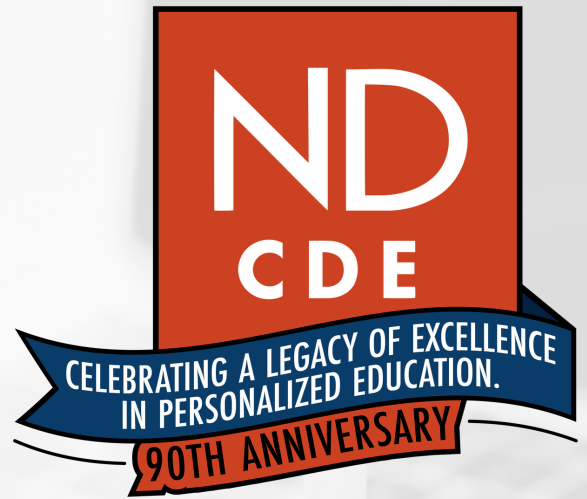


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PLAYBOOK

NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary.™

Center for
Distance Education

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.

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.



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.

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.



Leveraging Innovation: Launch a Modernized Enrollment and Billing System

Description: To streamline user experience and reduce manual processing, NDCDE will launch a new e-commerce and enrollment platform that integrates with key systems, automates workflows, and supports self-service options. This transition will improve enrollment accuracy, reduce response time, and provide administrators and parents with transparent financial information.

Key Measures of Success:

- New system launched by Summer 2026 with SIS, LMS, and billing integration
- ≥90% of enrollments processed without manual intervention by Fall 2026
- Parent and business manager satisfaction with registration/billing processes improves by ≥20%
- Time to assign students to teachers reduced by ≥50% compared to baseline
- ≥85% of users report the system is easy to use in post-implementation surveys



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

NDCDE 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



WHO MUST DO WHAT?



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!

