The Innovation Schools Initiative, a signature component of An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap signed into law in January 2010, provides educators and stakeholders across the Commonwealth with the opportunity to create new or conversion in-district autonomous schools. These schools operate with increased autonomy and flexibility in six key areas (curriculum, instruction, and assessment; schedule and calendar; staffing; professional development; district policies and procedures; and budget), and can implement creative strategies to create unique learning environments with the goal of establishing the school conditions that lead to improved teaching and learning.

Innovation Schools Fellowship Program

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department), in collaboration with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education (EOE) created the Innovation Schools Fellowship program to provide support for the cultivation of “break the mold” new or conversion innovation schools. The Fellowship will support prospective innovation school operators by providing support for an in-depth, yearlong new or conversion school development planning process in or more of the following educational models: 1) Blended Learning, 2) Year Round School Schedule, and 3) Early College or Multiple Pathways.

It is the expectation of the Department and EOE that all Fellows will develop an Innovation School Prospectus to be submitted for review by the district superintendent and screening committee. Additionally, the Department and EOE expect that the selected Fellows will serve as their respective districts lead applicant for the prospective innovation school and progress through each stage of the innovation schools authorization process. Progression through the innovation schools authorization process includes, but is not limited to the formation and convening of an Innovation Plan Committee in coordination with the district and community.

Fellowship Program and Award Timeline

The Innovation Schools Fellowship will commence in fiscal year 2015 (July 1, 2015) and conclude on June 30, 2015. The Department, in collaboration with EOE will begin the review of completed grant applications in March 2014 and selected applicants will be invited to participate in a formal interview process beginning late March into April 2014.

Selection Process

Due diligence will be done on the part of the Department and EOE during the selection process. The selection process will include a multi-stage review process, panel interview, and reference checks. The panel interview will include representatives from the Department and EOE, the identified Fellow, the district superintendent or designee, and additional district members as appropriate.
**Ideal Fellow Characteristics**

The ideal Fellow has the passion, capacity, and commitment to lead the development of a successful innovation school dedicated to increasing student achievement. The ideal Fellow will possess characteristics needed to bring a group of stakeholders together to work on a unified vision and meet a unified goal.

Additional ideal characteristics are:
- Highly Organized;
- Strategic Thinker;
- Strong Communicator;
- Strong Facilitation Skills;
- Strong Collaborator;
- Willingness to Learn; and
- Capacity to Inspire.

**Department and EOE Support**

The Fellowship is designed to include a multi-faceted approach to support the Fellows during their in-depth yearlong planning process. During the course of the Fellowship, Fellows will participate in cohort working sessions/meetings, conference calls, and structured coaching activities. This multi-faceted approach will serve as a support system for the Fellows while keeping the Department and EOE apprised of the progress that is being made.

*It is the expectation of the Department and EOE that all Fellows will develop an Innovation School Prospectus to be submitted for review by the district superintendent and facilitate the innovation school approval process through to final submission of Innovation School plan to the local school committee.*

**Concept Paper**

All Innovation Schools Fellowship applicants are required to complete and submit a three-to-five page Innovation Schools Concept Paper.

The concept paper must address the following areas:
- The candidate’s general concept for the prospective innovation school and the key design elements of the educational model that will be implemented;
- The student population that the prospective innovation school would serve;
- The need and/or problem the prospective innovation school would address;
- A brief overview of the specific autonomies that will be used to improve student achievement; and
- How community support (e.g., school and district level teachers and staff, family, business, and non-profit) for the prospective innovation school has been or will be garnered.