

Innovation Schools Update

Background

The Innovation Schools initiative, a signature component of *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* that the Legislature approved and Governor Patrick signed into law in January 2010, provides educators and other stakeholders across the state with the opportunity to create new **in-district and autonomous schools that can implement creative and inventive strategies, increase student achievement, and reduce achievement gaps while keeping school funding within districts**. These unique schools operate with increased autonomy and flexibility in six key areas: curriculum; budget; school schedule and calendar; staffing (including waivers from or exemptions to collective bargaining agreements); professional development; and school district policies.

Momentum to Date

A little over a year and a half has passed since the statute establishing Innovation Schools was signed into law. In that short amount of time, twenty Innovation Schools have been approved in thirteen different districts across the state, in urban, suburban and rural municipalities. These schools are on the vanguard of this initiative and have inspired others across the state to develop Innovation Schools in their localities. We expect another substantial group of Innovation Schools will be established this coming year.

Types of Schools Established

Innovation Schools serve students in varying grade levels (e.g. elementary, middle, and high school) and are of varying types (e.g. new or converted schools or programs within an existing school). Many of these schools are organized around specific themes such as **STEM, dual language** instruction, **International Baccalaureate (IB)** programs, **alternative education** opportunities (e.g. dropout prevention and dual enrollment at community colleges), **virtual platforms** and **wraparound** services. Many of the schools operate with novel schedules that will **significantly increase instructional time** for students and **professional learning opportunities** for educators.

Support for the Establishment of Innovation Schools

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Executive Office of Education (EOE) have worked collaboratively to support the establishment of Innovation Schools. The DESE and EOE have provided information and guidance to potential applicants and community stakeholders. Additionally, funds have been secured to support technical assistance, as well as planning and implementation grants.

This fall, over 100 participants attended Innovation School Information Sessions and webinars organized by the Executive Office of Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Working sessions have been offered to provide individualized consultation with applicants. In addition, the Innovation School website provides a host of information for potential applicants and district leaders. When requested by interested parties, EOE and DESE staff members have made themselves available for informational meetings in local communities. Additionally, the EOE has established an Innovation Schools Advisory Group that includes the leaders of many of the state associations (including AFT, MTA, MSSAA, MASC, MASS, MESPA, MCPSA), as well as other state-wide education leaders, in order to solicit the group's collective wisdom as to how best support the Innovation Schools initiative.

Innovation School Planning and Implementation Grants

EOE and the DESE have awarded two types of planning and implementation grants to eligible applicants and partner districts. Planning grant awards are for up to \$15,000. Implementation grant awards are for between \$25,000 and \$75,000. Innovation School Planning and Implementation Grants are supported with state Race to the Top funding. Next Generation Learning Models Innovation School Planning and Implementation Grants are supported with a grant to the EOE from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. \$350,000 in planning grants were awarded in March 2011 to applicants planning Innovation Schools. \$660,000 in implementation grants were awarded to approved Innovation Schools in August 2011. A second round of planning grants will be awarded in late winter 2012 followed by a second round of implementation grants to be awarded in summer 2012.

Eligible Applicants for Planning and Implementation Grants

Innovation Schools can be established by teachers, school and district administrators, superintendents, union leaders, school committees, parents, parent-teacher organizations, colleges and universities, non-profit community-based organizations, non-profit businesses or corporations, non-profit charter school operators, non-profit education management organizations, educational collaboratives, consortia of these groups, or other non-profit groups authorized by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Operation of Innovation Schools

An Innovation School operates according to an **innovation plan** which describes the areas of autonomy and flexibility and specific strategies that will be implemented in the school. At least one of the six areas of autonomy and flexibility must be addressed in this plan, and the applicant can determine which additional areas will be utilized in the short- and long-term. An innovation plan includes detailed information about the following:

- Specific **instructional, curricular, and assessment strategies** that will be implemented to improve student achievement and school performance;
- Allocation of **fiscal and other resources**;
- **School schedule and calendar**;
- Specific **recruitment, employment, evaluation, and compensation strategies** for staff members, and if applicable, a description of **proposed waivers from or modifications to collective bargaining agreements**;
- **Professional development opportunities** for all administrators, teachers, and staff members; and
- If applicable, **proposed waivers from district policies**.

The innovation plan must also include **annual measurable goals** that assess factors such as student achievement and school performance. In exchange for the authority to operate the school with increased autonomy, Innovation School operators are held responsible for advancing student learning and meeting these annual benchmarks. Innovation Schools will receive the **same per pupil allocation** as any other school in the district, and its operators can also secure grant or other types of supplemental funding to implement the innovation plan.

Eligible applicants can create an **Innovation Zone** that may include a set of schools within a district or geographic region, schools that will operate in accordance with particular instructional or curricular themes, or schools that are defined by other factors as determined by the applicants.

Multiple districts can work together to establish an Innovation School that would serve students from different communities.

Virtual Innovation Schools can also be established; they must operate in accordance with the Innovation Schools statute as well as additional regulations that were adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in July 2010. These regulations are available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr48.html?section=05>.

Innovation Schools Authorization Process

Innovation Schools are established in accordance with a locally-based authorization process.

1. An eligible applicant submits an initial prospectus to the district superintendent. *Within 30 days of receiving the prospectus, the superintendent must convene a screening committee that includes the superintendent or a designee, a school committee member or a designee, and a representative from the local teachers' union; two-thirds approval from the screening committee is required for the applicant to move forward.*
2. An innovation plan committee that includes up to 11 school, district, and community representatives develops the innovation plan.
3. Upon completion of the innovation plan, specific steps are required.
 - A conversion school requires a two-thirds majority vote of educators in the school.
 - A new school requires negotiations among the applicant, teacher's union, and superintendent if the innovation plan includes proposed waivers from or modifications to the collective bargaining agreement.
4. The innovation plan is submitted to the school committee, which must hold at least one public hearing. A majority vote of the full school committee is required for approval.
5. Upon approval, the Innovation School is authorized for a period of up to five years, and can be reauthorized by the school committee at the end of each term. *The superintendent will work with the school committee to evaluate the school in accordance with the annual measurable goals included in the innovation plan. In addition, the superintendent can work with the operator of the Innovation School and the school committee to revise the plan as necessary.*

Additional Information

Guidance documents about the Innovation Schools initiative are available at the following website: www.mass.gov/edu/innovationschools. For additional information about the planning and implementation grants, please contact Bridget Rodríguez (bridget.rodriguez@state.ma.us) in the Executive Office of Education (EOE), or Marlon Davis (mldavis@doe.mass.edu) at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Approved Innovation Schools

Below is a list of Innovation Schools that have received school committee approval. These schools are for varying grade levels (e.g. elementary, middle, and high school) and school types (e.g. new or converted schools or programs within an existing school). Many of these schools are organized around specific themes like **STEM**, **dual language** instruction, **International Baccalaureate (IB)** programs, **alternative education** opportunities (like dropout prevention and dual enrollment at community colleges), **virtual platforms** and **wraparound** services. Many of the schools will also operate with novel schedules that will **increase instructional time** for students and **professional learning opportunities** for educators. Schools denoted with an asterisk* have been approved and will open as an Innovation School in September 2012. All others are currently in operation.

BOSTON

- Roger Clap Community Academy: new school, grades K-5, lengthened school day, more professional development, inclusive governing board
- Margarita Muñiz Academy*: new school, grades 9 – 12, dual language (English/Spanish) high school

DENNIS-YARMOUTH

- Marguerite E. Small School: conversion school, grades 4-5, extended day for students through staggered teacher schedule

FALMOUTH

- Lawrence School: conversion school, grades 7-8, STEM, distributive leadership model

GREENFIELD

- Discovery School at Four Corners: conversion school, grades K-3, environmentally themed curriculum with expanded staff meeting time
- Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield: new school, grades 9-12, offers completely virtual school experience

MAHAR

- Pathways Early College High School: new school, grades 11 and 12, a collaboration with Mount Wachusett Community College, students earn a high school diploma and college credits

MONSON

- Monson New Century High School: conversion school, grades 9-12, individualized programs in 11th and 12th grade

NORTH MIDDLESEX

- Baccalaureate School of North Middlesex: school-within-a-school, grades 11-12, IB program

QUABOAG

- Quaboag Innovation Early College: conversion, school-within-a-school, grades 11-12, STEM, dual enrollment
- Quaboag Innovation Middle School: conversion school, grades 7-8, STEM

REVERE

- Paul Revere Innovation School: conversion school, grades K-5, creative scheduling to create common planning time, shared leadership model

SPRINGFIELD

- Springfield Renaissance Innovation School: conversion school, grade 6-12, focus on college and career readiness, Expeditionary Learning

WEST SPRINGFIELD

- 21st Century Skills Academy: new school, grades 9-12, hybrid virtual and in-school course work, work-based learning

WORCESTER

- The Chandler Magnet School: conversion school, grades preK-6, dual language program (English/Spanish)
- Goddard Scholars Academy at Sullivan Middle School: conversion school-within-a-school, grades 6-8, accelerated magnet program
- Goddard School of Science and Technology: conversion school, grades preK-6, STEM
- University Park Campus School: conversion school, grades 7-12, college preparatory
- Woodland Academy: conversion school, grades pre-K-6, new staffing autonomies, enhanced governing board

SALEM

- Carlton Elementary School*: conversion school, grades K-5, individualized learning, continuous progress model, trimester student transitions