

§8. Public school innovation

In order to support a culture of research and development and elevate the professionalism of the State's education practitioners, the commissioner shall encourage school administrative units to pursue continuous improvement processes to identify opportunities to innovate school structures and policies as a means of more effectively meeting the learning needs and improving the academic performance of all students. The public and private postsecondary institutions of higher education in the State are urged to partner with the department, the state board and school administrative units to provide appropriate and timely professional development programs and other support services to educators employed in public schools engaged in school innovation efforts. [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

1. School innovation. For the purposes of this section, the term "school innovation" means the process by which schools and communities use pilot programs and make significant changes in the existing school structure, including the policies, roles, relationships, pathways and schedules that influence teaching and learning in the school. School innovation recognizes the critical educational role of technology and integrates technology and technological systems in the classroom, in school governance and in school record keeping. School innovation is based on:

- A. The development of comprehensive educational goals establishing community expectations for what all students should know, the skills they should possess, the attitude toward work and learning they should hold upon completing school and the role of the school in the community; [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]
- B. A formal appraisal of the basic structures that govern operation of the school; and [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]
- C. A commitment to revise the basic school structure to achieve the comprehensive educational goals. [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]

School innovation, which is most effectively carried out at the local level, depends on community and educator involvement and approval and student participation. School innovation includes understanding of the various roles of stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, administrators, support staff, postsecondary education institutions and officials and various segments of the community. It focuses on understanding and defining the root cause of challenges and innovates and tests solutions. School innovation may include a significantly broadened role for schools and school administrative units that engage in education research and development. The commissioner may designate a school administrative unit that engages in education research and development as a demonstration site.

[PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

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

- A. Demonstrated that one or more state rules prevent or seriously handicap the unit's pursuit of its innovation goals; [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]
- B. Demonstrated that reasonable steps have been taken to provide the safeguards offered by the rules in question to allow continued educational progress by students and protect the continuity and integrity of the unit and employees of that unit; [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]
- C. Provided evidence that the necessary resources and community and staff support are present to ensure that the innovative changes requiring the waiver stand a reasonable chance of succeeding; and [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

D. Informed any bargaining agent or agents representing affected school employees of the waiver request. [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

E. [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (RP).]

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

[PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

3. Waiver of rules for educator preparation programs. In order to prepare educators to work in innovative schools, an educator preparation program may request that the state board waive the application of specific rules governing approval of that program. The state board shall grant waiver requests if, in the board's opinion, the program has:

A. Demonstrated that the rules for which a waiver is requested prevent or seriously handicap the program in its pursuit of a plan to meet the educational needs of its students and the staffing needs of innovative schools; [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

B. Demonstrated that reasonable steps have been taken to provide the safeguards offered by the rules in question to allow continued educational progress by students and protect the continuity and integrity of the program and employees of that program; [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]

C. Provided evidence that the necessary resources and support from the governing body and staff of an institution of higher education are present to ensure that the changes requiring the waiver stand a reasonable chance of succeeding; [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]

D. Informed any bargaining agent or agents representing affected program employees of the waiver request; and [PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW).]

E. Developed service, research and teaching relationships with one or more innovative public schools. [PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

The request for the waiver must include documentation to substantiate the conditions of this subsection. If the request is denied, the state board shall communicate the reasons for denying the request to the petitioning program.

[PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1991, c. 407, §1 (NEW). PL 2021, c. 571, §1 (AMD).

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