

This Deck:



<https://tinyurl.com/Vital-SD>

South Dakota Educator Retention: Key to Student and Community Success

Retaining Educators by
Making Schools Great Places to Work

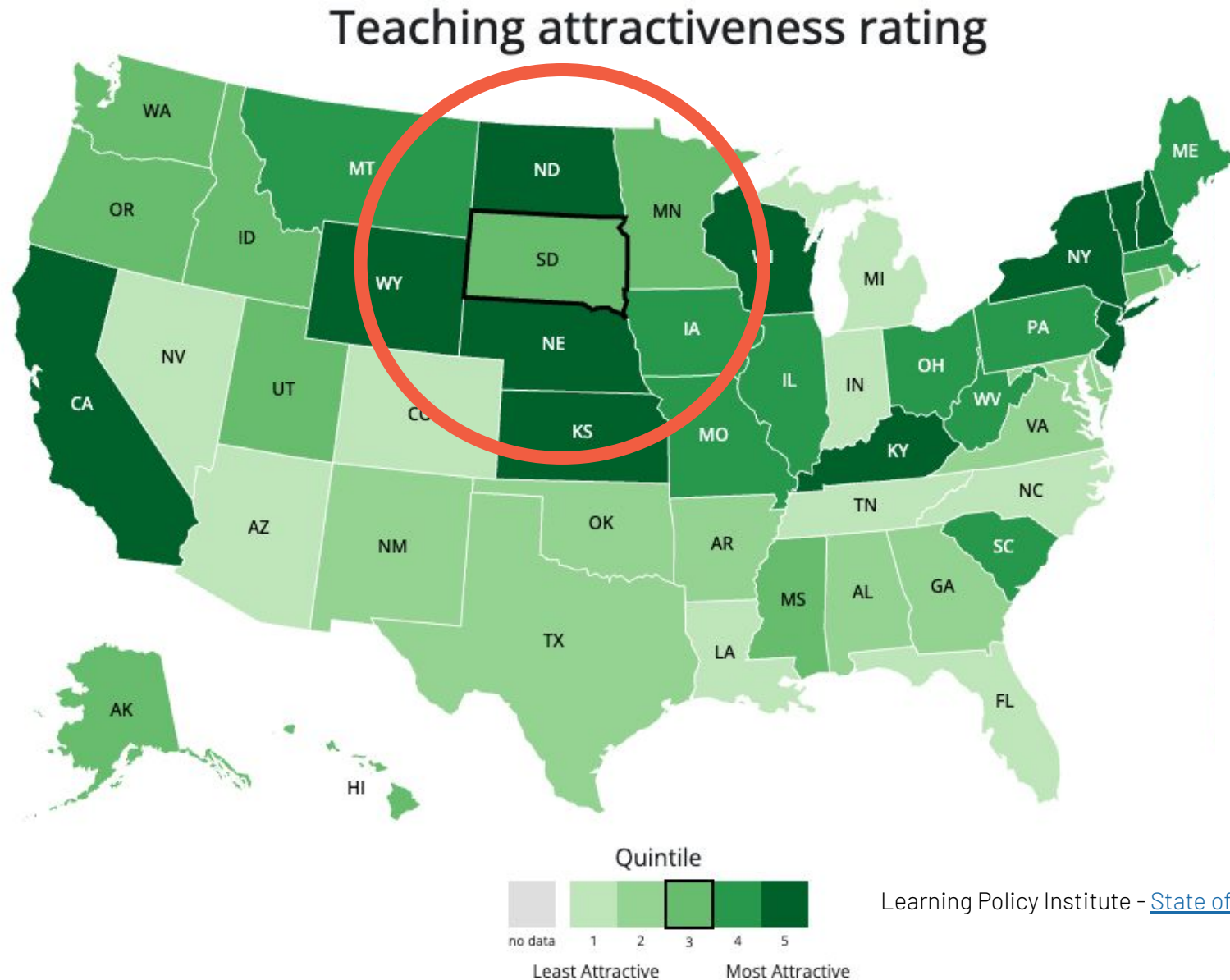


South Dakota:

The Educator Workforce Crisis Is Here.

South Dakota
Falls in the **3rd**
Quintile
Nationally for
Teacher
Attractiveness

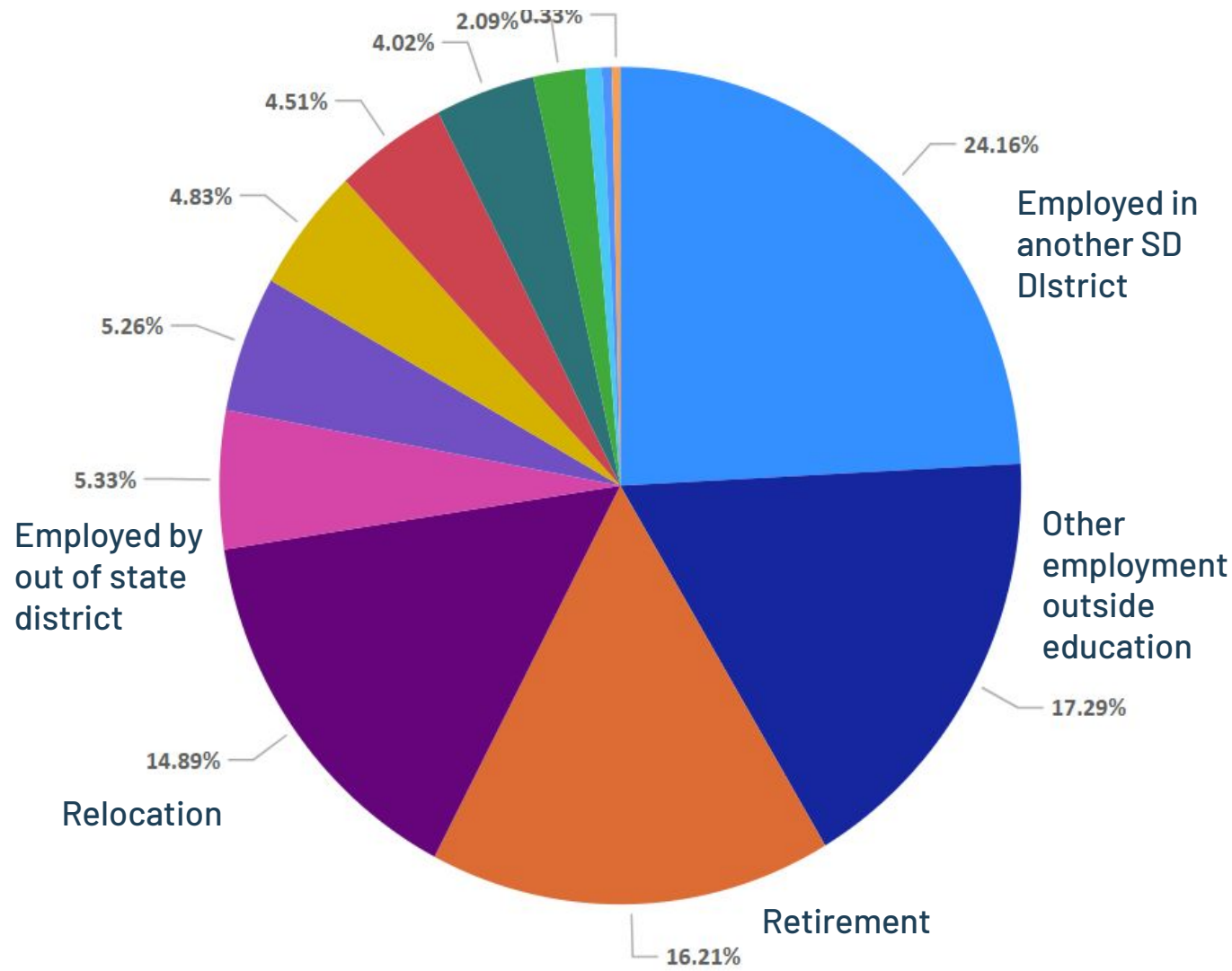
*(nearby states are
more attractive,
many in the 1st
quintile)*



Learning Policy Institute - [State of the teacher Workforce](#)

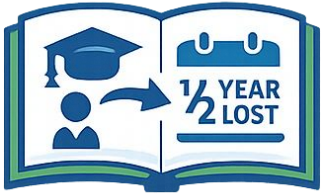
Last school year more than 1k South Dakota teachers left their jobs.

(nearly 10% of teachers)



- 17% left education entirely: More teachers left for a job *outside of education* than left for retirement.
- 5% left to teach in a different state.

Losing Teachers is Costing South Dakota



A **student** will **lose up to** $\frac{1}{2}$ **year** of learning for every one teacher turnover.



Turnover of one teacher costs South Dakota up to **\$20,000**.



SD spends an estimated **\$18MM** each year on costs associated with turnover.*



Over 50% of school vacancies were either never filled or became vacant again.

The Why

Retaining great teachers is the most strategic move we can make.

From Recruitment to Retention

Making recruitment efforts stick by helping schools keep their teachers.

- South Dakota is working hard to bring more teachers (e.g. through student-teacher stipends). Vital helps schools keep them.
- Vital makes sure new and experienced teachers want to stay by improving how it feels to work in schools.
- In small towns, every teacher matters. Keeping good teachers is one of the smartest ways to help schools and save money.



NO TEACHERS
NO SCHOOLS
NO
COMMUNITIES

Educator
Shortage?



Retention
Problem

The Data Is Undeniable: Burnout Is Widespread

Educator Voice and Working Conditions are Key to Reversing It

K-12 workers now have the highest burnout rate of any industry in America.

(Marken & Agrawal, 2022)

55% of teachers are thinking about leaving the profession earlier than planned.

(American Federation of Teachers, 2022)

Educators are less likely to leave the profession when they are involved in decision-making and feel supported.

(RAND Survey, 2022)

Vital Network is on a mission to ensure that every school is an **exceptional workplace** that **retains its talent** and contributes to a brighter future for the profession.

When schools are **great places to work**,
they are **excellent places for learning**.

The How

How Do We Keep Great Teachers?
By Building Better Workplaces.

Educators are Workers. Schools are Workplaces.

Job Conditions Drive Retention: Not Just Passion and Purpose

- **66% of teachers who left the profession said work-life balance was better in their new job** (NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2021–22).
- **58% of teachers who left said their workload was more manageable in their new job** (NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2021–22).
- **Teachers with unsupportive administrators are more than twice as likely to leave their school** (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

Conditions for Vitality & Retention



Conditions for retention can be *measured* and *changed*.



Building Workplace Conditions for Retention

Transformation happens not from collecting data, but from what we do with it together.

Data with Purpose: Surveys are a *starting* point for conversation, strategic inquiry, and action.

Structured for Sustainability: Schools design durable solutions that fit their unique context.

Leadership with Leverage: Vital Advisors support leaders to strengthen educator engagement, voice, and workplace well-being.

Built Together, Not Delivered To: This work is grounded in local conditions, responsive to each schools' goals, and adaptive to their strengths.

Vital Phases: How Change Happens

A simple process schools use to listen, try new ideas, and grow.



School-Level Actions, Positive Changes

Care & Support

- Improve staff onboarding so new team members feel welcomed and equipped.
- Host family info + listening sessions on high-interest topics (e.g., classroom behavior, tech use, math support at home).
- Improve student movement and safety by adjusting systems—like making hallways one-way or locking doors after passing time.

Time Management

- Review all meetings: what's the goal, who needs to be there, how often?
- Respect time - especially for staff on multiple committees.
- Ask staff what feels like “one more thing” and look for ways to reduce or support.

Voice & Decision-Making

- Share info in one easy-to-find place (instead of lots of emails).
- Make it clear how staff can join committees and what's expected.
- Be clear: When asking for input, explain how decisions will be made.

The Results: Spotlight on North Dakota

Proof in Practice

It's Already Working in North Dakota

Since 2023, Vital has partnered with ND Leaders to Create
Workplace Environments Where Educators Want to Stay

34
DISTRICTS

200
SCHOOLS

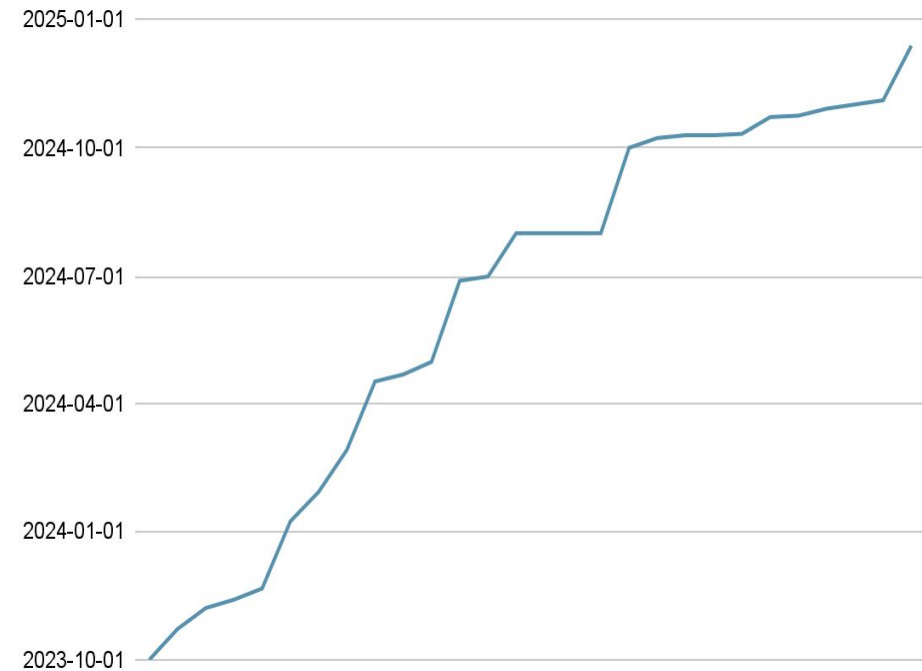
5 Regional
PARTNERS

50~% of ND
TEACHER VOICES ELEVATED

North Dakota Pilot District Engagement Momentum

Opt-In Trends:

Since 2023, Vital has steadily increased our impact across the state thanks to the endorsements and partnership with our member districts.



Early Results Are Promising: Especially for Rural Schools

Participating Schools from 2024-25 to 2025-26 School Years

After just one year, we saw growth across the board in teachers’ experience of their workplace conditions.

Locale	Care & Support	Time Management	Voice & Decision-Making	Well-Being
Urban	+1%	+6%	+5%	+3%
Rural	+3%	+6%	+6%	+4%

Systems Change Means Building Strong Statewide Partnerships



In addition to supporting individual districts, we help statewide organizations build and run strategic retention efforts.

Vital Liaisons:

State-based partners building local capacity and ensuring every district
– *especially small rural districts* –
can access the tools and support they need to thrive and retain great teachers.



The Next Chapter Starts Here

Investing in South Dakota's Educators

Statewide Investment in Teacher Retention:

The South Dakota Story is Ready to be Written

www.vitalnetwork.com/sdakota

Why Retaining SD's Educator Workforce Matters

Educators are a vital part of the state's workforce. Today, the state ranks in the middle of the nation for "teacher attractiveness," and many educators report an absence of "supportive and encouraging" work environments.



Keeping our teachers — supporting them to be well and to teach well — is one of the most direct and effective levers for improving student outcomes and sustaining our communities across South Dakota.

South Dakota's Teacher Pipeline, Last Year:

- 1,000+ departures
- Career exits > retirements
- <50% of vacancies filled
- Unstaffed classrooms across the state

This level of turnover is costly, both financially and academically.

Financially

Last year's teacher turnover is estimated to have cost the state at least \$18 million in taxpayer dollars.

Academically

The strongest in-school factor for student achievement is a **great teacher**, and research shows that students can lose up to a half-year of learning when their teacher leaves mid-stream.



Nathan Eklund
Founder &
Chief Executive Officer
nate@vitalnetwork.com



Dr. Erin Raab
Chief Strategy &
Impact Officer
erin@vitalnetwork.com

*"As a rural school district that struggles with finding qualified teachers when we have openings, **we know that teacher retention is important to our ability to have a quality school.***

One of the aspects we appreciate so much about our work with Vital Network is that the work is focused on positivity and moving our school forward.

Vital Network is helping us become the best school we can be and that is very inspiring."

Phil Leitner, *Superintendent*
Montpelier Public School

Collaborative and systematized guardrails have been the centerpiece of Vital Network's work with **Grand Forks Public Schools**.

There is authenticity in their approach and infinite reflection from school-level to district-level alignment. **Vital Network's approach is open and honest and is a "walk with you" perspective that is refreshing and difference-making.**

Dr. Terry Brenner
Superintendent
Grand Forks Public Schools

Fargo Public Schools is pleased to continue our partnership with Vital Network for the second consecutive year.

Their expertise in administering the survey and supporting the implementation of the data has been instrumental in enhancing our staff's well-being. **We highly recommend Vital for their professionalism and dedication to improving organizational health.** They are more than a vendor; they are a true partner in the work!

Dr. Jeff McCanna, *Chief Human Capital Officer*
Fargo Public Schools

Vital has been instrumental in supporting Jamestown Public Schools' strategic goals by providing valuable insights into staff perceptions of care and support, time management, and voice in decision-making. What makes the Vital Network process different is the framework and consultation that is embedded into ensuring staff voice is heard and action plans are collaboratively developed with a focus on improving the working and learning environment. JPS saw **measurable increases in all key areas between our baseline survey in December 2023 and the October 2024 survey, and we attribute that to Vital Networks processes and supports.**

Furthermore, the **alignment of Vital Network's efforts with the North Dakota Teacher Retention and Recruitment Task Force recommendations is evident.** By focusing on improving working conditions and fostering a supportive school culture through regular data collection and actionable insights, the JPS is proactively addressing key factors in teacher retention and recruitment, such as mentorship, workplace satisfaction, and professional development.

Dr. Rob Lech, *Superintendent*
Jamestown Public Schools

We are Responding to Partner Request for School Leader Retention

"Beyond their exceptional work with our educators, I am excited to share that our district is partnering with Vital Network to roll out our first survey designed specifically for building leaders. In a district as large as BPS, it's essential to ensure that our building leaders feel heard and valued, with a clear voice in shaping the direction of the district. This leader-focused process aims to break down barriers of isolation and provide a platform for our leaders to share their perspectives, fostering stronger connections and alignment across the district.

BPS and I remain steadfast in our support of Vital and their mission. Thank you for joining us in recognizing and supporting the incredible impact of their work."

Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent
Bismarck Public Schools

"Our district, like many others, struggles with retention and recruitment of qualified educators and other key staff members. By making Vital Network a part of our district, our educators feel like they have a voice and are being heard, something they have not always felt before.

Our Vital partnership opens the door to meaningful conversations and collaboration between our administrators and educators to create strategies to improve all these areas.

In our time with Vital, we have already seen improvement in employee morale and well-being. We are excited to continue our work with Vital Network."

Amanda Denevan, Assistant Human Resources Director
Williston Basin School District

The work Vital has done thus far has exceeded our expectations. They are a true partner and fully understand a 'one size fits all' approach does not work for recruitment and retention of staff. They recognize each organization has a unique culture and they have went above and beyond to understand our context.

During the fall of 2024, Vital Network engaged Central Cass, Maple Valley, and our district in a cohort to do this work together. This cohort has provided us with thought partners and resources. We knew the districts before but now we are truly partners in this work. **Before, we competed. Now, we work together to do what is best for our communities, educators, and learners. Vital Network was the catalyst for this unique partnership.**

Vital Network has helped us focus our attention on key areas to build a world class culture. **With their vast resources, network of districts, and high quality staff, they are helping us to become the best version of ourselves.**

Dr. Cory J. Steiner, Superintendent
Northern Cass School District

"Vital Network has created a system for North Dakota schools to understand and promote teachers' voices in our schools.

*Having already customized support particularly well for larger districts, Vital developed and began implementing a plan to **partner with the REAs to reach ND teachers in our smallest and most rural districts. Their presence in ND creates the opportunity for every teacher to be a part of the solutions in their school.***

Luke Schaefer, CEO
Central Regional Education Association

"Vital Network's work with schools leverages high-quality survey methods and objective teacher retention data to identify and foster the workplace factors that retain North Dakota's educators.

The collection of such high-quality data also enables strong evaluation of Vital Network's programming and the reporting of outcomes to the legislature."

**Dr. Ellie Shockley, NDUS Institutional Researcher
Supporting NDDPI**

The partnership between NDCEL and Vital Network has been instrumental in addressing the critical issue of teacher retention by aligning our shared commitment to supporting educators and school leaders.

With our established relationship and shared vision, there was an inherent level of trust from the start, which allowed administrators to confidently embrace the program. This trust not only facilitated a smoother implementation process but also created an environment where administrators felt supported in adopting new strategies to retain and empower their teachers.

Together, we are making meaningful strides in ensuring that North Dakota's schools remain strong and well-staffed for the future.

Dr. Aimee Copas, Executive Director
North Dakota Council of Education Leaders