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# PLAYBOOK

NORTH  
**Dakota**  
Be Legendary.™

Center for  
Distance Education

Updated November 2024

# WHO WE ARE, & WHY PLAYBOOK?



In the 1930's T.W. Thordarson envisioned a correspondence high school in which students and adults unable to attend a physical high school would have the opportunity to receive an education. With the aid of the Farmers' Union, Thordarson brought the vision to the state legislative assembly. North Dakota became the first state to provide a special appropriation for a correspondence high school, establishing the Department of Correspondence Study in 1935. After a series of name changes and organizational transitions under various state agencies, the North Dakota Center for Distance Education serves today as the state's virtual school, offering asynchronous, online K-12 education and diplomas to students statewide and beyond.

## What is a Playbook?

Based on Patrick Lencioni's *The Advantage*, this document is designed to provide organizational clarity for CDE by helping answer the six critical questions for an organization to understand itself, ensure cohesion among employees, and align its purpose with all it does. These six questions are: 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 do we exist, and what do we do? It emphasizes that we support and supplement the work occurring in bricks-and-mortar schools, explains to students the benefits of pursuing coursework through CDE, and highlights CDE's commitments when delivering its services, both practical and aspirational--to focus on quality and play a role in North Dakota's long-term prosperity.

The pages that follow provide answers to the remaining questions. CDE employees are encouraged to review this resource frequently and act on its contents to ensure the organization keeps sight of the clarity created by the leadership team dedicating time to work through these challenging but necessary questions.



## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

**The Center for Distance Education's (CDE) mission is to provide virtual education to support North Dakota's K-12 schools. It offers all students access to extensive educational opportunities, allowing them to achieve their personal goals and reach their full potential. CDE is innovative and quality-focused in its approach to educational delivery and its scope of services to foster the strength of North Dakota's future.**



# 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

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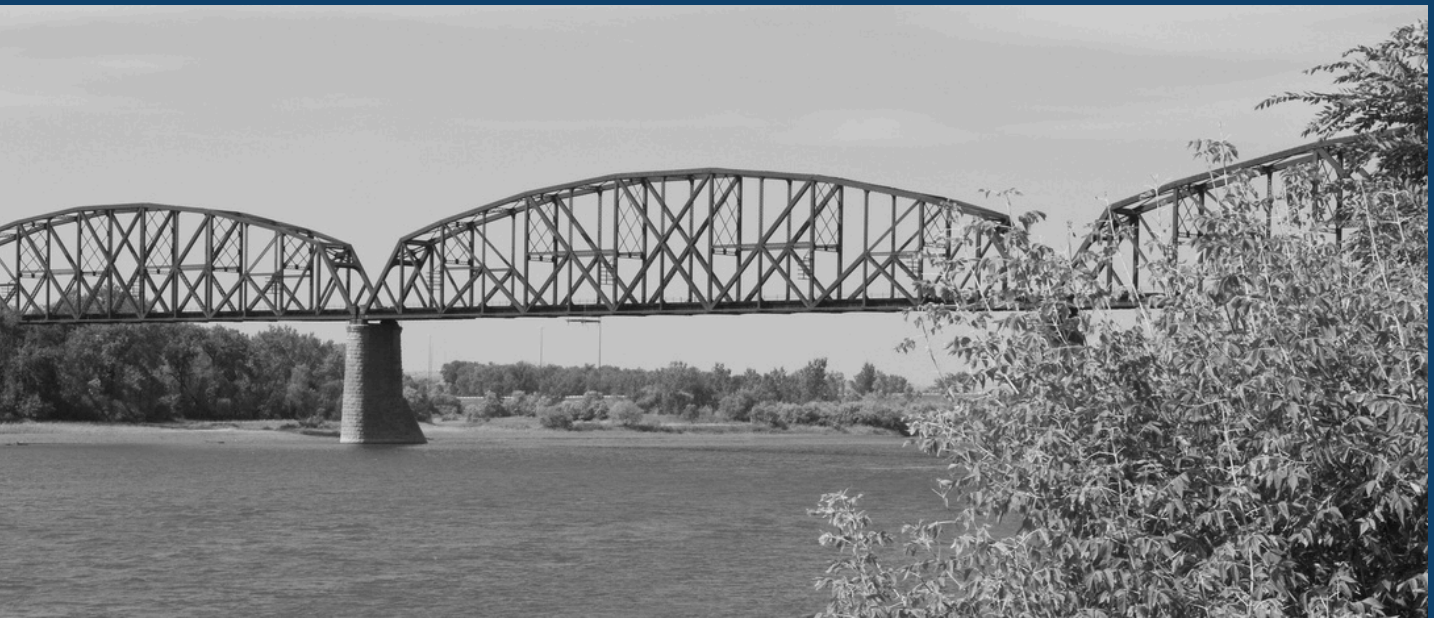
At CDE, we embrace the following as our core values.

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 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.

## ASPIRATIONAL VALUES



fearless ad



## How We Behave

# ACCIDENTAL VALUES

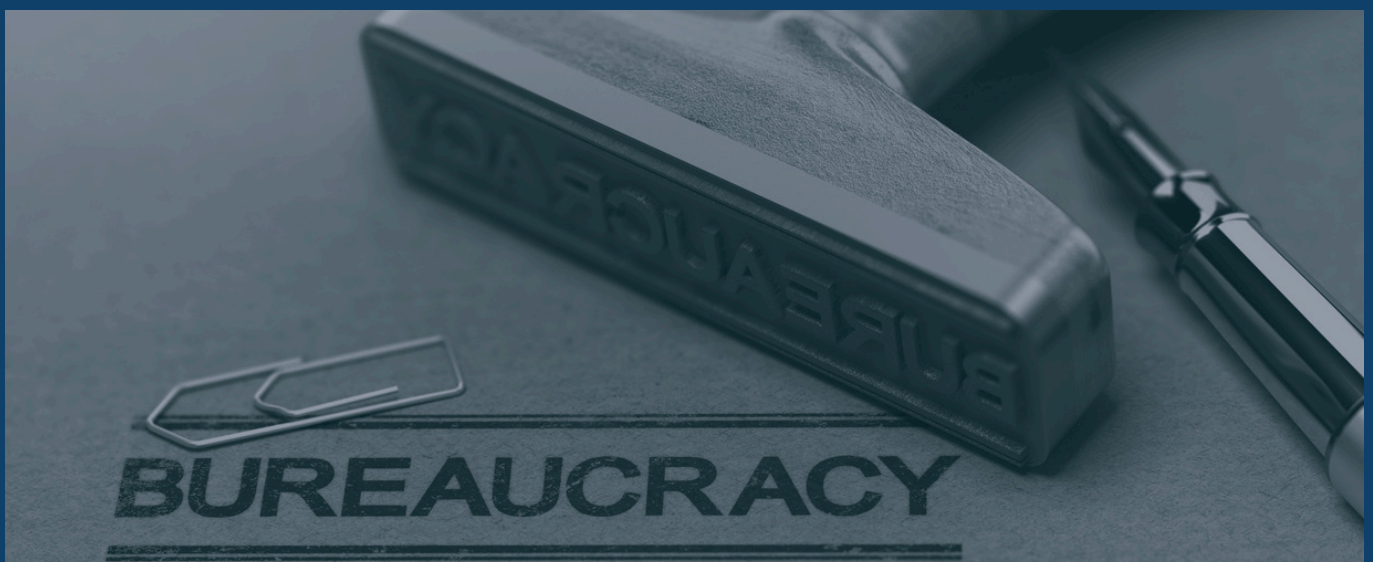
Accidental values are "the traits that are evident in an organization but have come about unintentionally and don't necessarily serve the good of the organization." -Patrick Lencioni

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.

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

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

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## 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 IN THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS: 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](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.



**The NDCDE Leadership Team accomplished the two goals it had collectively set in Summer 2024. The goal below was selected as a new priority in November 2024.**

**CDE will evaluate the validity of the data it currently collects, attempting to improve its accuracy, and begin developing dashboards to help increase staff access to and use of data.**

**Timeline:** Summer 2025

**Key Measures of Success:** This review will occur during 2024–25 school year, with the leadership team prioritizing which data to collect, improve, or visualize by February 2025. Changes in data collection will be implemented throughout the Spring of 2025. Dashboard production will begin in Summer 2025.

**As part of this data review, the leadership team will have an opportunity to evaluate multiple data sets, potentially accomplishing additional Critical Initiatives.**

# THEMATIC GOALS

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"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



## NDCDE Org Chart

### NDCDE Divisions & Departments

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



# WHO MUST DO WHAT?



**clar·i·ty** (klār'ī-tē)  
thought or style  
clearness < clar

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

### Teaching & Learning Division

- Instruction
- Curriculum
- Student Support Services
- LMS Operations
- SIS Implementation
- Teacher Professional Development
- Diploma Program

### Information Technology Department

- IT Support to Organization
- Cybersecurity
- SIS and LMS Functionality & Management
- Business System Oversight & Integration
- IT Infrastructure & Equipment
- New Technology Integration

### Operations Support Services

- Human Resources
- Enrollment Management
- DPI Reporting
- Frontline Support to Schools & Parents
- SIS Implementation
- Financial Management
- Risk Management
- Facilities Management
- Records Retention

**State Director:** Policies, Accreditation, Dual Credit, New Initiatives, Department Oversight, Legislation, Agency Liaison, Communication, Committee Oversight