



State of North Dakota

Department of Public Instruction

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North Dakota State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

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Introduction

In July 2014, Secretary Duncan announced our Excellent Educators for All initiative, designed to move America toward the day when every student in every public school is taught by excellent educators. As part of the initiative, consistent with section 1111(b)(8)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), each State educational agency (SEA) must submit to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators (State Plan) that ensures “poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers” as required by section 1111(b)(8)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA).

Equality of opportunity is a core American value. Equal educational opportunity means ensuring the schools have the resources they need to provide meaningful opportunities for all students to succeed, regardless of family income or race. To accomplish this goal, all students must have equitable access to a safe and healthy place to learn, high-quality instructional materials and supports, rigorous expectations and course work, and, most critically, excellent educators to guide learning. Yet, too often, students from low-income families and students of color are less likely than their peers to attend a school staffed by excellent educators, and are more likely than their peers to attend a school staffed by inexperienced educators or educators rated as ineffective. These inequities are unacceptable, and it is essential that a priority be placed on working collaboratively to ensure all children have access to the high-quality education they deserve, and all educators have the resources and support they need to provide that education for all children.

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) submits this State Equity Plan for meeting the Title I and Title II requirements under ESEA. This narrative and all annotated support materials attached herein constitute the full state plan for meeting the Excellent Educators for All initiative. The State of North Dakota is committed to ensuring every public school student will graduate from high school college or career ready.

In North Dakota, we have historically had a firm practice in place that all teachers have to be highly qualified. When the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) requirements were enacted in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), North Dakota followed suit and changed our state law to align with ESEA. North Dakota has had 100% of our teachers highly qualified in all schools regardless of the poverty level. In going through the process again to update our State Equity Plan, it remained clear that there remains only a minimal gap across the state with regard to the rate that poor students are taught by an unqualified teacher compared to students who are not poor. There is, of course, always room for improvement, especially with something as important as ensuring equity for all North Dakota students. The NDDPI remains committed to addressing the limited gaps that do exist to make improvements statewide.

North Dakota is a state that strongly believes in and supports local control. Therefore, the role of the NDDPI is to submit a State Equity Plan that provides our schools and districts with

technical assistance, strategies and ideas to help them implement better plans, and policies within their school system that will ultimately ensure all North Dakota students are taught by excellent educators. It is not the role of the NDDPI to over regulate or force districts to implement certain strategies.

The intent of the North Dakota State Equity Plan is to ensure poor and minority students are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than their counterparts. In order to have all students reach proficiency, it is imperative every student has a highly qualified teacher. Teachers have a critical role in actualizing this commitment; thus, NDDPI is also committed to ensuring every child has a competent, caring, and effective teacher.

Research clearly points to the power of quality teaching in improving student academic achievement. Thus, this equitable distribution plan will:

- 1) Determine where inequities in teacher assignments exist in North Dakota public elementary and secondary schools;
- 2) Locate statewide disparities including disparities within larger districts; and,
- 3) Highlight strategies for eliminating these inequities to promote the long-term placement of effective teachers with the children who need them the most.

Definition of “Excellent Educators”

NCLB mandates all teachers be highly qualified. The requirement that teachers be highly qualified applies to all elementary or secondary school teachers employed by a public local educational agency who teach a core academic subject (e.g., English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography). The term “highly qualified” means the teacher:

1. Has obtained full state certification from ESPB as a teacher or passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state, and does not have certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis;
2. Holds a minimum of a bachelor’s degree; and,
3. Has demonstrated subject-matter competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches, in a manner determined by the state and in compliance with federal statute.

The statutory definition subject-matter includes additional elements that apply somewhat differently to teachers new and not new to the profession, and to elementary and secondary school teachers. Such differentiations are defined in various sections of the NCLB and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

According to the federal definition, almost all teachers in the state of North Dakota meet the highly qualified requirement. However, being “highly qualified” does not necessarily translate to “highly effective” teaching. In recent years, there has been a shift to teacher effectiveness.

Currently, the NDDPI is updating teacher evaluation guidelines to meet current thinking around teacher evaluation practices. The NDDPI is also developing a state teacher evaluation model that can be used by districts if their current teacher evaluation system does not meet the updated guidelines. All North Dakota districts are required to use a teacher evaluation system meeting the updated guidelines in the 2015-2016 school year.

Overview of the Equity Plan Development Process

To develop the North Dakota State Equity Plan, the NDDPI staff used a four step process. First, education stakeholders from across North Dakota were identified and requested to be a part of the State Equity Initiative Planning Committee, which was an integral part of ensuring the State Equity Plan being developed was authentic and feasible for North Dakota public schools and districts. Second, state-level data were gathered to determine where equity strengths and gaps existed in North Dakota. Third, using the state-level data, a root cause analysis process was conducted to identify the source of the equity gaps. Fourth, practical strategies to eliminate the equity gaps based on the identified root causes were selected for implementation by appropriate education stakeholders. The remainder of this plan focuses on the details of each of these four steps.

Stakeholder Engagement

The NDDPI understands the importance of obtaining broad stakeholder input in any statewide initiative and most certainly in the development of this State Equity Plan. We believe that stakeholder input is a strength of our North Dakota plan. North Dakota had created a committee when we began working on our ESEA Flexibility waiver. To establish our State Equity Initiative Planning Committee, the NDDPI went back to our ESEA Waiver Committee as a start and then updated that group. Following this established process was helpful to both the field and NDDPI personnel as it was a familiar process that was used successfully two years ago when the state created an ESEA Flexibility Waiver application. The committee represents a comprehensive group of key stakeholders across the state. More than 19 various stakeholder groups are represented on the committee.

The State Equity Initiative Planning Committee list is included in the plan as Appendix A. The NDDPI was proactive after receiving written notice by the USDE that each state needs to submit an equity plan by June 1, 2015. In November 2014, NDDPI staff began the process to establish an Equity Initiative Planning Committee. Careful consideration was given to ensure there would be broad and diverse representation and that all key education stakeholder groups were included. The committee includes 26 members representing the many different stakeholder groups across the state including the following:

NDDPI Unit Directors	North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission
NDDPI State Superintendent	North Dakota Regional Education Associations
NDDPI Title I Committee of Practitioners	North Dakota United (ND Teacher Union)
North Dakota Association of School Administrators	North Dakota University System
North Dakota Association of Secondary School Principals	Office of the Governor
North Dakota Council of Educational Leaders	Pathfinder Parent Center/IDEA Advisory Committee
North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education	Teacher Education Programs – North Dakota University System
North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board	North Central Comprehensive Center at McREL International
North Dakota English Language Learners	Center on Great Teachers and Leaders

In reviewing the list of stakeholders in Appendix A, it may appear certain groups were only represented by one member (ELL, parents, Special Education). However, many of the stakeholders had dual representation. The NDDPI felt strongly about having a committee that wasn't too large, as then it becomes more difficult to make progress and get work done in a timely manner.

The NDDPI wanted the committee to have a manageable number; we knew from past experience that a smaller sized group is more productive. Each of the stakeholder members were also responsible to go back to their collective groups all throughout the process to gather feedback so each group was adequately represented.

Stakeholder Meetings

The State Equity Initiative Planning Committee convened four times between December 2014 and June 2015. The NDDPI State Superintendent, Kirsten Baesler, opened each meeting with welcome remarks to the Committee. Her attendance at these meetings demonstrated the importance of the equity plan to the Committee members and set the tone that stakeholder input is valued and critical to the equity plan. Further, she fully supported the NDDPI staff in the development of the North Dakota State Equity Plan.

The Committee had its first meeting on December 16, 2014. At this meeting, NDDPI staff provided key background information about the Excellent Educators for All initiative, the process that would be used to develop the North Dakota state plan, and their role or representation in the development of the North Dakota state plan. At this first meeting, the Committee also reviewed data provided by the NDDPI.

