



Innovation Zones Around the Country

A Summary of their Status - December 2011

Cities

Baltimore

The mission of the Office of New Initiatives (ONI) is to transform the district through the creation of new, innovative schools, and to develop other initiatives such as cooperative partnerships.

The ONI oversees the application process and start up of all new Baltimore City Public Schools, which include charter, contract, and the conversion Transformation Schools. In addition, the Office manages cross-departmental work to incubate new initiatives and provide support for systemic changes in the district.

Reporting structure:

The office's director reports the Chief Academic Officer, who reports to the district CEO. Find the [Baltimore Public Schools organizational chart](#) here.

Website:

http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Departments/Chief_Academic_Officer/O...

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Boston

The pilot schools program was designed in 1994 as a Boston Public Schools (BPS) district effort to counter the anticipated appeal of chartered schools in the city, established one year prior. It is responsible for creating new forms of schools and increasing the options available to students and teachers. It is charged explicitly with better serving at risk urban students.

Boston's mayor, the district's school committee (board), the district superintendent, and Boston Teachers Union came together to create the program. In those early days, the Boston Foundation and Boston Globe newspaper provided essential support and advocacy to the schools and to the merits of the pilot school effort generally.

Pilot schools are run by a governing board. These boards vary in size and composition, and may include the principal, teachers, students, parents, business partners, higher education partners, and active community members. In practice the board has full authority over policies, though power ultimately lies with the superintendent.

The district presently operates 23 pilot schools, serving approximately 15 percent of total enrollment. The schools, while overseen by the district's Chief Academic Officer, take part in a city-wide network facilitated by the non-profit [Center for Collaborative Education](#). The CCE provides schools with coordination support and assistance, including coaching services, professional development, advocacy, and research and evaluation.

Horace Mann chartered schools are another component of that city's innovation zone. Horace Mann schools are independent chartered schools, operated and managed by a board of trustees.

Horace Mann schools are identical to commonwealth chartered schools in terms of autonomy, but they do have some connections to the district. Their funding is provided in a lump-sum, set at the BPS average. Money flows to the school through the central office. The school may opt in to central office services, and they may be housed in BPS facilities at no additional cost. Teachers belong to the local union and are employed on the district's salary scale, but the schools are exempt from the bumping that takes place within the district.

In 2005 the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and BPS negotiated an agreement under which the Boston Teachers Union would open a new, teacher-run pilot school. [The Boston Teacher Union School](#) opened its doors in 2009.



In Boston independence and flexibility for new schools are valued and protected as part of a district effort at innovation. Meanwhile the chartering mechanism has been popular, with chartered schools regularly operating at their cap in the city. The civic and political community in the city has been supportive of efforts at innovation, perhaps most notably the teacher union.

The pilot school relationship with the teachers union:

Recognizing the potential professional appeal of independent chartered schools in Massachusetts, which are not unionized, the BTU was instrumental in forging the pilot schools arrangement. The schools provide more choices for teachers, as well as for students.

Pilot schools have full authority to hire and release teachers. When a school hires, it may take any qualified teacher whether they are a member of the district union or not. The teacher then becomes part of the BTU. If he is a permanent teacher and does not meet the needs of the school—for any reason—he may then be excessed into the district pool. Pilots get the quick and responsive staffing power they need to shape their school, and teachers get job security. Partly for this reason, and more-so for their independent and alternative characters, pilot schools have shown to be overwhelmingly popular places to work.

Five key areas of autonomy:

Pilot schools have autonomy over five key areas: budgets, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar.

Reporting structure:

Pilot Schools have their own boards, with oversight by the superintendent's office.

Find the [Boston Public Schools organizational chart](#) here.

Website:

<http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/node/20>

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Chicago

The Office of New Schools (ONS) at Chicago Public Schools oversees all chartered and alternative schools created prior to 2005, and then all schools created through the [Renaissance 2010 initiative](#). The Renaissance initiative was begun by Mayor Richard Daley in 2004 in response to the popularity of chartered schools in the city. The goal of the initiative is to create 100 new district schools by 2010.

Three types of schools may be created through the Renaissance initiative (and subsequently overseen by the ONS): Chartered, contracted, and semi-autonomous [performance schools](#). The district employs all three platforms in creating new schools. The type of school determines its degree of autonomy from the central office, its flexibility over staffing and management issues, and its structure of governance.

Currently the ONS oversees 125 schools in the city, 94 of which were created through the Renaissance initiative. The district has a total of approximately 680 schools. There are 7 more Renaissance schools approved to open in 2010.

Chartered and contracted schools are operated by a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, which signs a five-year agreement with the district to operate the school.

The ONS assigns a school support coordinator a portfolio of schools that he works closely with at various levels. The school support coordinator serves as the liaison between the schools and the district.

The [Renaissance Schools Fund \(RSF\)](#) is a nonprofit organization that supports Renaissance 2010 through fundraising and the recruitment and development of schools.

The [Chicago Public Schools Autonomy Chart](#) outlines differences in chartered, contracted, and performance schools along the lines of curriculum and calendar, staffing and management. The [Chicago Public Schools Funding Chart](#) outlines how school funds are determined.

Reporting structure:

The Executive Officer of the Office of New Schools reports directly to the district CEO. Find the [Chicago Public Schools organizational chart](#) here.

Website:

<http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us>



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Denver

The Denver New Schools Office (NSO) is responsible for the creation of new schools inside the district. Established in 2008, it employs a portfolio approach by starting new district schools and transforming existing ones through chartering and contracts. It oversees chartered schools in the city, and facilitates two district reform efforts titled [Beacon Schools](#) and a [School Improvement Grant program](#).

The business community in Denver has been very supportive of the district's efforts at creating new schools. In 2008 there were 25,000 students on waitlists for Denver chartered schools, and business leaders began to press for the creation of more options.

The office identifies and responds to the needs and priorities of the city. In its first years the office is focusing primarily on the development of secondary schools, including career and technical programs.

Reporting structure:

The office reports through the Assistant to the Superintendent for Innovation and Reform.

Website:

<http://planning.dpsk12.org/newschools>

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Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the country's second largest in terms of enrollment, with almost 690,000 students and approximately 650 schools across eight districts.

Since 2006 LAUSD has been running a limited [pilot schools](#) program that enabled ten semi-autonomous small schools to expanded flexibility to school and community leaders. Similar to the pilot schools in Boston, pilots in Los Angeles remain part of the unified school district and teachers are both employees of the district and members of the union.

Under a 2009 district board [Public School Choice](#) reform plan, outside operators and partners are invited to bid to operate up to a third of the district's schools.

LAUSD already uses multiple platforms to create schools, including pilot schools, chartered schools, and magnet schools. The reform plan pertains to newly-created schools, of which there will be 50 over the years 2010-2013, and all students in schools with "3+" status, a classification pertaining to failing qualification under No Child Left Behind. There were over 200 schools in that category in 2009 when the resolution was approved. Between one-quarter and two-thirds of district schools up for competitive bid.

Those doing the bidding for schools must have 501(c)3 legal status, operate publicly, and be open to all students, though not necessarily equally: restrictions are imposed on student composition as the schools are required to make an effort to reflect those schools they replaced. The schools are also restricted in their capacity to innovate, as all proposals must be able to demonstrate the soundness of their schools through research-based strategies.

Having first resisted the contracting arrangement, then reluctantly acquiescing to it, members of United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), the union local, have [chosen to seize the opportunity](#) to try and enter a management role of schools. They see it as an opportunity to improve the job of their members.

In 2009 [UTLA and LAUSD struck a deal](#) to allow the number of pilot schools in the district to increase from ten to thirty, anticipating that the ability to create semi-autonomous schools with central office support would better position teachers to compete with chartered school operators for the Public School Choice reform plan.

"This resolution has, in fact, re-energized our faculty," one teacher has been quoted as saying, "forcing us to turn inwards, reevaluate what we are doing and how we can make things better for our students."



Another teacher, remarking that this authority over what happens in their school is “the power that teachers have always been asking for,” understood that “With power comes responsibility. We are accountable for the results, and I don’t mind that.”

Some of the main petitioners for school contracts are chartered operators such as Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools, Synergy Academies, Green Dot, and others.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has been a key advocate for the new district policy, arguing for the structural change because LAUSD, one of the most challenged districts in the country, had made limited progress and [shows no sign of improving](#). Villaraigosa’s pressure on the district is of particular note because the mayor is a former organizer for UTLA union.

Daily operations of the schools are scheduled to turn over to the new operators by the start of the 2010 academic year. Los Angeles Unified, and the teachers of UTLA, are representing the most bold shift yet by districts and unions toward opening the district system. The next question is to what degree changes will be allowed to start, and grow. It is a trend worth watching.

LAUSD board resolution (2009):

[Public School Choice](#)

Website:

http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33.47493&_dad=ptl&_schema=...

Minneapolis

As part of a 5-year [strategic plan](#), in 2009 Minneapolis Public Schools established an Office of New Schools (ONS) to provide more and different options for students and teachers in the district, to try and raise achievement, and to stem years of declining enrollment. The strategic plan calls for closing the bottom 25 percent of schools in the district, and the ONS plays a central role in providing new options.

The Office maintains a portfolio of new schools, employing chartering, contracting, and Minnesota's new [Site-Governed Schools law](#) to create new schools.

The state legislation creating site-governed district schools provides that the district board of directors and site governing council must develop an agreement identifying the authorities and responsibilities delegated to the school sites. Those not assigned to the school site in the agreement remain with the school board.



The schools under the ONS will be in one way or another 'new,' either converted from an existing site or started ground-up. The district board has limited the scope of new-innovation to that which can be demonstrated effective within the boundaries of existing research.

Resources:

Article: Star Tribune cover story, ['What if teachers ran the school?'](#).

Find the district [RFP for Site-Governed Schools](#) here.

Find the template for the district's [Site-Governed Schools Council](#) here.

Reporting structure:

The office's Director reports to the superintendent of the district.

Website:

http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/MPS_New_Schools.html

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New York City

The New York City public school system is exceptionally large at 1.1 million students—the largest in the country—and is run by the [New York City Department of Education](#). Since 2002 the Department has operated a portfolio approach to school development in the city, charging an Office of Portfolio Planning (OPP) with identifying student needs and responding with new schools.

Each year the department reviews the school options available throughout the city, and assesses family demand. Tools available to the OPP include starting new district schools, chartering schools, closing low performing schools, changing a school's enrollment policies, or relocating pre-K and gifted and talented programs from one site to another.



Websites:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/schoolofone>

<http://schools.nyc.gov/community/innovation/izone/default.htm>

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States

Massachusetts

In January 2010, Governor Deval Patrick signed historic education reform legislation that provides educators and other stakeholders in all districts across the state with the powerful opportunity to create new "Innovation Schools," in-district and charter-like schools that will operate with greater autonomy and flexibility with regard to curriculum, staffing, budget, schedule/calendar, professional development, and district policies.

A wide range of applicants (including teachers, school and district leaders, community members, business partners, non-profit organizations, and institutions of higher education) can convert an existing school or create a new school in accordance with a locally-based approval process. In collaboration with local superintendents, school committee members, union representatives, and other stakeholders, the applicants develop an "innovation plan" that includes the specific strategies that will be implemented.

An innovation plan can include strategies to use different curricular and assessment tools or lengthen the school day and year, and can also include waivers to or modifications from the local collective bargaining agreement.

The innovation plan must include measurable goals to assess student achievement and school performance, and the operators are held responsible through a contract with the local school committee for meeting annual benchmarks.

All Innovation Schools receive the same per pupil allocation as any other school in the district, and operators can secure other types of supplemental funding to implement the innovation plan.

The Innovation Schools initiative offers eligible applicants with another opportunity to create autonomous schools in Massachusetts. Since the mid-1990's, districts have had the option of creating Horace Mann chartered schools. In Horace Mann chartered schools the teachers remain members of the collective bargaining unit, but any waivers to or modifications from the collective bargaining agreement must be included in the charter that is approved by the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

To date, only nine schools were established with Horace Mann status statewide and only eight retain that status today. The small numbers are due in part to difficulties of motivation on the part of applicants, incentives, and in some cases challenges related to negotiating necessary



agreements with local union and district officials. The Innovation Schools are seen as a more likely innovation sector for districts

The four platforms for schools in Massachusetts

[Commonwealth chartered schools](#) operate statewide. They are overseen by the state board of education, and each school's board of trustees has complete authority over operations. Teachers are not union members and the schools are fully independent of district regulations, and may develop their own procedures related to evaluation, staffing, pay, and professional development. However, there are also certain limitations: Commonwealth charter schools that operate within a district's boundaries cannot exceed a 9 percent share of the total funds spent on K-12 education in that area. In the legislation that was enacted in January, however, in the 10 percent of lowest-performing districts (as measured by district performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System), that share will be increased over time to 18 percent.

Horace Mann charter schools are similar to Commonwealth chartered schools in that they are also authorized by the state board of education, and each school's board of trustees has complete authority over operations—but there are some critical functional differences. For example, in Horace Mann chartered schools, union and district leadership must agree to allow the school to exist inside district boundaries, and funds for the school flow through the local district's central office. As with Commonwealth chartered schools, teachers are not union members—although they have the option of joining or remaining with the local collective bargaining unit.

The third alternative platform for the establishment of autonomous schools in Massachusetts is the Pilot Schools model in the Boston Public Schools, a much stronger mechanism for that district. Instead of having to opt out of regulations one by one, Pilot Schools are entitled to exemption from a [slate of rules and regulations](#) by virtue of their status. The schools function within the Boston Public Schools, and their teachers are members of the Boston Teachers Union, which agreed at the outset of the Pilot Schools initiative to waive mandates of their collective bargaining agreement if teachers at the site provided appropriate consent during their application for pilot status.

The fourth option for establishing autonomous schools in Massachusetts is the Innovation Schools initiative, as described above. In contrast to the two types of charter schools, Innovation Schools are authorized by the local school committee, and operate in accordance with an innovation plan.



Policies:

Here are some of the essential materials, pertaining to the Innovation Schools component of the bill. See [guidance documents and other information about the Innovation Schools initiative](#), and the [Education Reform Package: Readiness Schools legislation](#).

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Minnesota

In 2009 the Minnesota legislature made it possible for districts to create schools with autonomy and exemption from state regulation reflective of the state's [strong chartering sector](#).

The legislation authorizes creation of a new type of district school called a [Site-Governed School](#). These new public schools are created by teachers, and approved by the local school board. The schools report to the district board. Their teachers remain district employees and members of the union local. Exemptions from the district's master contract may be achieved through agreements between the district board and teachers union.

The [Minneapolis Federation of Teachers](#) played a key role in the legislation's passage, providing compelling testimony to lawmakers about its potential to improve the job of teaching. Their advocacy foreshadowed a rapid increase in interest and activity in 2010 by [United Teachers Los Angeles](#), to manage their own schools, too.

Legislation:

A 2010 recommendation, commissioned by the legislature, to form a state-level innovation entity to cultivate and guide efforts at creating schools that are new and also different.

[Site-Governed Schools legislation](#), enacted in 2009.

Resources:

A [typology of the three main ways of organizing schools in Minnesota](#): traditional district schools; site-governed district schools; state-chartered public schools.



West Virginia

In 2009 the West Virginia Legislature, in cooperation with Governor Joe Manchin, enacted HB 109: the [School Innovation Zones Act](#), a policy that allows the state board of education (WVBE) to designate individual schools as 'Innovation Zones.'

Schools, groups of schools, or individual academic departments may apply for Innovation Zone status. So may institutions of higher learning. The designation provides for possible exception from certain state rules and regulations.

West Virginia is one of eleven states without a chartering law. This legislation represents an effort by education leaders with support from the teachers union to provide an alternative platform for innovation inside the public system.

The law is designed for conversions of existing schools only. An Innovation Zone Selection Committee of the WVBE reviews applications brought by school leadership. In framing an Innovation Zone application the school leadership may request exemption from any state or county policy, rule, statute, or interpretation—except from those pertaining to state testing.

The state has been focusing for some time now in public and private circles on the notion of creating '21st century schools,' reflective of the work done by the [Partnership for 21st Century Skills](#). There are restrictions, if not hindrances: An application to designate a school an innovation zone must demonstrate that the educational model is both 'proven' and scalable. The idea for the innovation must come from the staff already at the school site, and enjoy the support of 80 percent of faculty. The application must show teacher collaboration and leadership in the new model.

There is growing public support and leadership for a statewide innovation sector, and energy is building among private organizations.

Laws and policies:

[School Innovation Zones Act \(H.B. 109, passed 6/2/09\)](#). See also [Resulting Education Innovation Zones policy from W.V. Department of Education](#)

Website:

<http://wvde.state.wv.us/innovationzones/faqs.html>