

DRAFT
CONCEPT OVERVIEW
***Innovation Zones: Teacher Collaboration and Leadership
for 21st Century Schools***

A. Purpose: To establish zones of educational innovation that allow the staff of schools to collaboratively devise and implement 21st century school improvement strategies that are currently restrained and/or restricted by WVBE policy or West Virginia Code.

B. Theory of Change: With removal of barriers and appropriate support and professional development, it is believed that the ability to significantly improve student achievement resides within each school. Top down "outside in" approaches to school improvement rarely produce lasting improvements. Decades of school improvement literature substantiate that schools where the principal uses a collaborative and distributed approach to leadership, where teachers have a unity of purpose, operate in a cohesive learning-centered culture and implement consistent, pervasive and research-based approaches to improvement, can and do improve student learning. Unfortunately, most schools lack time and organizational structures for collaboration and adult learning; teachers operate in isolation and feel little empowerment to change things beyond their own classroom. By creating innovation zones, teachers working collaboratively with their principal, will be given the opportunity to determine how to best improve student learning without constraints of policy or code that currently limit a staff's ability to innovate.

C. Benefits: Creating such a zone will allow a safe environment for significant areas of education reform to be applied on a small scale. Using the business principle of prototyping, such an endeavor will allow local educators to use their own creativity and innovative ideas to develop effective school-wide models for enhancing 21st century student achievement. The creation of such zones allows policy makers (1) to collect information on the effects of specific innovations on student achievement, (2) to document design and process strategies that enhance or impede success, (3) to determine if such practices should be brought to statewide scale through changes in practice, policy or code, and (4) to determine a statewide process for approving, monitoring and evaluating requests for waiver of state policy and code. Initiating such a project fills a significant need in West Virginia improvement efforts. Few current improvement efforts address the organizational and structural barriers that prevent 21st century learning. Thus, most current improvement efforts attempt to place 21st century learning practices in an organizational systems designed for 20th century learning. As a result, potential positive effects are diminished. Innovation zones will allow educators at the school level to rethink such areas as the extended and year-round school, allocation of time within the school day, professional development processes, professional advancement, facility design, utilization of technology, and other such areas that impact ability to develop 21st century learners.

D. Essential Conditions: For the innovation zone schools to be successful in advancing 21st century learning concepts, the governing guidelines/processes will be built

around the best current thinking and research associated with effective innovation and change. Thus, all schools applying for innovation zone status must adhere to the following essential conditions:

1. **Significant Contribution to Preparing Students for the 21st Century Learning:** In determining the innovation zone focus, the school staff must determine what must be changed or improved to better prepare students with the knowledge and skills necessary in the 21st century. The staff must be able to defend their selection based on the particular demographics and/or needs of their students and WV's vision for 21st century learning.

2. **Critical Mass of Support:** The targeted innovation must be derived from the creative vision of the local school staff and have the support and commitment of a critical mass of the staff within the school. A school will not be selected as an innovation zone site unless at least 80% of the staff is committed to and engaged in the success of the initiative. Likewise, during the four-year design and implementation process, this same percentage of staff must be decision-makers in the design, implementation and refinement of the initiative.

3. **Teacher Collaboration and Shared Leadership:** The implementation design will include processes for on-going teacher communication, planning, collaboration and problem-solving. There must be on-going opportunities for teachers to identify organizational barriers, solve problems and make decisions about the desired innovation. It must also include effective means of enhancing teacher formal and informal leadership throughout the process.

4. **Teacher Professional Growth:** The protocol design must include teacher designed regular and on-going embedded professional development. The professional development may be delivered in a variety of ways including professional learning communities. Professional development activities must relate to the desired innovation but also to the implementation processes such as effective teacher collaboration and shared leadership.

5. **Student/Parent/Community Engagement:** To create a broad partnership that supports the desired innovation, each school site must create a strategy for engaging students, parents and appropriate community members. This engagement must include two-way communication strategies that inform the innovation implementation process and appropriate involvement processes that create a common focus and sense of unified action.

C. Management/Support: The State Superintendent of Schools, working in cooperation with the State Board of Education, the Governor's Office and Legislative leadership, will oversee the development and implementation of innovation zone schools. This oversight will include on-going communication with various stakeholder groups that represent public education and higher education. In addition to the informal input from stakeholder groups, the state superintendent will appoint a "Innovation Zone Support

Committee" made up of professionals knowledgeable of 21st century concepts, effective change processes and the conditions that promote innovation. This Support Committee will oversee the procedures, guidelines, selection processes, support systems and evaluation protocols associated with the innovation zone initiative. Once selected, each innovative zone site will also have a teacher leader and principal representative on this Committee. This will enable the Support Committee to act in a true partnership as a "problem-solving/assistance group" dedicated to supporting innovation zone success. Once innovation zone sites have been selected, the Support Committee will help each school create the type of support system appropriate to the innovation desired in each school. The support system will be individualized to school needs and will be based upon interviews with the site staff. As appropriate, the State Superintendent of Schools will identify WVDE staff members with appropriate expertise to support the work of the school and act as a liaison to the WV Board of Education.

D. Local Board of Education: Prior to the application submission, the staff of the school must present their idea and receive approval of that idea by the superintendent of schools and local board of education. This approval must be documented in the application. In addition, the local superintendent of schools, or designee, must determine the type of support and assistance that will be provided locally and potential waivers of local policy or practice that may be needed to support school success. Schools seeking to be innovation zones must be given some latitude in determining what must be "taken off their plate" in addition to things they want to add as part of their desired innovation. The State Superintendent of Schools will discuss these issues with local superintendents at their regular meeting. Once innovation zone sites are selected, a letter of agreement will be created that defines the obligations of the WVDE, the LEA and the school.

E. Process/Timeline: The implementation of the Innovation Zone concept will proceed in six phases:

Phase I: Preparation and Research/Development of the Protocol (September 2008 - February 2009). Staff of the WVDE will conduct research on existing national programs for creating innovation zones. This research would be summarized in a concept paper for review by the WV Board of Education and other stakeholder groups. Next, proposals for Legislative funding, Board of Education policy and changes in Legislation will be drafted for review. Once consensus is reached on the basic vision for innovation zones, more specific protocol details will be drafted. This will include such specifics as the application parameters, the application process, the approval process, the innovation site support system, the evaluation process and the reporting system to the Governor, Legislature and WV Board of Education.

Phase II: Request for Applications/Site Selection (March - May 2009). Once the application process is defined, the WVDE Office of Communications will distribute appropriate information on the Innovation Zone concept and the processes for application. Care will be taken to communicate the concept to teachers and school

principals in such a way that discourages top-down pressure to apply. Included in the application processes will be the criteria for selection and the process by which schools will be selected. Criteria will be established that include such things as (1) the percentage of staff that must be committed to the concept, (2) documented support by the local Board of Education, students, parents and the community (3) potential of school to be successful with innovative processes, (3) quality of the projected planning design, and (4) the initiative's overall potential for furthering 21st century learning concepts, and (5) compliance with the "essential conditions" described in section D of the document. The process for reviewing the applications will be conducted by the Innovation Zone Support Committee. The review process will include a pre-screening to narrow the application pool to a reasonable number (15-25) followed by an on-site review of the schools to determine readiness and commitment. Once this review is complete, planning grants from \$10,000 - \$50,000 will be awarded. Grants will be awarded based on size of school and the characteristics of the planning design. Grants will not be awarded to schools where it is clear that the initiative has no potential to be "scaled up" in West Virginia schools.

Phase III: School Planning (June 2009 - May 2010). Once the innovation sites have been selected, the schools will implement a planning process designed to (1) develop a school professional learning community focused on the school's selected 21st century innovation and the "essential conditions," (2) develop the leadership/management plan for implementing the innovation over the succeeding three years, and (3) identify the Code or Policy exemptions necessary for implementing the desired innovation. The school will be allowed one year to complete steps one and two. However, schools requesting code exemptions must submit those prior to the Legislative session beginning January 2010.

Phase IV: Selection of Schools for Implementation (June-July, 2010). Once schools have completed the three goals outlined in Phase III (see specifics above), the schools will submit their refined plan to the Support Committee. The Support Committee will evaluate the quality of the school plans and their potential to further 21st century goals. This may include review of both written plans and interviews with school staff. Once the reviews are complete, the Support Committee will recommend schools to receive code or policy waivers. These recommendations will go to the WV Board of Education and the WV Legislature. The Support Committee will also work with the State Superintendent of Schools to determine the financial and human resources that may be leveraged to support the schools who qualify for Phase V Implementation.

Phase V: School Implementation (August 2010 - July 2013). During the implementation phase, care will be taken to provide the support and assistance that allows the schools to put into practice the behaviors and processes that lead to successful change and improvement. Using the principles of continuous improvement, there will be support for on-going teacher collaboration, planning and shared leadership; embedded professional development, mentoring; monitoring

and feedback, and effective processes of internal and external communication. The Support Committee working with WVDE personnel will help schools determine ways that fiscal and human resources may be leveraged or realigned to support school goals. Assigned WVDE personnel will also act as liaisons to address issues and concerns that inevitably occur during the change process.

Phase VI: Reporting/Lessons Learned (August 2010 - July 2013). A data collection strategy will be designed to document both the implementation processes and outcomes produced for students. These data and information will be structured for policy makers so that decisions may be made regarding the "scaling up" of the targeted innovation. The reports will also be structured so that policy makers can use the findings in designing more effective and efficient procedure for granting policy and code waivers to West Virginia schools.

F. Focus of Innovation Zones - In order to advance the Governor, West Virginia Board of Education and the Legislature's vision for 21st century learning, the focus of individual school or district innovations should align with elements of this 21st century vision. Thus, the application and selection process will be structured around key 21st century curriculum and instructional concepts. These 21st century concepts are listed below. *It should be noted that schools and school systems will be given the latitude to focus on innovation areas **not listed** below if the school staff feels the selection will advance 21st century learning.* It should also be noted that all selected schools must demonstrate a commitment to *21st century leadership practices* described in section D under essential conditions.

1. 21st Century Curriculum: Schools or school systems may choose one or more of the following 21st century curriculum areas:

- a. Focus on Rigorous Standards in any Content Area
- b. Integration of 21st century Skills
 - Thinking and Problem-Solving
 - Information/Communication Processing
 - Personal and Workplace Productivity Skills
 - Creativity and Innovation Skills
 - Student Self-Direction
- c. Fiscal, Economic and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- d. Civic Literacy and Global Awareness
- e. Personal Wellness

2. 21st Century Instructional Processes: Schools or school systems may choose one or more of the following 21st century areas:

- a. Standards-Based Instruction
- b. Problem-Based Learning
- c. Contextual Learning
- d. Performance Assessments
- e. Classroom Assessments for Learning

- f. Technology Integration
- g. Teacher Facilitated/Student Directed Learning

G. Policies/Code for Which Exemptions May Be Requested - Until Innovation Zone schools complete their planning, it is difficult to determine which policies or code may be the subject of exemption requests. However, the policies/codes listed below are likely to be included in requests since they govern the critical elements of school organizational structures and operation. The WV Board of Education, working with the Governor's Office, the WV Legislature and stakeholder groups, must determine if certain areas of code or policy will be excluded from exemptions and waivers. Certainly any area of code/policy that, if waived, would undermine the safety or well being of staff or students would not be considered.

1. Policy 2445.40: Groupings for Textbook Adoptions for Early childhood, Middle childhood and Adolescent Education
2. Policy 2510: Assuring Quality of Education: Regulations for Education Programs
3. Policy 2515: Uniform Grading
4. Policy 2520.1 through Policy 2520.19 and Policy 2520.25 and Policy 2520.55: 21st Century Content Standards and Objectives for West Virginia Schools [all subjects]
5. Policy 5202: Licensure of Professional/Paraprofessional Personnel
6. Policy 5310: Performance Evaluation of School Personnel
7. Policy 2340: West Virginia Measures of Academic Progress Program
8. WV Code 18-5-45: School Calendar
9. WV Code 18A: School Personnel