K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



North Dakota

Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in North Dakota.

This guide profiles **North Dakota**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

NORTH DAKOTA — PART 1 OF 7

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota educates roughly 120,000 public K–12 students across about 170 school districts — many of them small and rural, reflecting the state's wide geography, with enrollment concentrated in a handful of growing cities. Public education is overseen by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the elected...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 7
- **End of compulsory age** — 16
- **Districts** — ~170, many small and rural
- **Satisfying it** — Public, approved nonpublic, or home education

PRE-K IN NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota has historically invested little in state-funded prekindergarten and has been one of the last states without a large public pre-K program. It has added a modest prekindergarten grant program to support some district and community programs, but early learning still runs largely through Head Start (including tribal Head...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 7–16
Districts	~170
Testing	NDSA · ACT
Diploma	22 units
Choice	Open enrollment

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

North Dakota's largest districts are in its growing cities — Fargo , Bismarck , West Fargo , Grand Forks , and Minot — while much of the state is served by small rural districts. A distinctive feature: North Dakota has no operating charter schools . (A 2025 law created a legal framework that could allow charter schools in the future, but...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN NORTH DAKOTA

- **Catholic & parochial schools** — Diocese of Fargo and Diocese of Bismarck schools (such as Shanley High School in Fargo and St. Mary's in Bismarck)
- **Other religious schools** — Lutheran, Christian, and other faith-based schools
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori and schools for specific learning needs

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

North Dakota uses the NDSA (North Dakota State Assessment) in grades 3–8 and grade 10 for ELA and math (plus science), and many districts give the ACT in grade 11. Run by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. There's no exit-exam gate.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **NDSA ELA & Math** — Grades 3–8 and grade 10
- **NDSA Science** — Science at designated grades
- **ACT (grade 11)** — Offered by many districts — a real, college-usable score
- **NDSA Alternate** — For eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

NDSA is online with varied item types; the ACT follows the national ACT format.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. North Dakota doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; districts set course and credit requirements.

HOW IT'S SCORED

NDSA reports achievement levels; the grade-11 ACT is scored 1–36.

AT A GLANCE

System	**NDSA**
Grades	**3–8 and 10**
Subjects	**ELA, Math, Science**
High school	**ACT (grade 11, district option)**
Grad requirement?	**No exit-exam gate**
Format	**Online**

TESTING WINDOWS

NDSA is given in a spring window set by each district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **Practice tests** — NDDPI provides practice materials matching the online format
- **ACT prep** — Our ACT guide applies where the ACT is given

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate. Ask your district about make-up windows and any questions.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com

NORTH DAKOTA — PART 3 OF 7

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

North Dakota requires 22 units with no exit exam , organized around the Choice Ready framework — students build essential skills plus readiness in a post-secondary, workforce, or military track.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

North Dakota's 22 units include 4 English, 3 math, 3 science, 3 social studies, 1 PE/health, and electives (with a CTE, arts, or world-language focus). Districts may require more.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. North Dakota students take state assessments (including the ACT), but a passing score is not required to graduate.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

North Dakota issues a standard diploma, with Choice Ready recognition and the Seal of Biliteracy available.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

The Choice Ready framework has students demonstrate essential skills plus readiness in one of three areas: post-secondary, workforce, or military — a flexible, goal-oriented design.

AT A GLANCE

Units	22
Exit exam?	No
Framework	Choice Ready
Ready in	Post-secondary, workforce or mil...
Confirm with	Your district

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How many credits does North Dakota require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- **Does North Dakota require a test to graduate?** — No — North Dakota has no exit exam; a passing test score is not required to graduate.
- **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

North Dakota publishes the ND Insights report card and identifies lower-performing schools for support under ESSA — rather than assigning a single letter grade or star rating.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

North Dakota reports proficiency, growth, graduation, English-learner progress, and school-quality measures (like attendance and Choice-Ready indicators), and identifies schools for comprehensive or targeted support . Read across the indicators and any support status.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on ND Insights (insights.nd.gov) . Review the indicators (especially growth) and the trend.

AT A GLANCE	
Format	Report card + support identifica...
No	Single grade or stars
Tool	ND Insights
Look up at	insights.nd.gov

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How does North Dakota rate schools?** — North Dakota uses the ND Insights report card plus federal support identification — not a single grade or stars.
- **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

North Dakota does not currently have an active statewide private-school-choice program. Education-savings-account proposals have been debated in the legislature but not enacted into a broad program. North Dakota offers public choice through open enrollment.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no active broad ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in North Dakota. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available). Because proposals recur, confirm whether a new program has passed.

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

Private-choice bills have been debated but not enacted as a broad program. Confirm the current status, since this can change session to session.

AT A GLANCE	
Private choice?	**No active statewide program**
Note	**ESA proposals debated, not enact…**
Public choice	**Open enrollment**
Homeschool	**Legal (with requirements)**
Confirm with	**Your district**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does North Dakota have a private-school-choice program?** — Not currently — North Dakota has debated ESA proposals but has no active broad private-choice program; confirm the latest.
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

North Dakota licenses teachers through the Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB) . You complete an approved program, pass the required Praxis exams, and earn a license.

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **Praxis Core** — Basic skills — or satisfied with qualifying scores
- **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your endorsement area
- **Praxis PLT** — Principles of Learning and Teaching (pedagogy) for your grade band
- **Note** — Requirements vary by endorsement — confirm your specific tests

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE	
Agency	North Dakota ESPB
Basic skills	Praxis Core (or qualifying score...
Content & pedagogy	Praxis Subject + PLT
License	Initial — then renewable

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In North Dakota, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams)...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with North Dakotas agency and your current state

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

North Dakota's state aid is administered through the North Dakota University System and the Department of Public Instruction, with merit and need-based programs plus a workforce matching scholarship.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **North Dakota State Grant** — Need-based aid for North Dakota residents at eligible in-state colleges — limited funds, so file early.

MERIT & LOTTERY SCHOLARSHIPS

- **North Dakota Academic & CTE Scholarship** — A merit award for students who complete a rigorous academic or career-and-technical curriculum and meet GPA/ACT requirements at eligible ND colleges.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

ND Career Builders matches private contributions to provide scholarships (and loan repayment) for students in high-demand occupations who commit to work in North Dakota.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

North Dakota's College SAVE 529 plan offers a state income tax deduction for residents.

AT A GLANCE

Merit	**ND Academic & CTE Scholarship**
Need-based	**ND State Grant**
High-demand (matching)	**ND Career Builders**
529 plan	**College SAVE**
Agency	**ND University System / DPI**

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with North Dakota University System** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

READ NORTH DAKOTA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

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