

# Strategic Plan Goals and Targets for Judicial Branch Education in North Dakota



Prepared by:  
Judicial Branch Education Commission  
North Dakota Supreme Court  
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# 2023 Judicial Branch Education Strategic Plan

## Goals and Targets

**Vision:** *The Judicial Branch Education Commission will promote and support a culture of learning within the judicial branch that prioritizes the continued personal and professional growth of its judges and staff.*

The goal of developing a learning organization is to encourage and facilitate learning at all levels as part of the court system's fundamental culture and overall vision for long-term success. A learning culture gives employees a sense of control and mastery that comes with training and encourages pride and ownership. When staff possess a comprehensive and complete understanding of expectations, they have more confidence in their work and can act quicker and solve problems independently when challenges arise. Empowered, well-trained staff possess the self-motivation to actively seek out solutions.

Staff who are well trained and who have ample opportunities for professional development feel valued, which increases the likelihood of retention. Staff members who have regular, relevant training to update their essential skills stay interested and motivated. In an environment with a strong, shared vision, employees are curious and emboldened to learn what they need to be their best. Learning organizations also learn from their mistakes and actively engage in problem solving.

### Primary Areas of Focus

#### Goal 1 - Clerk of Court Office Access to Training

The goal for this focus area is to address the turnover rate in state-employed offices and to better support both the clerks and deputies in all clerk of court offices. The education components will be addressed through collaboration with Trial Court Administrators and the court's technology department. The focus is on development and retention of deputy clerks and management skills of Clerks and supervisors.

**Strategies currently implemented to address this area of focus include the following:**

- 1) Started Clerk of Court Curriculum – several courses available in LMS (Learning Management System)
- 2) Live@Lunch for Clerk Offices– addresses updates and changes to technology, procedure and practice
- 3) Newsletter – Monthly publication for clerk offices
- 4) Hiring Web Series – live webinars for clerk office managers and supervisors to address interviewing, hiring and retention
- 5) County clerk access to the LMS beginning July 1, 2023.

**Limitations on Current education efforts include the following:**

- 1) The lack of a designated member of the IT staff responsible for assisting in the development of live and on-demand courses and other resources.
- 2) Reluctance on the part of clerk staff to formally express their training needs.
- 3) Reluctance on the part of clerk office staff to teach or facilitate education sessions state-wide due to uncertainty about their own knowledge and skills.
- 4) The lack of uniformity in process and procedure among offices/courts.
- 5) A preference by staff for calling the Help Desk or another office for assistance rather than utilizing existing resources such as online courses and best practice manuals.
- 6) A lack of data from either a needs assessment or report of call ticket information to help direct the development of specific training efforts.



**Targets**

- **Complete new hire curriculum (set of specific asynchronous courses) for clerks available in the Learning Management System (LMS)**
  - o Purposes of Court
  - o Court Structure
  - o Court Procedure & Policy
  - o Court Processes
  - o Courtroom technology (Zoom, DTen, phones, recording equipment, document camera)
  - o Court Specific Software
- **Develop a Curriculum (set of specific courses) for Continuing Education on software, policy, process, procedure, and rules delivered in the following manner:**
  - o On demand asynchronous full courses in LMS developed with IT and other subject matter experts
  - o On demand asynchronous micro-learning (how to) in LMS developed with IT and other subject matter experts
  - o Regularly scheduled live software courses (online or in-person) taught by IT staff, staff attorneys, senior clerks and administrators.
- **Mentoring Program**
  - o Institute a formal mentor program for new Clerks of Court coordinated by the Education Department in collaboration with Trial Court Administrators
- **Needs Assessment**
  - o Conduct a full assessment of all clerk of court offices to better determine the training and education needs of all levels of staff. Assessment should include a review of resources, such as manuals and practice guides, and involve the finance department to better understand issues related to payment of fines and fees.

## Goal 2 – Becoming a Judge: Orientation and Training for New Judges

The goal for this area is to address initial orientation for new judicial officers and specific support during the first year on the bench. Focus will be on conducting criminal, civil and juvenile court hearings, ethics, procedural fairness, demeanor, access issues, court technologies and various substantive legal topics. It will include shared learning experiences and peer support. The education components will be addressed through collaboration with Trial Court Administrators and the court’s technology department.

### Strategies implemented to address this area of focus include the following:

1. General Jurisdiction Course at the National Judicial College.
2. Orientation with State Court Administrator’s Office – 1 day meeting with various departments.
3. New judge curriculum has been started in LMS (currently covers topics addressed in orientation meeting).
4. Bench scripts, bench cards, and other resources available in LMS.

### Limitations on Current education efforts include the following:

1. Small cohorts of judges coming to the bench at one time limit the feasibility of a full in person orientation course.
2. Lawyers come to the bench with different practice backgrounds and expertise in different areas of law.
3. Caseload demands in the district limit the amount of time a new judge can spend learning and observing before taking on a full caseload.
4. One-judge courthouses impede informal peer-to-peer learning.
5. No formal course or courses (curriculum) through IT for learning to use Odyssey and other necessary software.



## Targets

- **Onboarding**
  - o Develop an asynchronous Onboarding curriculum available in the LMS and required for all new judicial officers.
- **Introduction to Odyssey**
  - o Develop, in collaboration with IT, a blended learning (live and asynchronous) Odyssey course for new judges to be taken within the first month. Focus on navigating the program.
- **Virtual Hearings**
  - o Develop, in collaboration with IT, a blended learning (live and asynchronous) course for new judges on the use of available courtroom technology and best practices for holding remote hearings that must be taken within the first 1-3 months. This could also be offered to the judicial support staff.
- **Mentoring Program**
  - o Institute a formal mentor program for new judges coordinated by the Education Department in collaboration with Trial Court Administrators and presiding judges.

- Develop learning cohorts of new and experienced judges from across the state to participate in a full year of live interactive remote education and discussion facilitated by mentor judges.
- **Bench Videos**
  - Produce videos of judicial hearings that align with the existing bench scripts and bench cards in the LMS.

**Note:** Topics to include in new judge curriculum:

- Legal research and writing -This training will teach the judge how to find and analyze legal precedents, as well as how to write effective legal opinions.
- Evidence law - This training will teach the judge about the rules of evidence and how to apply them in court.
- Trial skills- This training will teach the judge how to conduct a trial
- Judicial temperament and ethics - This training will teach the judge about the importance of judicial temperament and ethics, and how to avoid conflicts of interest.
- Communication and conflict resolution - This training will teach the judge how to communicate effectively with others, including how to resolve conflicts in a fair and impartial manner.
- Diversity and inclusion - This training will teach the judge about the importance of diversity and inclusion in the courtroom, and how to create a more inclusive environment for all parties involved in the case.

### **Goal 3 – Education Programming for Judicial Support Staff**

The goal for this focus area is to determine the needs of staff who support judicial officers and offer appropriate education for each level of staffing.

**Strategies implemented to address this area of focus include the following:**

1. Court reporters train annually on reporting software.
2. Staff attorneys/law clerks included in online Live@Lunch trainings.
3. Grammar/Writing courses offered online via 3<sup>rd</sup> party contract for reporters/recorders.
4. Stand-alone writing course offered for staff attorney/law clerks.

**Limitations on Current education efforts include the following:**

1. There are 6 different job titles that currently support judicial officers – court recorder, judicial assistant, court reporter, paralegal, law clerk, and staff attorney. This results in relatively small numbers in each category. While they all provide support and take the record, these positions have different pay grades, different skills sets and different levels of responsibility.
2. In person judge training has not historically been open to other staff members and there could be resistance to including support staff in their training.
3. It is not cost effective to have separate in-person training for small numbers.
4. Few participated in the online grammar/writing courses offered through the 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendor.



## Targets

- **Needs Assessment**
  - Conduct a full assessment of judicial staff to better determine the training and education needs of all levels and type of staff.
- **Appropriate Training**
  - Develop continuing education programs that match the needs of various staff, including research, writing, case law, rules, and statute updates, taking the record, courtroom technology, and court procedure. Training may be in conjunction with judicial training (online environment). Explore the need and feasibility for stand-alone events or concurrent tracks within judicial training.

### **Goal 4 – Standardized Technology Training for all Judicial Branch Employees**

The goal for this area is to offer uniform, consistent training on all software programs and technology equipment utilized by the court system. The purpose is to develop a better skilled workforce, improve efficiencies and accuracy in case management, and to improve staff retention in high turnover areas. The focus is on best practices to create strong foundations for innovation and collaboration that will elevate the organization.

#### **Limitations on Current education efforts include the following:**

1. Currently no developed curriculum or standard course offerings for technology-related training branch wide.
2. Training has been ad hoc by IT staff or provided at the district or unit level
3. Technology department does not have a position primarily dedicated to training/education, however the technology coordinator position (3FTEs) does list a major responsibility as training judicial employees on efficient and effective operation of technology tools, hardware, software and systems.
4. Staff feel they don't have time to participate in training.



## Targets

- **All new hires**
  - Assess the software skills necessary for judicial branch personnel and develop, in collaboration with IT, an onboarding curriculum in the LMS to address these basic skills as well as develop a regular calendar of live courses taught by technology staff addressing updates and new software applications.
- **Judicial Officers**
  - Develop advanced technology courses (live and asynchronous) with technology staff on Odyssey, dashboards, Zoom, remote hearings, e-warrants and other software programs used by judges.

## Secondary Area of Focus

### Leadership Development

- Judges and professional staff
  - Communication skills
  - Learning organizations
  - Managing human resources
  - Conflict resolution
  - Faculty development

## General Resource Needs

- **Staffing**
  - Assign a specific member of the IT staff to work with the education department to design and deliver technology-related education or alternatively assign a technology skilled staff member to the education department in order to prioritize and streamline the delivery of tech-related training to all judges and judicial employees.
- **Facilities**
  - Consider training facility space needs in any legislative study to provide new offices or a new building for the North Dakota Supreme Court and Administrative Office of the Courts.