



INNOVATION ZONES

CREATING POLICY FLEXIBILITY FOR COMPETENCY-BASED
PERSONALIZED LEARNING

What Are Innovation Zones?

Innovation zones help state policy leaders identify outdated policies and regulations that may get in the way of educators designing innovative models.

State education agencies interested in shifting their role from enforcing compliance to one of supporting innovation and building capacity in districts are working to spur new innovative instructional models and create space for competency-based pathways in student-centered learning models. States can create an innovation zone by passing enabling legislation to set up a program or offering certain waivers or exemptions from administrative regulations and statutory provisions.

Innovation zones help state policy leaders create space in state policy for local educators to design innovative education models. They allow local districts or schools to request a waiver from outdated state policies and regulations that communities have identified as a barrier to high-quality, student-centered learning. These models are also known as “districts of innovation” or “schools of innovation;” the concept name varies from state to state.

Why Are Innovation Zones Important?

An innovation zone authority provides increased flexibility for a state to waive certain regulations and requirements for schools and systems beginning to plan, design and implement personalized, competency-based education models.

Innovation zones offer school districts waivers from state education policy to support practitioners in the process of developing and implementing new learning models. As practitioners implement their models, any rules or regulations that impede the model development are brought to light and can be addressed through these waivers. This shifts the role of the state agency from one of compliance enforcement to one that supports enabling innovative learning programs in schools and systems.

Legislative Examples

The following are some examples of legislation, statutes or regulations creating innovation zones.

ARKANSAS



Arkansas created a program to support districts of innovation. A school district may petition the Arkansas State Board of Education for all or some of the same waivers granted to an open-enrollment public charter school.

[AR Code § 6-23-304 \(2012\)](#)

COLORADO



The Innovative Schools Act enables the creation of innovation schools and innovation school zones within school districts. Upon designation of a district of innovation, the Colorado State School Board may waive any statutes or rules specified in a school district's innovation plan.

[C.R.S. 22-32.5-101](#)

KENTUCKY



The Kentucky Board of Education is authorized to approve districts of innovation. Kentucky public school districts may apply to be exempt from certain administrative regulations and statutory provisions, as well as waiving local board policy, in an effort to improve the learning of students.

[KY Rev Stat § 160.107 \(2013\)](#)

MINNESOTA



[Minnesota Session Laws, 2017, 1st Special Session, Chapter 5, Sec. 52](#)

Minnesota's legislature established innovation zone partnerships to allow school districts and charter schools to research and implement innovative education programming models designed to better prepare students for the world of the 21st century. The legislation enables school districts, charter schools, postsecondary institutions, nonprofit organizations and units of government to join together to form an innovation zone partnership. A partnership may apply for exemptions from most state laws and regulations. exemptions from most state laws and regulations.

MISSISSIPPI



The Mississippi State Board of Education is authorized to approve public school districts of innovation for the purposes of improving students' educational performance. Districts of innovation shall be provided flexibility from selected board regulations.

[SB 2191 \(2015\)](#)

Amends Title 37 of the Mississippi Code of 1972.

NEW YORK CITY



Issued by the New York City Department of Education, this Memorandum of Understanding creates the iZone for the purposes of a community of schools using innovative approaches to improve outcomes to receive flexibility from many standard regulations.

[iLearnNYC Regulations](#)

NORTH DAKOTA



North Dakota created an innovative education program. The superintendent of public instruction may issue waivers to school districts from an array of statutory requirements in order to improve the delivery of education, provide increased educational opportunities for students or improve the academic success of students.

[SB 2186 \(2017\)](#)

Amends Section 15.1-06-08.1 of the North Dakota Century Code.

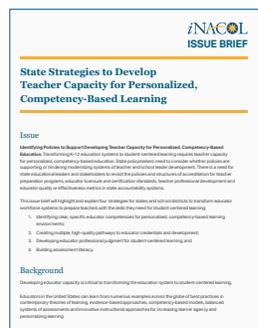
Recommendation for State Policymakers to Create Innovation Zones to Support Student-Centered Learning

States can create innovation zones to improve education systems and catalyze the development of personalized, competency-based learning models. By authorizing the state board or department of education to create innovation zones and issue school districts waivers from state statutes, regulations and requirements that impose barriers for modernization, school leaders will be provided with the flexibility they need to advance transformative practices and move to innovative, student-centered learning models.

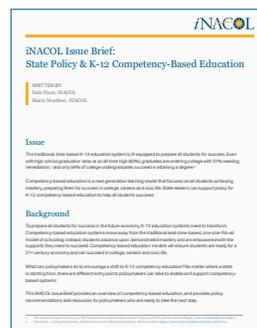
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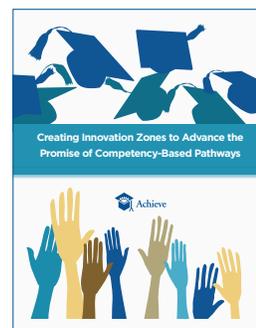
iNACOL – [Current to Future State: Issues and Action Steps for State Policy to Support Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#)



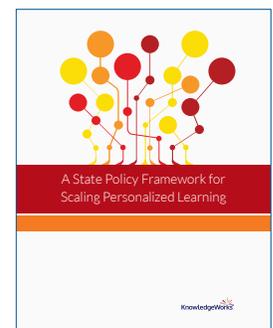
iNACOL – [State Strategies to Develop Teacher Capacity for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#)



iNACOL – [State Policy & K-12 Competency-Based Education](#)



Achieve, Inc. – [Creating Innovation Zones to Advance the Promise of Competency-Based Pathways](#)



KnowledgeWorks – [A State Policy Framework for Scaling Personalized Learning](#)

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The mission of iNACOL is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all.

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