



NEXT GENERATION LEARNING

Key Policy Components
ExcelinEd Policy Toolkit - 2019

INTRODUCTION

Each student deserves a high-quality education that meets their needs, but the conventional, one-size-fits-all system of education anchored in the industrial age leaves too many students behind. Next generation learning reimagines learning for the 21st century by providing innovative educators flexibility and support to meet the needs of all students.

States can use innovation and pilot programs to send a signal of support for innovation and the need for change, enabling the incubation and scaling of 21st-century education pathways. A key component of these programs is the provision of a **mechanism for flexibility from state-level policy obstacles** that can prevent schools from implementing certain innovations.

“Our current public education system is not intentionally hostile to effective innovation, but the existing structures, policies and traditions work against it at every turn.”

[Personalized Learning at a Crossroads](#), Center for Reinventing Public Education, June 2018

Based on existing state examples and experience, the following are suggested elements of a sound policy for states to consider that wish to design innovation or pilot programs. These seven elements encourage participation while providing safeguards. Best of all, they allow for a completely unique state approach to next generation learning.

1. PURPOSE STATEMENT

Innovation is a broad term that can be difficult to define. Rather than crafting a definition that may ultimately be too restrictive, this section provides an opportunity for states to describe their purposes, intentions and goals. This section can also be used to spotlight desired areas of emphasis such as personalized learning, STEM or college and career pathways. Ultimately, the purpose is to provide a mechanism for districts to apply for flexibility to address old problems with new innovative solutions.

2. INNOVATION PLAN: PROCESS AND ADMINISTRATION

To be designated a School of Innovation, districts must first submit an innovation plan. The primary goal of the plan is to ensure that applicants are truly ready and prepared to implement their proposal. Applicants that are not approved should be given specific feedback that can be addressed and the opportunity to reapply. Schools must demonstrate a willingness to depart from the status quo and redesign existing practices. Applications should feature more than the implementation of a new program or technology. Please note that these programs may simultaneously include grants.

Design Considerations

- Who will administer the program? Who will approve applications? The role of the state superintendent and the state board of education will vary from state to state.
- Should there be required timelines for approvals? For example, a requirement that the department respond within 60 days and if applications are not approved the department identifies reasons why.
- How long does the program designation last for approved applicants? Three to five years is common but optional. However, enough time must be allotted not only for full implementation but for a thoughtful design and planning phase.



3. INNOVATION PLAN: REQUIREMENTS

Innovation plans should be designed with brevity and simplicity in mind, and many states give broad authority to the state department or state board to craft them. However, experience has proven there are some components that are critical.

1. **District-level support is essential to school-level implementation.** A resolution adopted by the local board supporting the plan and anticipated timeline for implementation goes far in demonstrating support. Similarly, the district should be able to identify the resources and support it will provide—including what flexibility will be given from local policies and procedures to support implementation.
2. **Applicants must be required to show meaningful parent, educator and community engagement as well as a long-term community outreach and stakeholder communication plan.** Robust engagement and long-term planning can help ensure the sustainability of innovation in the face of implementation challenges and changes in leadership or staff.
3. **Schools of innovation must be able to demonstrate progress and, ultimately, success.** Innovation plans should include a description of goals, performance targets, indicators or metrics of success as well as expected outcomes. All data required for state accountability are starting points, but applicants should be encouraged to propose and develop new measures as well.

4. FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

There is one common component among existing state innovation and pilot programs across the country: the opportunity for schools to apply for flexibility from state statutes, regulations and policies that may hinder full implementation of the school's innovation plan and propose alternative solutions.

However, the policy should also clearly iterate which policies are *not* available for exemption—such as health, safety and civil rights requirements—and that schools of innovation shall continue to be subject to any statutes and regulations that are not explicitly waived.

Waiver requests should include a description of the innovative practices that schools seek to implement and how the waiver will facilitate implementation. Participating schools should be allowed to submit amendments for further flexibility as they seek to implement their innovation plans.

5. INNOVATION NETWORK

The most effective and efficient way to support schools of innovation and provide technical assistance is through a state network. Through these networks or incubators, schools can identify the policies that hinder full implementation as well as collaborate, brainstorm solutions and develop state resources to support a statewide transition.

Design Considerations

- How will the network be supported, and who will administer it?
- Should the department present a plan to the board to provide technical assistance and support to the network which may include a contract with a third-party provider?
- Will funding be provided to schools? The department? A third-party provider?



6. STUDENT PROTECTIONS

Many new learning models push the boundaries of time, place and pace and seek to provide learning opportunities outside of the traditional school building and school day. Furthermore, some innovative practices are moving away from the traditional age-based, grade-level system and may result in nontraditional report cards, diplomas and transcripts. State innovation programs should ensure that students attending a school of innovation are not at a disadvantage if they need to transfer to a new school or seek to apply for higher education admission, scholarships and financial aid. [Learn more.](#)

7. EVALUATION AND REPORTS

Innovation programs exist to improve outcomes for students by providing statutory and regulatory flexibility. Authorizing policies must ensure there are reporting and evaluation requirements to determine progress and success. The state should provide clear examples of metrics and indicators that include, at a minimum, achievement and growth measures on statewide assessments. Evaluations and reports should also include the goals, performance targets, expected outcomes with indicators or metrics of success as well as expected outcomes provided in the school applications. [Learn more.](#)

RESEARCH & RESOURCES

- [Next Generation Learning: Policy Summary](#)
- [Next Generation Learning: Model Policy](#)
- [Policy, Pilots, and the Path to Competency-Based Education: National Landscape Report](#)
- [Tale of Three States](#)
- [The Path to Personalized Learning: The Next Chapter in the Tale of Three States](#)
- [5 Policy Briefs for States Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning](#)