DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program

General Information

Revised July 2018

Where can I read the enabling legislation?

The pilot project was passed in the 2017 legislative session, [House File 2, pages 67-70, lines 67.6 - 70.36](#).

Why apply for an Innovation Research Pilot Zone Program?

Minnesota needs to explore, identify and implement the most innovative education models if our state's students are to represent the world's best workforce in the 21st century.

What benefit comes from participating in an approved Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program?

Selected schools and districts can shift from a "just work harder" mentality to an opportunity to use more creativity, freedom and innovation to deliver quality education that addresses the World's Best Workforce. Partners create real-world research from a formal hypothesis/theory of change developed out of their best intuition and educated guesses about what works. Engaging partners from higher education can provide a perspective on research that might otherwise be difficult to obtain. Projects will develop a research-validated basis that advances educational models and new practices throughout the state. Along the way, the Minnesota Department of Education will report results to the Minnesota Legislature.

Who can apply to participate in an Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program?

School districts and/or charter schools located in the seven county metropolitan area may apply. An Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program may also partner with higher education, other units of government, nonprofits, businesses and other organizations.

What is the deadline to apply?

You may apply at any time, however, applications received on or before January 25, 2019, will be reviewed with an anticipated notification date of late March 2019. Applications will be recommended for approval to the commissioner by the Innovation Research Zone Advisory Panel. Rejected applications may be resubmitted after the innovation zone partnership has modified the plan to meet each individually identified objection. Please note that the commissioner has selected three Greater Minnesota and two seven-county metropolitan area programs; the current application period is for one seven-county metropolitan area program.

How long do approved pilot programs last?

The legislation does not set a specific length of time for each program. However, your plan will need to determine an end date so that you have a timeline for evaluation and sharing of results. A pilot program may be suspended or terminated if:

- The program is not being implemented as described in the application or according to the application timeline.
- The remediation attempts and notice to partners are not successful.
- The Advisory Panel recommends that the commissioner of education suspend or terminate the program.

How long should my application be?

There is no page limit for an Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program, however, you may want to limit your application to approximately 25 pages.

Does my district have to submit a new application?

Yes, a district with an approved project under the 2012 laws (as amended in 2014) is required to submit a new application. Please note that all innovation zone pilot programs approved under 2012 laws (as amended in 2014) may continue through the 2018 school year.

Is funding available?

No, approved projects do not get more money from Minnesota. Participants do not lose money and the taxation authority does not change. There may be costs associated with participation.

What about flexibility?

Your application may specifically request exemption from certain laws and rules. If the Commissioner of Education grants you an exemption, this exemption must be published on the Minnesota Department of Education website. The list of schools and districts claiming specific exemptions will be updated annually. However, there are some laws and rules for which no exemption is available. These are listed below.

What about our employees?

Employees remain employees of their charter school or school district. Boards remain subject to any employment agreements under Minnesota Statutes, sections 122A and 179A.

Does our governance change?

No. You remained governed by respective school boards, with general powers under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B or 124E.

What is the application submission and approval cycle?

You may submit your application at any time. Applications received on or before January 25, 2019, will be reviewed for an anticipated March 2019 notification date. Statute provides that your application will be reviewed by an Innovation Research Zone Advisory Panel. The advisory panel will recommend one program from the seven county Metropolitan area for approval. The Commissioner of Education will make the final decision on whether or not a pilot program is selected.

When will the advisory panel meet?

During the 2018-19 school year, the advisory panel will meet in person and over the phone. Meetings are open to the public; you may request to be notified of meeting dates by emailing Jennifer R. Nelson (jennifer.r.nelson@state.mn.us).

Is a report to the Minnesota Department of Education required?

Each approved research zone partnership must submit an interim program report to the Commissioner of Education by January 31, 2020, and an annual report by September 30, 2020. The report will be based on the application questions. Additional reporting will be required while the program is operational and include annual reports at the end of each September.

How does the Minnesota Department of Education report to the Minnesota Legislature?

The Commissioner of Education must analyze each Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program's success in realizing its objectives. The department must summarize and categorize innovations programs and then submit a legislative report by February 1, 2019, and every two years thereafter.

Definitions and help for specific application questions

Part 2: Partnership Organizations

You are not required to have partnerships, but they may be of great help. For example, you might not, at the school or district level, have the expertise or time to craft the pilot program as a rigorous research program. A partnership with a Minnesota college or university may be helpful. Nonprofit organizations may have strong networks into communities of families where significant achievement gaps exist. Businesses may have excellent opportunities for career exploration that could combine with classroom academics to enhance Minnesota students' abilities to compete in a global workforce.

Part 3: Program Information

Question 1: Hypothesis Statement. A hypothesis is an educated guess–a statement that often puts forth an "IF … THEN ..." statement. Although data and research to validate your hypothesis may not be available at the start, your project will gather data that tests its effectiveness. Please note that Innovation Research Zone Pilot Programs are intended to allow participants to test new ideas. Applicants are encouraged to think beyond continuous improvement of existing practices to achieve true innovation. A theory of change, which is based on an IF-THEN proposition, is a good starting point for developing an Innovation Research Zone program.

This Theory of Change model is provided by the Center for Applied Research in Education at the University of Minnesota.

Theory of Change

IF something is done with or for the program participants, THEN something should change.

Example:

IF resources (such as staff, equipment, materials) are available, THEN the program can provide a certain set of activities or services to participants.

IF participants receive the services (intervention, etc.), THEN they experience specific changes in their knowledge, attitudes or skills.

IF individuals change their knowledge, attitudes, or skills, THEN they will change their behavior and usual practice.

IF enough participants change their behavior and practice, THEN the program may have a broader impact.

A more detailed example outlines a proposed youth development program.

Current Conditions

Program Participants

Students in school district - Sample

Middle school – grades 6-8

High school –grades 9-12

16 schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul

11,600 students

Climate

A youth-development organization that works with students over a seven-year period, from middle school through high school, to help them to develop life skills that can transform their lives.

Theory of Change

If we provide goal-setting workshops and special programming/services to students they will be inspired to …..

Then

1. Learn to make informed choices.
2. Learn to plan for meaningful futures.
3. Enrich their imaginations.
4. Have increased confidence.
5. Have positive outlooks.
6. Develop clearly defined goals.
7. Develop well-planned strategies for success.

Program Goals

Provide programming that motivates and inspires students to:

1. Work hard to live up to their potential and achieve their dreams.
2. Improve academic performance.
3. Stay engaged in school.
4. Reduce at-risk behaviors.

Question 3: Emerging Practices.

An Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program may include, but are not limited to, the following emerging practices. You may write your own or use or adapt emerging practices provided below.

1. Personalized learning, allowing students to excel at their own pace and according to their interests, aspirations, and unique needs.
2. The use of competency outcomes rather than seat time and course completion to fulfill standards, credits, and other graduation requirements.
3. Multidisciplinary, real-world, inquiry-based, and student-directed models designed to make learning more engaging and relevant, including documenting and validating learning that takes place beyond the school day and school walls.
4. Models of instruction designed to close the achievement gap, including new models for age 3 to grade three models, English as a second language models, early identification and prevention of mental health issues, and others.

5. New partnerships between secondary schools and postsecondary institutions, employers, or career training institutions enabling students to complete industry certifications, postsecondary education credits, and other credentials.
6. New methods of collaborative leadership including the expansion of schools where teachers have larger professional roles.
7. New ways to enhance parental and community involvement in learning.
8. New models of professional development for educators, including embedded professional development.
9. New models in other areas such as whole child instruction, social-emotional skill development, technology-based or blended learning, parent and community involvement, professional development and mentoring, and models that increase the return on investment.

A SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based and time-bound) goal meets six distinct criteria. Most programs administered by the Minnesota Department of Education that involve goal-setting require goals meet those criteria. The table below discusses five of the six criteria, with examples.

SMART Criteria and Examples

SMART Criterion	Importance	Ambiguous Versions	Clear Examples
Specific (and Strategic)	Specific goals are easier to measure and show progress on than broader goals, which risk being vague. The details describe the data so stakeholders know how to check results.	The percentage of all students who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019. Confusion: What data, and about whom, does this represent?	The percentage of all students enrolled in grades 3-5 for at least half an academic year at XYZ Academy who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019.
Measurable	Goals based on measurements help prove when progress is happening. Goals with starting and ending values allow people to show what progress is expected.	All students enrolled in grades 3-5 for at least half an academic year at XYZ Academy will improve reading skills between 2018 and 2019. Confusion: What data are we using, and what is the desired change?	The percentage of all students enrolled in grades 3-5 for at least half an academic year at XYZ Academy who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019.

SMART Criterion	Importance	Ambiguous Versions	Clear Examples
Attainable	People are more motivated to work toward goals they believe they can achieve than toward goals that seem unrealistic.	The percentage of all students who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 90.0% in 2019. Confusion: What increase is reasonable in one year?	The percentage of all students enrolled in grades 3-5 for at least half an academic year at XYZ Academy who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019.
Results-Based	Goals based on specific results for students rather than inputs or tasks keep the focus on the motivating purpose – the big "why" – used when setting the goals.	The percentage of all students receiving 8 hours or more of focused reading instruction per week will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019. Confusion: What is the student outcome we expect to see?	The percentage of all students enrolled in grades 3-5 for at least half an academic year at XYZ Academy who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019.
Time-Bound	Goals with a time frame create accountability and commitment and distinguish single-year from multi-year goals.	The percentage of all students who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% to 76.0%. Confusion: What is the baseline, and when do we check the result?	The percentage of all students enrolled in grades 3-5 for at least half an academic year at XYZ Academy who are proficient on the Minnesota reading accountability tests will increase from 72.1% in 2018 to 76.0% in 2019.

For more information about Setting Useful Goals, visit the Accountability page on the MDE website.

Question 5: World's Best Workforce Goals

Each school district and charter school is required to have a World's Best Workforce Plan. The World's Best Workforce goals are found in Minnesota Statutes section 120B.11. Briefly, they are:

1. All children are ready for school.
2. All third graders can read at grade level.
3. All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed.
4. All students are ready for career and college.
5. All students graduate from high school.

Find more information about the World's Best Workforce can be found on the Minnesota Department of Education website.

Part 4: Exemptions

The Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program law (Laws of 2017. 1st Special Session, Chapter 5, Article 2 Section 52) allows you to request specific exemption in the following areas:

1. Any law or rule from which a district-created, site-governed school under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.045, is exempt.
2. Any statute or rule from which the commissioner has exempted another district or charter school, as identified in the list published on the Department of Education's website under subdivision 4, paragraph (b) of the Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program legislation.
3. Online learning program approval under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.095, subdivision 7, 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 under Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.10, subdivision 2a, for a student who meets the criteria of Minnesota Statutes, section 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.

Please note: the exemptions under this subdivision must not be construed as exempting an innovation zone partner from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments.

To request an exemption, go to the Minnesota Reviser of Statutes website and copy the exact citation and language from which you seek exemption and paste into the application. Please provide a brief explanation of why you are seeking this exemption and how the exemption relates to the program's goals, objectives or implementation plan.

Part 5: Laws and rules for which no exemption is allowed

1. Health and safety. All federal, state, and local health and safety requirements applicable to school districts.
2. Statewide accountability requirements governing standards and assessments in Chapter 120B.
3. Minnesota Public School Fee Law, sections 123B.34 to 123B.39.
4. Tort liability under Chapter 466.
5. Pledge of Allegiance requirement under section 121A.11, subdivision 3.
6. Employment requirements under Chapter 181 governing requirements for employment.
7. Continuing truant notification under section 260A.03.

8. Teacher evaluation and peer review process under section [122A.40, subdivision 8](#), paragraph (b), clauses (2) to (13). The teacher evaluation process in this paragraph does not create any additional employment rights for teachers.
9. World's Best Workforce. Must adopt a policy, plan, budget, and process, consistent with section [120B.11](#), to review curriculum, instruction, and student achievement and strive for the world's best workforce.
10. Pupils with a disability. Must comply with sections [125A.02](#), [125A.03](#) to [125A.24](#), [125A.65, and 125A.75](#) and rules relating to the education of pupils with a disability. If enrolling prekindergarten pupils with a disability under section [124E.11](#), paragraph (h), must comply with sections [125A.259](#) to [125A.48](#) and rules relating to the Interagency Early Intervention System as though it were a school district.
11. Religious instruction release time, consistent with section [120A.22, subdivision 12, clause (3)](#).
12. Minnesota Human Rights Act Chapter 363A and section [121A.04](#) governing student athletics and sex discrimination in schools.
13. Bullying policies in Section [121A.031](#).
14. Chapter 13 governing government data; and sections [121A.75](#) governing access to juvenile justice records, and [260B.171](#), subdivisions 3 and 5, governing juvenile justice records.
15. [120A.22, subdivision 7](#), governing the transfer of students' educational records and sections 138.163 and 138.17 governing the management of local records.
16. Open meetings. Must comply with Chapter 13D governing open meetings.

Questions?

Attend an informational webinar about the Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program on Wednesday, October 31, at 1:00 p.m. Please email [Jennifer R. Nelson](#) (jennifer.r.nelson@state.mn.us) or call (651) 582-8791 with any other questions.

Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program
Wednesday, October 31, 2018 1:00 p.m., Central Daylight
When it's time, [join the meeting](#)
Meeting number: 596 768 680

Join by phone
Call-in toll-free number: 1-888-742-5095
Conference Code: 492 064 9083