State Progress Toward Next Generation Learning

A NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

State Progress Toward Next Generation Learning: A National Landscape identifies next generation learning programs across the country and presents seven Key Policy Components for state leaders to consider on their paths to innovation. The report reflects data and information gathered during a spring 2019 review of next generation learning programs in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., and offers the following elements.

▶ **PART 1**
National Landscape Overview provides a look at the current national landscape based on our updated 50-state survey of state programs.

▶ **PART 2**
7 Key Policy Components offers a detailed summary of state efforts and recommendations aligned to each component.

Clearing the Way for Next Generation Learning

Next generation learning prioritizes innovative, student-centered practices to ensure every student succeeds. But the transition from conventional, one-size-fits-all systems to systems that identify and adapt to student needs, cannot be achieved without the commitment of local leaders to try new approaches. **The hallmark of next generation learning programs is the opportunity for participating school districts or schools to identify the state laws and policies that present obstacles to innovation and improvement and to request exemption from them.**

What Is Next Generation Learning?

ExcelinEd's strategy to advance mastery-based, personalized learning expanded in 2018 to encompass a broader range of innovative models and approaches comprehensively described as **next generation learning**. This strategy reflects and is intended to support a wide variety of state approaches because the process of redesigning education will be unique to each state's context. So, it's essential that states embark on this journey with a clear understanding of why they are pursuing next generation learning.

Learn more about next generation learning at ExcelinEd.org.

Read the Full Report
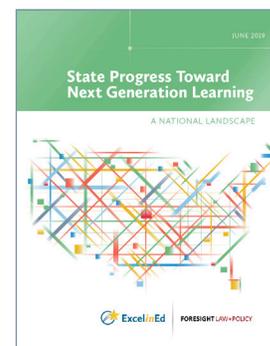
Taking Advantage of Existing Flexibility

Our research shows that most states already have established flexibility authority that can be used to promote next generation learning.

This realization of the extent of existing flexibility led us to search more deeply to understand why there's a widely held belief that schools don't have flexibility opportunities when, in fact, they often do. We have identified three immediate challenges which we seek to address through this report.

3 Challenges to Next Generation Learning

1 **Some states still need to create a program to incentivize next generation learning, and many states can take steps to strengthen or expand existing programs.** *State Progress Toward Next Generation Learning* identifies challenges states may face as they pursue next generation learning and offers clear guidance to consider as they design general innovation or pilot programs to meet the needs of their students and communities.

2 **K-12 leaders and practitioners are often unaware of existing opportunities to design and implement next generation systems.** State leaders must do more to build understanding of existing opportunities and how school leaders can secure waivers or exemptions from regulations that stifle innovation. Often state education agencies are unaware of programs that have been in place for a long time or that were created for a different purpose. Opportunities for flexibility must be cataloged and effectively communicated to schools. Some states are beginning to prioritize this. In Idaho, for example, lawmakers took action to require the state's department of education to "conduct a statewide awareness campaign to promote understanding and interest in mastery-based education…"

3 **Most states are missing out on opportunities to use data from waivers to drive needed regulatory reform.** State leaders must ensure systems are in place to collect the data needed to evaluate the success and impact of next generation learning programs. The underlying premise of these programs is that burdensome policies stand in the way of schools being able to evolve. Identifying the most frequently requested waivers—and the reasons why and proposed solutions— will provide policymakers valuable information as they make systemic changes. Currently only a few states—including Arkansas and Colorado—report information on waivers.

Existing Flexibility

WAIVERS
Interest in student-centered approaches has led nearly every state legislature to create or expand authorizing provisions under which a state board of education or chief state school officer can consider and approve requests for waivers from state law and regulations. Many of these provisions provide specifically for waivers from seat time requirements or minimum hours of instruction.

PROGRAMS
Thirty three states and Washington, D.C., have established general innovation or pilot programs to explore next generation learning. Most next generation program statutes offer much broader flexibility than waivers. General innovation and pilot programs often allow exemptions that are generally on par with those available to charter schools.

Next Generation Learning Programs in the U.S.

This map shows current state policies related to next generation learning programs. It is intended only to reflect state law and policy foundations. It does not attempt to describe the status of program implementation.

Statutory	Statutory	Non-Statutory	Expired/Terminated	No Program
INNOVATION PROGRAM	PILOT PROGRAM	INNOVATION *OR* PILOT PROGRAM	INNOVATION *OR* PILOT PROGRAM	

*The primary purpose of the next generation learning programs in Florida, North Carolina and Washington is to support school improvement or to reward good performance with flexibility.
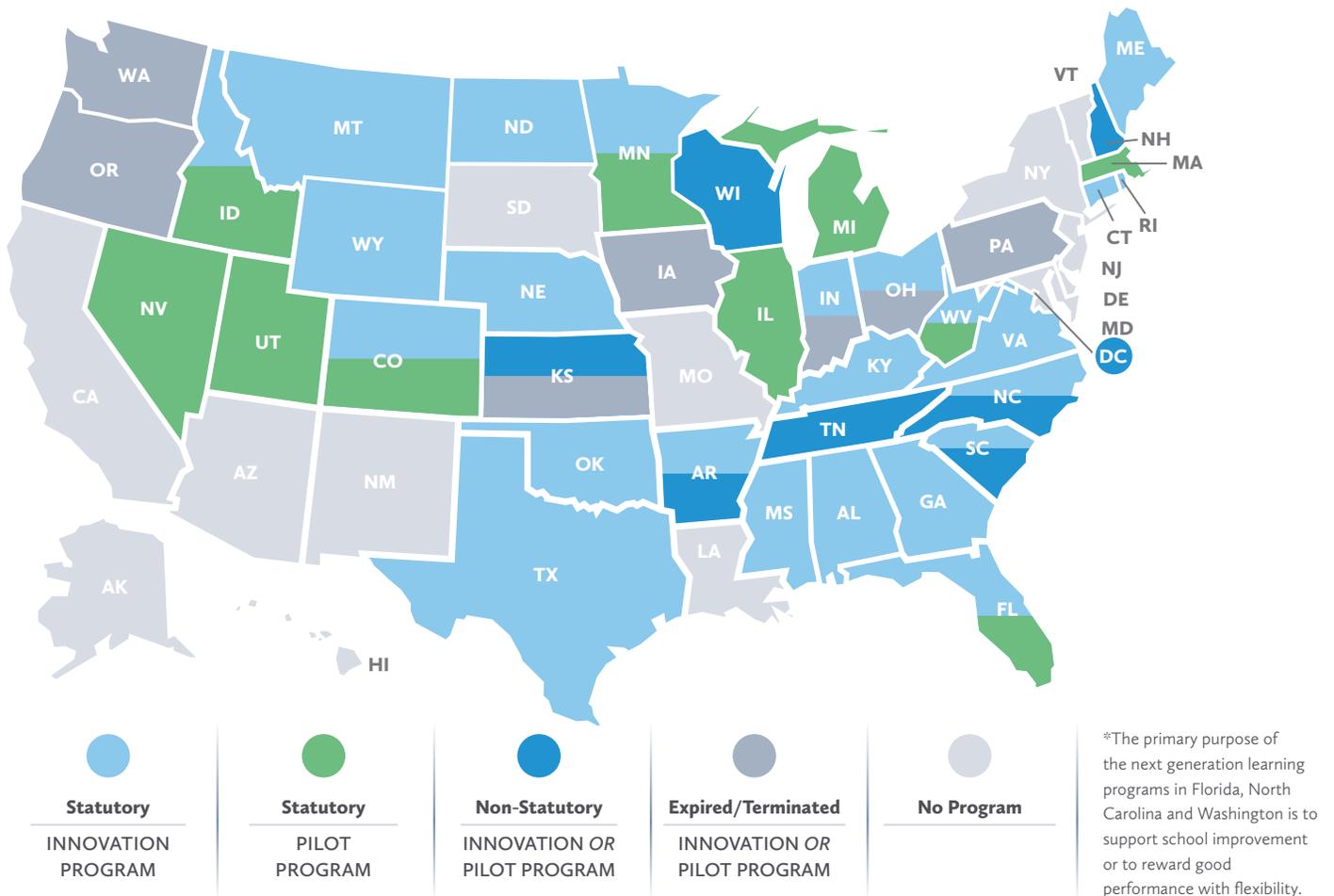
The report distinguishes between programs that are codified (statutory) and those that are not (non-statutory). It also distinguishes between general innovation programs in statute and pilot programs in statute.

Findings and Trends

State Progress Toward Next Generation Learning identifies the following findings:

- **33 states and Washington, D.C, are or will soon be administering a next generation learning program.**

- **Since 2016, at least 15 states have created new next generation learning programs. The approaches taken by state policymakers are varied, but all have taken steps to give schools flexibility to find new solutions to existing challenges.**

- **During that same period, at least 6 states have amended or expanded existing next generation learning programs.**

- **In Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington, next generation programs have sunset, been suspended or otherwise terminated.**

- **In 13 states, there are no next generation learning programs.**

7 Key Policy Components

Using over 50 examples from state programs, *State Progress Toward Next Generation Learning* identifies **seven Key Policy Components** for states to consider when designing general innovation or pilot programs. These seven components encourage participation and provide guidelines to ensure programs follow the state's vision for next generation learning while protecting participating students and ensuring school accountability. Best of all, the components allow for a completely unique state approach to next generation learning.

1. Purpose Statement

Define a purpose statement that expresses the next generation learning program's vision and intent.

2. Innovation Plan Requirements

Define innovation plan requirements—such as criteria for participation and performance expectations—or provide administrators with guidance on establishing plan requirements in regulations.

3. Innovation Plan Process and Administration

Establish in statute a well-designed process and guidelines for next generation learning program administration.

4. Flexibility Request

Provide an opportunity for schools to apply for flexibility from state statutes, regulations and policies that may hinder innovation planning and implementation.

5. Innovation Network

Establish school innovation networks with identified goals to create a space for collaboration and mutual support.

6. Student Protections

Ensure that students attending a school of innovation or a pilot program 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.

7. Evaluation and Reports

Provide for the collection and reporting of program data, progress monitoring, program evaluation and continuous improvement.

Using these Key Policy Components and the other resources described by the report, policymakers and other stakeholders can create strong foundations for next generation learning programs and begin to address existing challenges.