

# Overview of the Innovation Schools Act

The Innovation Schools Act, passed in 2008, provides a path for schools and districts to design and implement innovative ideas and practices, and to obtain waivers from state and local policies and collective bargaining agreements that challenge their ability to execute their ideas. The stated purpose of the Act is to provide additional flexibility to schools and districts for the purpose of meeting student needs, and it is the intent of the Colorado Department of Education to interpret the provisions of the Act broadly so as to maximize this flexibility.

Obtaining innovation status can give schools more autonomies, similar to those received by charter schools, giving them greater flexibility and control over their resources without the responsibility for operations and HR. It also allows the school greater control over budget, schedule, staffing, and school operations, so that these resources may all be strategically aligned with the school's approach to teaching and learning. Currently, most of the modifications that schools have made as a result of innovation status are in the areas of time, school calendar, and personnel, which allow the schools to increase their instructional time and manage their own staff. Although they could seek flexibility, most innovation schools have chosen to continue implementing their district curricula.

Any public school may apply to its local school board to become an Innovation School. Groups of public schools within a district may apply to become Innovation Schools operating in an Innovation School Zone. The Department encourages schools and districts to pursue innovation status and to seek waivers permitted under the Act if existing policies and procedures inhibit their ability to innovate and/or serve their students well.

## The Process for Seeking Innovation Status:

- 1.) *Develop an Innovation Plan*-engage school staff, community, and SAC
- 2.) *Obtain Consent*-evidence that majority of administrators, staff and SAC consent to designation as an innovation school.
- 3.) *Seek District Waivers/Approval of Plan*-local board considers the plan, including the request for waivers, and within 60 days must approve or reject the plan with written explanation. An amended plan may be resubmitted after denial.
- 4.) *Seek State Waivers/Approval of Plan*-state may suggest changes/additions for further innovations to increase the likelihood that the innovations will result in greater academic achievement. Plan must be approved or denied within 60 days.
- 5.) *Seek Approval of Collective Bargaining Waivers*-60% of the members of the collective bargaining unit who are employed at the innovation school must consent to innovation status.
- 6.) *Implement and Review*-Every 3 years the local school board must review the innovation school's performance and determine whether adequate progress is being made. The local school board can revoke a school's innovation status or require the innovation plan be revised. The state is not involved at this level unless additional state waivers are requested in revised plan.

## Summary of Innovation Schools

Innovation Districts in 2012	# of Innovation Schools	# of Innovation Zones	# Students Enrolled	Total District Enrollment	% of Students in Innovation Schools	Date innovation Status Grated
Denver public Schools	25	0	10,959	83,377	13.14%	March 2009
Colorado Springs D11	1	0	977	28,993	3.370%	August 2010
Kit Carson	2	1	110	110	100%	March 2011
Falcon District 49	9	1	6,934	15,478	44.60%	June 2012

*The above information can be found on the CDE Innovation website in the 2013 Innovation Report (reflecting 2012 data).*