



Innovation Pilot Project Interim Evaluation

Fiscal Year 2016

Report

To the

Legislature

As required by

**Minnesota 2012 Session Law, Chapter 263, section 1: as modified by
2014 Session Law, Chapter 312, Article 15, section 24**

COMMISSIONER:

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**Innovation Pilot Project Interim
Evaluation**

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Statutes

Minnesota 2012 Session Law, Chapter 263,
Section 1: as modified by 2014 Session
Law, Chapter 312, Article 15, Section 24

Cost of Report Preparation

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately \$1,196.00. Most of these costs involved staff time in analyzing data from surveys and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying and other office supplies.

Estimated costs are provided in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2011, section 3.197, which requires that at the beginning of a report to the Legislature, the cost of preparing the report must be provided.

Introduction

The innovative delivery of education services and sharing of district resources pilot project is established by the Minnesota Legislature to improve student outcomes by allowing groups of school districts to work together to provide innovative education program and activities and to share district resources.

There are currently four Innovation Pilot Projects (IPPs):

1. Farmington and Spring Lake Park School Districts: New Designs for Education
2. Leroy-Ostrander, Southland, Lyle, Grand Meadow, Glenville-Emmons School Districts: South-Central Education Consortium
3. SouthWest Metro Educational Cooperative and Jordan School Districts: Career Technical Academy
4. Lakeville, Prior Lake-Savage and Burnsville School Districts: Minnesota Center for Advanced Professional Studies

Both Farmington and Spring Lake Park IPP and the South-Central Education Consortium applies for the 2014 through 2018 cohort. The remaining two IPP's are part of the second cohort approved for the 2015 through 2018 school years.

Participating districts have been collaborating to design innovative learning opportunities for students and challenging professional development for educators while working cooperatively to share resources and expertise. For this report each group was asked to provide a brief description of their respective IPP, to update progress toward their proposed goals, to summarize the effectiveness of their IPP, and to provide recommendations for improvement.

Legislative Charge

Law, Chapter 263, Section 1: as modified by 2014 Session Law, Chapter 312, Article 15, Section 24 is established to improve student and school outcomes by allowing groups of school districts to work together to provide innovative education programs and activities and share district resources.

To participate in this pilot project to improve student and school outcomes, a group of two or more school districts must collaborate with school staff and receive formal school board approval to form a partnership. The partnership must develop a plan to provide challenging programmatic options for students, create professional development opportunities for educators, increase student engagement and connection and challenging learning opportunities for educators, increase student engagement and connection and challenging learning opportunities for students, or demonstrate efficiencies in delivering financial and other services.

The commissioner shall submit an interim project report by February 1, 2016, to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over kindergarten through grade 12 education finance and policy on efficacy of the pilot projects, analyzing participating districts' progress in realizing their educational goals and objectives to work together in providing innovative education programs and activities, sharing resources and use of best practices.

Analysis

The four innovation pilot projects groups self-reported on the following:

- their ability to produce desired results,
- their ability to implement best practices which lead to positive changes in student outcomes,
- progress in realizing their educational goals,
- progress in realizing their objectives for collaboratively providing innovative education programs and sharing resources.

An analysis of each IPP is provided below.

- 1) Implementation of the Farmington and Spring Lake Park School Districts' New Direction for Learning IPP began during the 2014-15 school year. These partner districts report that they have made progress toward creating a "culture of innovation" within their school systems where learning can happen at anytime, anywhere with the student acting an agent of his or her learning by creating their own learning pathways. The districts support the work of staff and students by providing a digital learning platform with 24/7 access and greater choice through personalized and flexible learning environments.

The use of a digital learning platform has greatly enhanced continuous interaction between students and staff. Both districts report that the IPP informed the design of innovative solutions for a number of issues. Examples of issues include the following: a student's ability to keep up with school work if they miss a class, the difficulty of finding substitute teachers using the traditional substitute teacher model, make-up days for weather-related school closings.

These two IPP partnership districts have developed accountability measures and incorporated them into the Farmington's World's Best Workforce Plan and the Spring Lake Park's Operational Plan. Both of these plans provide evidence of how the districts' systems customize student learning, grow student learning and skills, create a culture for learning and innovation, have an impact on learning and service, are being operationally sound stewards of resources and maintain academic performance.

This IPP has provided opportunities for staff from both districts to share professional learning and expertise and to participate in Innovation by Design retreats.

- 2) The South-Central Education Consortium IPP member districts include Leroy-Ostrander, Southland, Lyle, Grand Meadow, and Glenville-Emmons School Districts. The Consortium's IPP involves recruiting secondary students into high demand positions within southern Minnesota businesses and working with local vocational technical institutions to attain partial certification for secondary students. The Consortium reports that all partners—school districts, parents and students, local businesses, and vocational technical colleges—are highly supportive of the project; however, progress toward results has been limited primarily due to a lack of resources for a career counselor position deemed critical to the success of the initiative.

- 3) The SouthWest Metro Educational Cooperative and Jordan School District's Career Technical Academy IPP is intended to provide professional development to staff to ensure that core academic skills are integrated into career-focused classes for students who have fallen behind or are at-risk of failing to graduate. This IPP has provided support for staff to develop an environment where student needs are identified and instruction is personalized. Several courses have been developed. Staff has visited businesses to learn about the expectations and demands of the current business culture. They concluded that employers are looking for trustworthy, independent, hardworking, attentive employees. The IPP has an agreement with Normandale Community College to provide college preparatory courses on study skills and reading skills for college and paths to college success (e.g., self-management, interdependence, creative and critical thinking, college expectations and using college resources). Several certifications are now available to youth or adults.

- 4) Lakeville, Prior Lake-Savage, and Burnsville School Districts' Minnesota Center for Advanced Professional Studies IPP is a high school program working with education, industry, and community partners to immerse all students in profession-based work experiences. This IPP is on track to reach project goals. Two professional pathways in 1) medicine and healthcare and 2) business have been developed. Hennepin Technical College and Normandale Community College will provide college credit aligned with the course offerings. Student and parent information nights will be held in January 2016, and student registration will begin in February. There has been strong interest thus far.

The 2015-16 school year was the first year of planning and implementation for both the SouthWest Metro Educational Cooperative and Jordan School District IPP and the Lakeville, Prior Lake-Savage, and Burnsville School Districts IPP. Each has made progress toward the initial implementation of their pilot projects as a result of actively recruiting students and families, developing professional development opportunities and curriculum, and engaging with community partners and local businesses.

Conclusion

The IPP partners were asked to suggest improvements to the pilot project legislation and to make additional recommendations for consideration. This input is listed below.

1. Provide grant funding to support the innovation project for up to seven years.
2. Create regional innovation zones to bring together the school districts and create partnerships with post-secondary schools and businesses in each zone.
3. Include charter schools as well as public and private organizations as partners.
4. Permit more flexibility through waivers for staffing, licensure, funding, and sharing of students.
5. Allow school district staff with expertise to provide instruction for concurrent enrollment courses by waiving concurrent enrollment credentialing requirements set by the higher education commission.

6. Have at least one innovation grant project partner with the research university to develop a new and different model/project that has no current research base.
7. Districts taking part in an innovation pilot project should be exempt from and subject to the same laws and rules as are district created site-governed schools under Minnesota Statute 123B.045.
8. Allow exemptions from high school learning standards, statutes regarding teacher evaluation, and state testing.
9. Include on the IPP application review panel members who have expertise in innovation and are from the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, Center for Applied Research in Education at University of Minnesota, and three additional members, as determined by Commissioner, to advise the commissioner on applicant qualifications and ability to participate in a pilot project.