



Policy Brief: Innovation Research Zones Pilot Program

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Establishment and Requirements for Participation

One or more school districts or charter schools may join together in order to form an innovation zone partnership. The partnership can also include non-school partners, which include but are not limited to:

- Postsecondary institutions
- Other units of local government
- Nonprofit organizations
- For-profit organizations

The innovation zone's plan must be developed in collaboration with the school's instructional staff. Additionally, an innovation zone partnership *must* research and implement innovation education programs and models that are based on proposed hypotheses and may not yet be supported by peer-reviewed research. Some of the examples given in the law are:

- Personalized learning
- Use of competencies rather than seat time and course completions to fulfill standards, credits, and other graduation requirements
- Multidisciplinary, real-world, inquiry-based, and student-directed models that are designed to “make learning more engaging and relevant.”
- Models of instruction that are designed to close the achievement gap, which include but are not limited to new models for learners age 3 to grade 3, English as a second language, early identification and prevention of mental health issues.
- New partnerships between secondary schools and postsecondary institutions, employers, or career training institutions.
- New methods of collaborative leadership
- New ways to enhance parental and community involvement in learning
- New models of professional development for educators

Innovation Zone Plan

An innovation zone plan that is submitted to the commissioner must describe the following:

- How the plan will improve student and school outcomes, that are consistent with the World's Best Workforce ([120B.10](#))
- Role of each partner in the zone
- Research methodology used for each proposed action in the plan



- Exemptions from the list below that the partnership will use
- Description of how teachers and other educational staff from each partnership school will be included in the planning and implementation process
- Detailed description of expected outcomes and graduation standards
- Timeline for implementing the plan and assessing the outcomes
- How the results will be disseminated

Exemptions

Any school that is included in an innovation zone, that has a commissioner approved plan, is exempt from each of the following state education laws and rules that are specifically identified in their plan:

1. Any law or rule from which a district-created, site-governed school is exempt. ([123B.045](#))
2. Any statute or rule from which the commissioner has exempted another district or charter school.
3. Online learning program approval ([124D.095, subdivision 7](#)), but only if the school district or charter school offers a course or program online combined with direct access to a teacher for a portion of that course or program.
4. Restrictions on extended time revenue ([126C.10, subdivision 2a](#)) for a student who meets the eligible pupil criteria as defined under [MN Statute 124D.68, subdivision 2](#).
5. Any required hours of instruction in any class or subject area for a student who is meeting all competencies consistent with the graduation standards described in the innovation zone plan.

Innovation Research Zone Advisory Panel and Commissioner Approval

The Innovation Research Zone Advisory Panel must be established and convened by the commissioner. The purpose of the Panel is to review all innovation zone plans that are submitted for approval. The commissioner must appoint someone who has expertise in evaluation and research, and the Panel must be comprised of nine members, with one member from each of the following organizations:

- Educators for Excellence
- Education Minnesota
- Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals
- Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association
- Minnesota Association of School Administrators
- Minnesota School Boards Association
- Minnesota Association of Charter Schools
- Office of Higher Education



The Panel will make recommendations to the commissioner, who can then approve up to three innovation zone plans in the seven-county metropolitan area and up to three in greater Minnesota.