



2017 Innovation Research Zone Pilot Projects Interim Report

Report to the Legislature

As required by [Minnesota Laws 2017 1Special Session chapter 5 article 2 section 52](#)
[Subd 5](#)

For more information:

Jennifer R. Nelson, Director
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113
651-582-8791
Jennifer.r.nelson@state.mn.us
<https://education.mn.gov>

As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1100 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

Upon request, this material will be made available in an alternative format such as large print, braille or audio recording. Printed on recycled paper.

Table of Contents

For more information.....	2
Legislative Charge.....	4
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	4
Analysis.....	4
Bloomington “New Visions for Pathways to Graduation”	5
Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton “Vision 2020”	7
Montevideo-Benson “BEST (Building Exceptional Student Talents)”	8
Norman County West “Norman County West Innovation Program”	10
Saint Paul Public Schools “Graduation Program for EL Students”	11
TriDistrict “TriDistrict College and Career Readiness Initiative”	11
Conclusion	13
Bibliography.....	14

Legislative Charge

[Minn. Laws 2017 1Sp c 5 art 2 s 52 Subd 5](#) requires that:

Each research zone partnership must submit project data to the commissioner in the form and manner provided for in the approved application. At least once every two years, the commissioner must analyze each innovation zone's progress in realizing the objectives of the innovation zone partnership's plan. The commissioner must summarize and categorize innovation zone plans and submit a report to the legislative committees having jurisdiction over education by February 1 of each odd-numbered year in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section 3.195.

Executive Summary

Districts are keenly interested in pursuing innovative strategies for serving students. School districts showed an interest in using innovative practices that engage community partners, personalize learning, support alternative pathways to graduation, and respond to the needs of the whole student. The lack of additional financial resources to support implementation was cited as a challenge to implementation for almost all projects. Part way through the first year, most projects have made good progress on implementation; some have achieved initial goals.

Applicants were able to request exemption(s) from certain state statutory requirements (Minn. Laws 2017 1Sp C 5 art 2 s 52 subd 2). Exemption requests related to online learning programs (Minn. Stat § 124D.095) were approved and posted to the MDE website; other exemptions, including those related to extended-time revenue, were denied as the law does not authorize the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to provide additional funding. Some applications requested exemptions to statutes that were not authorized in the law or were explicitly removed from consideration.

Introduction

This report summarizes and categorizes the Innovation Research Zone Pilot projects approved under the law. It provides insight into the process of approving and carrying out Innovation Research Zone projects. It also provides an interim analysis of each Innovation Research Zone Pilot project approved under the 2017 law.

Analysis

The Innovation Research Zone Pilot Project Advisory Panel approved six project applications under the 2017 legislation. The application period opened in September 2017 and applications were due January 25, 2018. The panel approved four applications (three metro area and one greater Minnesota) and gave the unsuccessful applicants an opportunity to revise and resubmit an application based on feedback provided by the advisory panel. Two additional projects (both greater Minnesota) were subsequently approved; one metro area approved project withdrew in April 2018. MDE reopened the application period in September 2018 to select one additional project from the metro area, to be awarded in March 2019 with a projected start date of July 1, 2019.

The following are project summaries and categorizations of approved projects for activities through December 2018.

Bloomington “New Visions for Pathways to Graduation”

Partners: Bloomington Public Schools (BPS), Valley View Elementary, Valley View Middle School, Kennedy High School, Jefferson High School, Normandale Community College, Bloomington Public Health, SERVMN (Minnesota Reading Corps), Insight Works

Project Category(ies):

Alternate pathways to graduation
Integrated educational system

Project Summary:

Three innovations were sought: 1) Create and pilot seamless integrated “E-5” educational system that locates and unites early learning programming with the district’s traditional K-5 academics under the instructional leadership of the elementary principal; 2) Create and pilot a system to identify “beat the odds” teachers and instructional strategies and use this information to personalize learning more effectively for English Learners; 3) Create and pilot a system of alternative pathways to graduation that provide more flexibility in the way students are able to earn credits and meet state testing and graduation requirements.

Project Update:

The E-5 Pathway at Valley View Elementary School (VVE) has been established with the Reading Corps to provide research-based pre-K instruction to all early childhood providers that serve students in the Valley View catchment area. A value-added study of English Learner instruction at Valley View Middle School (VVM) is taking place – a quasi-experimental study with return on investment.

The first phase of a quasi-experiment research was conducted by Dr. David Heistad to determine the effectiveness of the age 4 pre-K program at VVE. A matched sample of 47 students performed significantly less well on the BEKA Total Literacy Assessment [$t(46)=2.12;p=.04$] than students who attended the Valley View voluntary pre-K program. The evaluation to improve the success of Bloomington ELL students is well underway. Bloomington has hired a Research Evaluation Assessment Specialist to conduct the year-long evaluation which includes student, staff and parent surveys. Valued added analysis of the most productive teachers in increasing reading and math achievement growth will take place. Interviews and video tape for the Middle School (VVM) teacher who “beat the odds” in reading will take place in January 2019; interviews and video tape for the Elementary School Teacher who “beat the odds” in reading and math will take place in February 2019.

Progress on Outcomes:

The Bloomington IZ is making progress on 83 percent of its goals for Innovations 1 and 2 as follows:

- At least **36.8 percent** of children enrolling in VVE Kindergarten will meet beginning of Kindergarten targets for oral language, literacy, numeracy, and social emotional development (BEKA, TS GOLD) by Fall 2020.

As of October 2018, 30.8 percent of VVE Kindergarten Students were proficient in literacy and 45.1 percent of students were proficient in numeracy. TS Gold data will be available in 2019.

- The percentage of VVE students making national norm growth on the MAP Reading assessment will increase from 41.6percent in Spring 2017 to **51.6 percent** in Spring 2020.

As of June 2018, 56.4 percent of VVE students made national norm growth on MAP Reading.

- The gap between VVE students in poverty and students not in poverty (using free/reduced-price lunch as a proxy) in the percent making national norm growth in reading will decrease from 7.3 percent in Spring 2017 to **2.3 percent** in Spring 2020.

As of June 2018, the reading gap between VVE students in poverty and students not in poverty was 11.2 percent.

- The percentage of VVMS students receiving EL services who meet or exceed national norm growth on MAP Reading will increase from 39 percent in 2017 to **49 percent** by 2020.

As of June 2018, 43.9 percent of VVMS students made national norm growth in reading.

- The percentage of VVMS students receiving EL services who meet or exceed national norm growth on MAP Math will increase from 47.2 percent in 2017 to **52.2 percent** in 2020.

As of June 2018, 50.0 percent of VVMS students made national norm growth in reading.

- The disparity between EL and non-EL students at VVMS in the percentage who meet or exceed national norm growth on MAP reading will decrease from 6.3 percent in 2017 to **2.0 percent** by 2020.

As of June 2018, the gap between EL and non-EL students at VVMS decrease to 5.9 percent.

Innovation 3 Goal (not measured yet):

- Of 30 BPS students who take STATWAY in their senior year of high school in 2018-19 and in 2019-20, 25 each year will enroll at Normandale after high school graduation.

Barriers:

Exemptions not granted lead to the lack of ability to use extended-time revenue in a flexible manner and lack of ability to use special education staff to serve all E-5 students in the Innovation Zone.

Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton “Vision 2020”

Partners: St. James Public Schools, Fairmont Area Schools, Waseca Public Schools, St. Peter Public Schools, Sleepy Eye Public Schools, Tri City United, Granada, Huntley East Chain, South Central Service Cooperative

Project Category(ies):

Personalized learning
Career Technical Education (CTE)

Project Summary:

By bridging equitable access to programming across districts, the project seeks to close opportunity gap. Using student-centered learning environments, offer personalized learning and alternative pathways to graduation and mastery of standards. Vision 2020 creates equitable access to shared programs, staff, and learning management systems. Improve equitable access to CTE programming, industry certification and college credit in all participating schools.

Project Update:

Each district is currently in development of their own personalized-learning framework as each school community has different cultures and norms. The practices being discussed and developed at local levels are:

- Personalized learning – allowing students to excel at their own pace and according to their interests, aspirations and unique needs.
- The use of competency outcomes rather than seat time and course completion to fulfill standards, credits and other graduation requirements.
- 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.

Progress on Outcomes:

Overarching Goal: Increase opportunities for students to pursue their passions and interests in learning at all levels.

Goal 1: Build the capacity throughout Vision 2020 Innovation Zone to develop and implement student-centered learning environments starting now and continuing throughout the life of the initiative.

- These conversations are happening at the local level as a result of cultural differences and accepted school/community norms. Conversations take place between districts with regard to progress on personalized learning implementation. The districts learn and borrow from each other.

Goal 2: All students to meet core grade level subject and/or graduation requirements while pursuing strengths and/or areas of interest. New options will be communicated to student by January 2020 to be implemented by

the 2020-2021 school year.

Goal 3: Improve equitable access to career technical education programming, industry certification and college credit in all participating schools by the year 2023.

- The development of career academies and certification programming is happening collaboratively. A meeting is scheduled for January 10, 2019, with those involved in Vision 2020 to develop such programming. The initial development will be in the business management side of offerings.

It is too early to determine if the project will meet goals 2 and 3, as it has not realized full implementation and the majority of progress is expected in spring 2020.

Barriers:

It has been difficult to conduct meetings in which all schools are at the table. At times, that makes it difficult to make decisions and achieve progress. This is anticipated to change as academies/tracks are developed.

Montevideo-Benson “BEST (Building Exceptional Student Talents)”

Partners: Montevideo Public Schools, Benson Public Schools, Minnesota River Valley Education District, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Montevideo Economic Development Authority, Montevideo Area Chamber of Commerce, Chippewa Valley Ethanol Company; CNH Industrial

Project Category(ies):

Personalized Learning

Project Summary:

Students will work with advisor to develop personalized learning plans. Plans will take into account student strengths and weaknesses and vocational assessments to develop a learning plan with courses and experiences, mutually agreed on measures of success related to the courses and experiences.

Project Update:

The project was slow to start; the team had asked for several waivers which were denied. Time was spent clarifying the denials, which delayed the project and impacted partnerships. Students have had opportunities to develop personal goals in their preferred learning style, identify vocational interests and use Minnesota Career Information System to support career pathways. Students are participating in career and technical education courses through a five district collaborative. Facilitated by mentoring teachers, students have created self-directed learning plans. Teachers are being supported in finding strategies to allow students to demonstrate mastery of the standards through competency-based methods.

Progress on Outcomes:

Objective 1:

For the 2018-2019 school year, 50 students (juniors and seniors) will have personalized learning plans that allow the students to excel at their own pace and according to their interests, aspirations and unique needs.

Actions:

- Ninety students are participating in the Innovation Research Zone project.
- All students at Montevideo High school have started their personalized learning plans.
- Sixteen students are engaged in coursework/study/work experience as part of their personalized learning plans.
- All juniors and seniors at Benson have met with our counselor to develop their personalized learning plan/career path.
- Twenty-nine students are engaged in work experience/extended internships.

Students are using Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS) and a draft learning plan template that addresses areas not covered in the MCIS. Assessments for identifying student strengths, weaknesses and student preferred learning styles are being explored. MCIS and ASVAB are used as vocational assessments to identify potential career pathways. Principals are measuring engagement and empowerment of students during walkthroughs and teacher evaluations. The team is developing a student survey to measure student perception.

Objective 2:

By June 1, 2018, teachers and administrators will identify innovative ways to measure competency-based outcomes which can be used to demonstrate mastery of standards, earn credits and meet other graduation requirements.

Strategies:

Competency outcomes used in other districts to fulfill standards, credits and other graduation requirements are being researched. The team is working to develop a process to document and validate learning that takes place beyond the school day and school walls. Due to limitations not relieved by a waiver, the team has not spent as much time on this particular strategy.

Objective 3:

By August 1, 2018, at least 10 teachers will develop multidisciplinary, real-world, inquiry-based and student-directed models designed to make learning more engaging and relevant.

Strategies:

Sixteen teachers are participants in the Innovation Zone program. These teachers are developing innovative models and experiences that are used by students.

Objective 4:

By June 1, 2018, at least 10 businesses will be identified as partners that will allow students to gain work experience and/or industry credentials.

Strategies:

Twenty-three businesses have been identified and are willing to host students for job shadowing, mentoring, entrepreneurship, service learning, volunteering, internships other cooperative work experience, youth apprenticeship or employment. A draft orientation checklist/contract (which includes a list of expectations for students and business supervisors and evaluation protocol) for participating students and businesses has been developed.

Overall, the project looks to be on track for achieving the expected outcomes and graduation standards.

Barriers:

The need to revise the application and a delay in notification of our designation as a research zone until mid-May, led to a delay in implementation. The partners expressed disappointment in the denial of waiver requests. The project hoped to do programming that is new and different, yet a number of barriers prevent the fullest implementation of ideas.

Norman County West “Norman County West Innovation Program”

Partners: Norman County West, Halstad Living Center Compass Business Consultants, Dekko Foundation/Shock n’Awe, Magnell Custom Cabinets and Woodworking, Halstad Elevator Company, Halstad Telephone Company

Project Category(ies):

Career Technical Education (CTE)

Project Summary:

Provide programming that motivates and inspires students to achieve their potential and academic goals. To help students make informed decisions about future academic and educational plans; engage in career-oriented environments authentic to hands-on learning and technology; be prepared for career or expectations for education after graduation; partner with area school districts to provide an authentic hands-on learning experience in career and technical areas where it is currently difficult to find licensed teachers. Activities undertaken in partnership with local businesses.

Project Update:

Partnership with Halstad Living Center and a new partner, Border Dental Access Center, provide hands-on learning experiences and special programming services that will cater to individual students. A Certified Nursing

Assistant Program, Administrative Assistant, and Clinical Assistant certification opportunities are being finalized as of the date of this report.

Progress on Outcomes:

The project is preparing students to participate in the hands-one learning opportunities with business partners. The project has not been able to achieve its expected outcomes and graduation standards due to an altered timeline and implementation process. One outcome has been modified from the application – the 80 hours of work/training will equal .5 high-school credits. The project team meets monthly to review progress.

Barriers:

The Norman County West School Board vote to tuition out students in grades 6-12 beginning in September 2017 created challenges and setbacks for the program. While the project timeline was altered, the additional time has offered the opportunity to establish productive dialogs and willingness to collaborate with several area schools. The enthusiasm to work together to establish innovative educational opportunities in rural Minnesota has been successful.

Saint Paul Public Schools “Graduation Program for EL Students”

Partners: LEAP High School, Gateway to College ALC (GtC), Saint Paul Public School District

Project Category:

English Language Learners

Project Summary:

Create program to identify and recruit older-than-average EL students from traditional high schools to enroll at LEAP or GtC and work with families to select an alternative learning center program and design a graduation plan. Use flexibility to provide access to educational services to EL students until age 22.

Project Update:

Discontinued in April 2018.

Project Outcomes:

n/a

TriDistrict “TriDistrict College and Career Readiness Initiative”

Partners: Inver Grove Heights Community Schools, South St. Paul Public Schools, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Public Schools, Intermediate District 917, North American Trailer, Twin Cities Orthopedics

Project Category(ies):

Career Technical Education (CTE)
Personalized Learning

Project Summary:

As part of larger goal of improving and increasing career and college readiness for all students, the goal is increase the racial, ethnic and socio-economic diversity of students enrolled in rigorous immersive learning experiences. Partners will develop immersive career-focused courses and/or series of courses (pathways) open to all students. CTE focus may include internship/mentorship; rigorous coursework aligned with personalized postsecondary education plans.

Project Update:

In the first area of focus for the Innovation Research Zone (changing what students experience and explore career and college opportunities), the project continues to iterate and improve the early high school experience of TriDistrict students. Activities include: adding a career and college fair for students, implementing a summer college road trip (a free opportunity for any student to visit up to eight colleges and universities in Minnesota), partnering with the Dakota County Library System to host a summer job hiring fair for students ages 14+, and adding co-sponsored events to the calendar of TriDistrict.

The freshmen seminar course at Henry Sibley High School has been updated by adding “Career and College Fridays.” Every Friday, either a different post-secondary institution (two-year, four-year, and military) or a career field is highlighted by guest speakers, hosts and presenters. Finally, TriDistrict partnered with Dakota/Scott County Workforce Development Board’s Youth Committee to be a site for the testing and use of Traitify. Traitify is an online interest survey and career exploration tool that has 3000+ users to date.

In the second area of focus for the Innovation Research Zone (changing how students engage and involve themselves in their thoughtfully chosen courses), of a number of new courses have been introduced or refined. These new and/or refined courses include EMR/EMT coursework with EMR/EMT certification, culinary courses with a ServeSafe certification, a CNA course with certification as a certified nursing assistant, a Trades Exploration course, and a Teacher Explorer course with concurrent enrollment credit through the University of Minnesota. Other courses and curricula are being updated for the 2019-20 academic years and beyond.

In the third area of focus for the Innovation Research Zone (providing immersive learning experiences (ILE) for students that have a career and/or college focus), two courses are being implemented: Healthcare Careers and Medicine, and Careers in Transportation Business and Technologies. In each of these courses, students spend the fall semester at a business partner’s campus site immersed in three areas of study: career exploration, professional skills development, earning an English language arts credit—meeting ELA standards in the context of the career environment in which their program resides. Right now, students are preparing for interviews for an internship experience that will take place during the spring semester. In the internship

placement, students will have the opportunity to continue to learn and practice what was learned in the fall as they complete a 160+ hour internship.

This type of coursework is part of the Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) Network of programs. The TriDistrict is one of eight such programs in the state of Minnesota, and one of 48+ across the United States. Between private and public grant-making, the TriDistrict has received more than \$170,000 in funding to support our TriDistrict Career and College Readiness Initiative, primarily in the third area of focus.

Progress on Outcomes:

This is the first year of implementation, so data on goals, objectives and outcomes is not yet available. Qualitatively, student response and excitement has been substantial. Parent interest and involvement and satisfaction has increased. Business partner engagement continues to grow as local and regional chambers of commerce increase involvement and engagement. Quantitatively, 150+ students are engaged in new or revised programming with a specific career trajectory. This is a nearly 100 percent increase from the prior year.

Outcomes are not yet available. For ninth grade seminar at Henry Sibley, the entire freshman class (approx. 385 students) are participating. For TriDistrict courses, 43 students are participating. For individual district courses in career pathways, 100+ students are participating in CNA, Teacher Explorer, and EMR/EMT courses.

Barriers:

The challenge most prevalent is that TriDistrict courses are off-site. When offerings are looked at through an equity lens, the project has a strong commitment to providing transportation for students who do not have their own. This includes transportation for student internships. The anticipated cost for transporting approximately 12 students is \$60,000+. Without transportation, however, the students would not be able to attend. These students are also students who fall into typically underserved populations.

Another area of challenge in keeping this coursework accessible to all students is the ability to provide additional, just-in-time support for struggling students. As a part of the Innovation Research Zone application, the project had requested an exemption from Minnesota Statutes section 126C.10. As a result of course timing, the project had requested the ability to access extended-time revenue during the school day to support at-risk students, allowing them to stay in the program. Two students dropped out of the program because of struggles with this.

Conclusion

While the Innovation Zones are still early in their implementation, several themes have emerged.

- The time needed for start-up of an innovation zone increases as the number of partners increases.
- Several projects were hampered by the inability to generate additional revenue to cover the cost of services.
- Most projects were modified somewhat from the application because no additional funding was available to support the projects or delays related to internal approvals and processes.

- The challenge of measuring learning outside of the school day and school wall was noted, particularly as it relates to achieving academic standards.

The next year of implementation will provide improved evidence of success in meeting outcomes.

Bibliography

Innovation Research Zone Pilot Project Interim Reports, 2019, submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education by:

- Bloomington Public Schools
- Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton
- Montevideo-Benson
- Norman County West
- TriDistrict