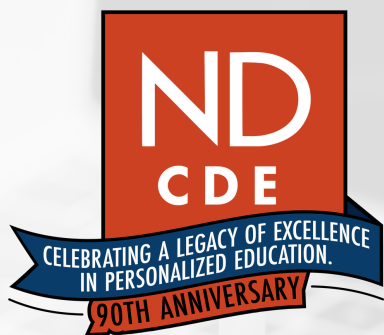


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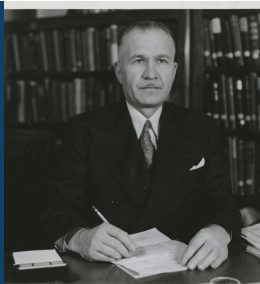


PLAYBOOK

NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary.™

Center for
Distance Education

Who We Are, & Why a Playbook?



In 1935, T.W. Thordarson, with support from the Farmers' Union, helped North Dakota become the first state to fund a correspondence high school, establishing the Department of Correspondence Study. Now known as the North Dakota Center for Distance Education, it has evolved into the state's virtual school, offering asynchronous, online K–12 education and diplomas to students across North Dakota and beyond.

What is a Playbook?

Based on Patrick Lencioni's *The Advantage*, this document helps establish organizational clarity at CDE by addressing six key questions: why do we exist, how do we behave, what do we do, how will we succeed, what must we do, and who must do it?

The mission statement answers two of these—why we exist and what we do—by affirming CDE's role in supporting students wherever they are and supplementing brick-and-mortar schools with flexible, high-quality virtual learning. It highlights CDE's commitment to individual support, academic excellence, and North Dakota's long-term prosperity.

The following pages address the remaining questions. Staff are encouraged to revisit this resource regularly to stay aligned with the clarity shaped by CDE's leadership team.

MISSION STATEMENT

The North Dakota Center for Distance Education meets students wherever they are: Empowering future-ready learners in North Dakota and anywhere there is an educational need.

How we behave: CORE VALUES

"Core values are the deeply ingrained principles that guide all of a company's actions; they serve as its cultural cornerstones."

–Patrick Lencioni



At CDE, we embrace the following as our core values.

We are:

Barrier breakers: We're relentless in our efforts to provide educational access to students.

Bridge builders: Cultivating partnerships and relationships enrich and expand our services, encouraging deep engagement with them.

Flexibility fluent: Fluidity and adaptability drive our operations daily, helping us meet the evolving educational needs of students and schools.

How We Behave

ASPIRATIONAL VALUES

Aspirational values are "traits we wish our cultural had . . . but which are not necessarily true . . . they are something we aspire to."

–Patrick Lencioni

At CDE, we aim to be:

Fearless innovators: As a virtual school, we aspire to be on the cutting edge of educational change, participating in life-long learning to keep pace with the ever-evolving dynamics of our fields and taking risks when deemed to be in our students' best interests

Quality conscious: We always pause to consider quality before we venture into new territory, and through ongoing assessment and evaluation, we constantly recommit to quality to guide all growth and change

Considerately collaborative: We recognize that none of our departments can operate effectively on their own; we are better when we work in tandem with each other, and we strive for cohesive synergy in all we do, leveraging the best of all employees' talents; this approach to our work has a residual impact on our interactions with students, parents, learning coaches, and schools, inviting a team approach to each student's learning experience.



ACCIDENTAL VALUES



Accidental values are "the traits that are evident in an organization but have come about unintentionally and don't necessarily serve the good of the organization."

–Patrick Lencioni

At CDE, we're aware of the following aspects of our culture and do our best to self-regulate their impact on our operations:

Fear paralysis: We're fearful of our organization's stability, need, and relevance, causing us to avoid risks, mistakes, and failures.

Self-sacrifice: We are stewards of our public funding and our status as a state agency, causing us to operate in a frugal, resourceful manner and make personal sacrifices to get the job done.

Triplicity: As a business, a state agency, and a virtual school, we are unconventional by nature. Being part of the state government adds a layer of bureaucracy to our operations but also affords many unique opportunities. This trifecta sometimes causes us to lose sight of our primary focus—not a business or a state agency, but a school.

How We Behave: PERMISSION TO PLAY



"These are the minimum behavioral standards that are required in an organization." –Patrick Lencioni

At CDE, we assume that all our employees embody the following. We are:

Student-centered: With deep empathy, we consider our students first and do what's necessary to meet their needs.

Passionate about education: We know the value of education, and we're excited to demonstrate to our students its endless potential.

Self-directed problem solvers: We're a virtual workforce, requiring the ability to work and often troubleshoot independently. We operate under a silent honor code, committing to fulfill our responsibilities daily with very little oversight.

Technology adept: We use a wide variety of technology to effectively perform our responsibilities and stay connected with our students, educational partners, and co-workers.

How will We Succeed?

STRATEGIC ANCHORS

"Strategic anchors provide the context for all decision making and help companies avoid the temptation to make purely pragmatic and opportunistic decisions. "

-Patrick Lencioni

We refuse to settle for the status quo.

We know the strengths and limitations of our virtual education delivery model.

We consider who is served by our decisions, prioritizing students first.

VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to transform education in North Dakota and beyond by providing a flexible, high-quality virtual learning experience.

We aim to do this by:

- **Empowering Students:** Providing a comprehensive and high-quality education that integrates a state-aligned curriculum, personalized learning experiences, and 21st-Century skill development to equip students as lifelong learners who are workforce-ready.
- **Supporting Schools:** Anticipating and fulfilling the evolving needs of North Dakota schools by providing cutting-edge curricula.
- **Leading in Virtual Education:** Positioning North Dakota as a national leader in virtual learning by adopting innovative, research-based practices that maximize student engagement and academic success.
- **Investing in Staff:** Ensuring our staff are resourced and empowered to deliver exceptional education and foster a dynamic, engaging virtual learning environment.

What is Important: SHORT & LONG-TERM GOALS

"When it comes to how a cohesive team measures its performance, one criterion sets it apart from non-cohesive ones: its goals are shared across the entire team."

-Patrick Lencioni

NDCDE has developed a [strategy map](#) through its accreditor, Cognia, to guide its organizational strategy and action steps over the next three to five years. NDCDE's map was developed with the input of all leadership team members and through data collected from all NDCDE employees through surveys and prioritization exercises. This plan contains three strategic themes and three corresponding objectives:

Strategic Theme 1: Improving Student Outcomes

Enhancing CDE's understanding of student outcomes and improving our pass and completion rates

Strategic Theme 2: Exceeding Expectations

Ensuring CDE services and supports are exceeding stakeholder needs and expectations, including those of the state

Strategic Theme 3: Leveraging Innovation

As a virtual school, keeping pace with technology innovations to support and educate our students and staff

Strategic Theme 4: Optimizing Efficiency

Ensuring that CDE operates with optimum efficiency considering its state agency status, its strategic priorities, and the scope of its roles and responsibilities



The full plan can be found here:

https://www.cde.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/PDFs/cognia_strategy_map.pdf



The leadership team uses this plan to regularly select collective short-term goals that are highlighted in the NDCDE Playbook.

Goal One. Expand Academic

Programming: NDCDE will launch several new offerings to meet evolving student needs.

Timeline: Fall 2025

Key Measures of Success: CertX, dual credit, agriculture, continuity core, and military courses fully launched Fall 2025; ≥75% of students in new programs report satisfaction or relevance on surveys; Additional measures are listed in the strategy map.



Goal 2. Implement a Strategic Marketing &

Communications Plan: NDCDE will execute a multi-tiered marketing and communications strategy to expand awareness, drive enrollment, and strengthen stakeholder understanding of its flexible, high-quality offerings.

Timeline: September 2026

Key Measures of Success: Marketing plan finalized, student return rate exceeds VLLA benchmark by Fall 2026, and ≥85% of families report awareness of diploma program, pacing guides, and support tools. Additional measures are listed in the strategy map.

THEMATIC GOALS

"The thematic goal is the answer to our question, *What is most important, right now?*"

–Patrick Lencioni

Who Must Do What?

"Every organization of any size needs some division of labor . . . without clarity around that division of labor, the potential for infighting, even among well-intentioned people is great."

–Patrick Lencioni

OUR DIVISIONS

- Teaching & Learning Division
 - Teaching
 - Curriculum & LMS
 - Education Technology Systems
 - Student Support
- Operations Support Services
 - Finance
 - Human Resources
 - Enrollment
 - Information Technology Department



NDCDE Org Chart



Part of the challenge is that most organizations have adopted conventional titles for their various departments ... Sometimes two people claim to be responsible for the same task or discipline."

-Patrick Lencioni

Students, Schools, & Families



Teaching & Learning Division	Operations Support Services Division
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instruction• Curriculum• Student Support Services• LMS Operations• SIS Implementation• Teacher Professional Development• Diploma Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human Resources• Enrollment Management• State Reporting• Financial Management• Risk Management• Facilities Management• Records Retention• IT Department



State Director: Policies, Planning, Accreditation, Dual Credit, New Initiatives, Division Oversight, Legislation, Agency Liaison, & Communications

LIVING **THE PLAYBOOK**

At the North Dakota Center for Distance Education, this Playbook is more than a document—it's a call to clarity, alignment, and action. Every decision, every interaction, and every innovation we pursue should reflect the values and vision outlined in these pages.

Whether you're teaching, supporting, building systems, or shaping strategy—your work is vital to delivering exceptional virtual education. Keep this Playbook close. Revisit it often. Use it to stay grounded in our mission, aligned with our goals, and committed to growing together.

Let's keep learning forward!

