

Innovation Schools: Using Innovation to Promote Academic Achievement

The Innovation Schools initiative, a signature component of *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* that Governor Patrick signed in January 2010, provides educators and other stakeholders across the state with the opportunity to create new **in-district 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.

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 will operate 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 must include 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 will be 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>.

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.*

Resources to Support the Establishment of Innovation Schools

The Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will award planning and implementation grants to eligible applicants and partner districts based on availability of funding. Innovation Schools Planning Grants are supported with state Race to the Top funding. The Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for grants will be posted at www.mass.gov/edu/innovationschools.

Additionally, technical assistance will be provided to eligible applicants to support the development of innovation plans.

Additional Information

Guidance documents about the Innovation School model and approval process approved initial prospectuses and innovation plans, and information about the planning and implementation grants are available at www.mass.gov/edu/innovationschools.

For more information about the Innovation Schools initiative, please contact Bridget Rodríguez, Director of Planning and Collaboration at the Executive Office of Education (bridget.rodriguez@state.ma.us) or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (achievement@doe.mass.edu).