

# *Innovation Schools: Using Innovation to Promote Academic Achievement*

*In January 2010, Governor Patrick signed historic education reform legislation that gives all students and families greater access to high-quality schools. The Innovation Schools initiative, a key component of this legislation, provides educators and other stakeholders in all districts across the state with the powerful opportunity to create new “Innovation Schools,” in-district and charter-like schools that will operate with greater autonomy and flexibility with regard to curriculum, staffing, budget, schedule/calendar, professional development, and district policies. These public schools will be able to implement innovative strategies to improve student achievement while keeping school funding within districts.*

## **Why Innovation Schools?**

Effective schools are characterized by high-quality teaching and leadership, high expectations for all students, meaningful relationships between teachers and their students, and a strong sense that educators truly own the performance of their students and are deeply involved in the operation of the school. Innovation Schools represent the new chapter of education reform in Massachusetts, as they provide an unprecedented opportunity for educators and other partners to utilize their expertise to establish the conditions that will best meet the needs of their students. For example, Innovation Schools can increase opportunities for teachers to take on new instructional and leadership roles, and other community members can contribute directly to the development and operation of these schools.

## **How will Innovation Schools operate?**

An Innovation School will operate according to an “**innovation plan**” which describes the areas of autonomy and flexibility and specific strategies that will be implemented in the school. An innovation plan must include, but is not limited to, the following elements:

- A **curriculum plan** that includes detailed information about how the proposed curriculum will improve student achievement and school performance;
- A **budget plan** that includes detailed information about how funds will be used differently in the proposed school;
- A **school calendar and schedule plan**;
- A **staffing plan** that includes detailed information about how the principal, teachers, and other staff members will be recruited, employed, evaluated, and compensated in the proposed school and if applicable, a detailed description of any **proposed waivers from or modifications to collective bargaining agreements**;
- A plan that includes information about the **unique instructional focus and operational policies and procedures** that will be implemented in the school, and how they will support student achievement and school performance; and
- A **professional development plan** that describes how the proposed school will provide ongoing and high-quality professional development opportunities to administrators, teachers, and other staff members.

The innovation plan must also include **measurable, annual goals** that assess factors such as student achievement and school performance. In exchange for authority to operate the school with increased autonomy, Innovation School operators will be held responsible, under a contract with the local school committee, for advancing student learning and meeting these annual benchmarks.

Innovation Schools will receive the **same per pupil allocation** as any other school in the district, and its operators can also secure grant or other types of supplemental funding to implement the innovation plan.

The innovation plan committee for a proposed school, which is responsible for developing the innovation plan, could consider the following strategies:

- Adopt innovative instructional, curricular, and assessment practices;
- Extend the school day and/or year;
- Provide additional enrichment activities for students;
- Allocate more funds for professional development;
- Modify hiring and staffing practices;
- Increase time for teacher and staff collaboration;
- Provide wraparound services for students and their families;
- Establish schools with special themes (e.g., the arts, STEM, etc.); and
- Secure freedom from district rules and/or contract provisions.

Virtual Innovation Schools can also be established, and they must operate in accordance with regulations that were adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education in July 2010.

### **Who can propose an Innovation School?**

The following groups, or consortia of these groups, are eligible to convert an existing school or create a new school:

- Parents;
- Teachers;
- Parent-teacher organizations;
- Principals;
- Superintendents;
- School committees;
- Teacher unions;
- Colleges and universities;
- Non-profit community-based organizations, business or corporate entities, charter school operators, or education management organizations;
- Educational collaboratives; and
- Additional groups authorized by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

*\* Private and parochial schools are not eligible to operate Innovation Schools.*

### **Application Process**

**Proposals to establish either new schools or convert existing schools will be generated, reviewed, and approved entirely at the local level as follows.**

1. The applicant **develops and submits an initial prospectus** to the district superintendent who will convene a screening committee that includes the superintendent or a designee, a school committee member or a designee, and a representative of leadership from the local teachers' union; two-thirds approval is required to move forward.
2. An **innovation plan committee** (consisting of, at minimum, the applicant, the superintendent, a school committee member, a parent with a child in the district, a district principal, and two district teachers) then **develops and internally approves the innovation plan**. Note: if an innovation plan includes provisions that conflict with state laws governing other public schools, approval by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education is required. If an innovation plan includes a proposed waiver from Innovation Schools regulations adopted in July 2010, approval by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is required. Detailed information about securing approval is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=5652>.
3. Upon completion of the innovation plan, specific steps are required.
  - A **conversion school requires a two-thirds majority vote of the current teachers in the school**.
  - A **new school requires negotiations** among the applicant, local teacher's union, and superintendent if the innovation plan includes proposed waivers from or modifications to the collective bargaining agreement.
4. The innovation plan is then submitted to the school committee, which must hold at least one public hearing; a **majority vote of the full school committee is required for approval**.
5. Upon approval, **the Innovation School is authorized for a period of up to five years**, will be evaluated annually by the superintendent, and can be reauthorized by the school committee at the end of each term.

For more information about the Innovation Schools initiative and the approval process, please contact Saeyun Lee ([saeyun.lee@state.ma.us](mailto:saeyun.lee@state.ma.us)) or Nick Martinelli ([nicholas.martinelli@state.ma.us](mailto:nicholas.martinelli@state.ma.us)) at the Executive Office of Education, or Cliff Chuang ([cliff.w.chuang@state.ma.us](mailto:cliff.w.chuang@state.ma.us)) at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Guidance documents are also available at the following website: <http://www.mass.gov/edu/innovationschools>.