

Supporting and Scaling School Innovations:

Learnings from National Research

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Areas of inquiry

- What is school innovation?
- How can school innovation be supported by leaders of districts, partnering organizations, and schools
- How can innovative approaches to teaching and learning be shared and scaled?



Methodology

Data sources

- Published literature on school innovation
- Landscape scan of over 65 sources (e.g., reports, websites)
- Primary data collected from 59 participants
 - Background interviews and advisory panel meetings with education and school innovation experts
 - Interviews and focus groups with district and nonprofit leaders, school leaders and founders, teachers, and students from 10 focal districts and nonprofits
- Artifacts about school innovation shared by participants



Methodology (cont'd)

Analytic approach

Thematic analysis, triangulating themes across data sources



Identification of focal districts and nonprofits

- Purposive sample of ten initiatives from districts and nonprofits
- Selection criteria informed by advisory panel and review of published literature and publicly available resources
- Granted autonomies (e.g., in student assessment, professional development, student scheduling) to facilitate innovative approaches to teaching and learning



Characteristics of focal districts and nonprofits

- Participants in Title I and National School Lunch programs
- Located in large urban areas with diverse student populations
- Varied in terms of grade levels served, governance structures and models, and motivations for pursuing innovation



Conceptions and critical components of innovation

Innovation as...

- improved and diverse approaches to achieving long-standing goals
- focusing on nontraditional goals and “*beginning from a fundamentally different set of questions*” [school-level leader]. One school-level leader’s guiding questions:

“What does it take to produce thinkers, doers, teammates, and citizens? What does it look like to graduate young people into a life of security, connection, and purpose? And do you have a sense of agency or control over your life, do you have meaningful relationships with people, do you feel like what you’re getting up and doing everyday matters?”



Conceptions and critical components of innovation (cont'd)

Innovation as...

- the provision of flexibility and support (and not “*input control*”) is essential for school-based educators to execute their work
- characterized by intentional communities of practice
- an equitable approach to serving students; an opportunity to meet each student’s specific needs by offering different models and resources



Examples of innovative teaching and learning practices

- Competency-, inquiry-, and project-based learning opportunities
- Authentic assessments of learning
- Opportunities for “real-world learning” via experiential learning
- Focus on social-emotional learning, strong relationships, restorative cultures, advisory models
- Use of technology to facilitate professional learning for teachers and personalized learning experiences for students



Examples of innovative teaching and learning practices (cont'd)

- Resources (e.g., a state-of-the-art maker space) to facilitate learning in the areas of art, computer science, engineering, and auto work
- Unique pathways to graduation/specializations that students choose
- Highly individualized student schedules (e.g., blocks that facilitate interdisciplinary work)
- Teachers serving as facilitators and other non-traditional capacities



Overview of findings

*Shared visions
and knowledge
of autonomies*

*Commitments and
distribution of power*

Tailored supports



Findings

Shared visions and knowledge of autonomies

- Clearly articulated visions and missions related to innovation
 - Example: a theory of action shared “*in public record*” that articulates inputs, outcomes, and the roles of the district and schools in achieving a shared vision
- Shared knowledge and understandings of schools’ autonomies
 - To ensure all relevant school departments/staff understand and honor schools’ flexibilities



Findings (cont'd)

Strong district/nonprofit commitments to innovative schools and distribution of power

- Consistency in district-level commitment to innovation
 - Including to mitigate the effects of staff turnover in districts
- District orientation that fosters school-level empowerment
- Advocacy and support from a nonprofit outside a district
- Shared leadership, decision-making power, and responsibility (e.g., with educators) *“Putting the folks who are closest to the work in charge”*
- Financial supports and budget flexibilities
- Support from teachers’ unions



Findings (cont'd)

Tailored supports for schools and educators

- Differentiation of supports and resources to meet schools' individual needs
- Positions, offices, or partners that support innovation
- Support, development, and supervision of school leaders
- Robust professional learning opportunities for educators, tailored to individual schools' needs, schedules, etc.



Sharing and scaling

- Strategic and intentional approaches to sharing models and scaling practices
 - Set processes and schedules for sharing models and practices among teachers, schools, districts, and partners
 - Facilitation of professional learning opportunities that bring schools together to work collaboratively on strategies and impact.
 - Piloting the scaling of successful school-level innovations for implementation in other schools



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