

2023 Legislative Priorities

01. Maintain Current Level of Funding: \$6.4 million from the state and special spending authority of \$4.5 million

The North Dakota Center for Distance Education (CDE) has played a vital role in supporting K-12 education throughout the state, most recently delivering essential online educational services during the pandemic. Post-pandemic, enrollments have stabilized, but many students and school districts, large and small, have found new use cases for online learning, relying on CDE to supplement in-person instruction. Enrollment remains 25% higher than pre-pandemic.

The cost of running a fully online K-12 school continues to increase with inflation, resulting in CDE needing at least sustained state funding at \$6.4 m and the ability to spend money raised through tuition under the \$4.5 m special spending authority granted to it by the Emergency Commission to maintain operations. Even with this appropriation and authorization, CDE may need to consider increasing tuition or cutting services to address a projected \$1.4 m deficit due to costs associated with purchasing curriculum, paying adjuncts a competitive wage, and maintaining its technology infrastructure.

02. Add Three Additional FTEs: \$520,000

As mentioned, CDE's enrollment remains 25% higher than pre-pandemic. While CDE responded to previous spikes in enrollment by relying on adjuncts to deliver our courses, with the enrollment trends stabilizing, we also hope to add additional stability to our operations by hiring three FTEs. At least two of these positions would serve as teachers in our highest-need areas based on enrollment trends. CDE has conducted studies on students' outcomes in courses delivered by an FTE vs. an adjunct teacher, finding a strong correlation between FTEs and course pass rates. The final position may be used to hire a third teacher but may also be used to add staff to our technology team who worked on overload throughout the pandemic to provide students and teachers with around-the-clock support through our ticketing system.

03. Meeting Students' Needs through Amendments to NDCC 15-19 & 15.1-22-01

CDE has spearheaded two bills this session to help ensure it continues to meet students' needs. The first allows districts currently not operating a kindergarten to offer this service through CDE, potentially reducing travel time for our youngest students in rural schools and allowing them early exposure to online education. CDE's kindergarten program was developed and implemented during the pandemic. With lower enrollments, CDE has the capacity to provide this service to school districts looking for alternative ways of delivering kindergarten to its students.

Our second bill expands CDE's ability to educate out-of-state students. CDE has used tuition from these students to help supplement its budget, enhancing and expanding its services to North Dakota students through this revenue stream. These out-of-state students have expressed interest in taking CDE's dual credit courses; however, NDCC 15.1-25-01 currently restricts high schools to only offering dual credit to North Dakota students. To ensure CDE does not have to exclude its current and future out-of-state learners from our dual credit courses and perhaps assist state institutions with increasing their enrollments, CDE seeks authority to provide dual credit to non-resident students.