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House of Representatives, January 8, 2025

An Act to Foster Innovation in Maine Schools by Updating the Requirements of School Innovation Waivers

Submitted by the Department of Education pursuant to Joint Rule 204.

Received by the Clerk of the House on January 6, 2025. Referred to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs pursuant to Joint Rule 308.2 and ordered printed pursuant to Joint Rule 401.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R B. Hunt".

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative MURPHY of Scarborough.

1 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

2 **Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §8, sub-§1**, as amended by PL 2021, c. 571, §1, is further
3 amended to read:

4 **1. School innovation.** For the purposes of this section, ~~the term~~ "school innovation"
5 means the process by which schools and communities use pilot programs ~~and~~ or make
6 significant changes in the existing school structure, including the policies, procedures,
7 roles, relationships, pathways, approaches, pedagogies, philosophies and schedules that
8 influence teaching and learning in the school, in order to support the best learning
9 environments and opportunities for students. School innovation recognizes the critical
10 educational role of technology and integrates technology and technological systems in the
11 classroom, in school governance and in school record keeping. ~~School innovation is based~~
12 ~~on:~~

13 ~~A. The development of comprehensive educational goals establishing community~~
14 ~~expectations for what all students should know, the skills they should possess, the~~
15 ~~attitude toward work and learning they should hold upon completing school and the~~
16 ~~role of the school in the community;~~

17 ~~B. A formal appraisal of the basic structures that govern operation of the school; and~~

18 ~~C. A commitment to revise the basic school structure to achieve the comprehensive~~
19 ~~educational goals.~~

20 School innovation, which is most effectively carried out at the local level, depends on
21 community and educator involvement and approval and student participation. School
22 innovation ~~includes~~ may include understanding of the various roles of stakeholders,
23 including parents, students, teachers, administrators, support staff, postsecondary
24 education institutions and officials and various segments of the community. It focuses on
25 understanding and defining the root cause of challenges and innovates and tests solutions.
26 School innovation may include a significantly broadened role for schools and school
27 administrative units that engage in education research and development practices that can
28 be attempted as a pilot program and shared with others. ~~The commissioner may designate~~
29 ~~a school administrative unit that engages in education research and development as a~~
30 ~~demonstration site.~~

31 **Sec. 2. 20-A MRSA §8, sub-§2**, as amended by PL 2021, c. 571, §1, is further
32 amended to read:

33 **2. Waiver of rules for local schools.** A school administrative unit ~~undergoing~~
34 engaged in school innovation may request that the commissioner waive the application of
35 specific rules to that unit, or to certain schools in that unit, if the waiver is necessary to
36 achieve the proposed school innovation. The commissioner shall grant a waiver if the
37 requesting unit, as determined by the commissioner, has:

38 A. Demonstrated that one or more state rules ~~prevent or seriously handicap~~ inhibit the
39 unit's pursuit of its school innovation goals;

40 B. Demonstrated that reasonable steps have been taken to provide the safeguards
41 offered by the rules in question to allow continued educational progress by students
42 and protect the continuity and integrity of the unit and employees of that unit;

1 C. ~~Provided evidence that the necessary resources and community and staff support~~
2 ~~are present to ensure that the innovative changes requiring the waiver stand a~~
3 ~~reasonable chance of succeeding; and~~

4 D. Informed any bargaining agent or agents representing affected school employees
5 of the waiver request; and

6 F. Demonstrated an intention to engage in professional learning to support school
7 innovation, which may include, but is not limited to:

8 (1) Design thinking;

9 (2) Interdisciplinary methods;

10 (3) Outdoor learning;

11 (4) Early childhood education;

12 (5) Career exploration, including extended learning opportunities, junior
13 achievement programs, entrepreneurial skills development and student-run
14 businesses; and

15 (6) So-called whole student approaches, including, but not limited to, the so-called
16 Building Assets, Reducing Risks model, community schools, school-based health
17 centers, alternative education programs, in-district special education programs,
18 inclusive music and arts programs and inclusive science, technology, engineering
19 and mathematics and computer science programs.

20 The department shall provide professional learning and technical assistance to schools
21 seeking such support for school innovation.

22 The request for the waiver must include documentation to substantiate the conditions of
23 this subsection. If the request is denied, the commissioner shall provide the reasons for
24 denying the request to the school administrative unit.

25 SUMMARY

26 This bill updates the school innovation statutes by eliminating certain requirements that
27 school units must fulfill to obtain school innovation waivers. The bill also updates
28 language to reflect current practice and currently appropriate terminology.