



American Youth Policy Forum

State Policy Context

Scaling Deeper Learning through District-Wide Implementation of Project-Based Learning

An AYPF Study Tour

Kentucky/Ohio | November 6-8, 2018

Currently, many students in the United States do not leave school with the skills they need for their future, be it college or career. This is due to a general lack of “soft-skills” development: students leave the classroom with content knowledge, but without the ability to apply it in a meaningful way. Deeper learning is an educational movement that addresses this problem by promoting content mastery, critical thinking and problem solving skills, collaboration, communication, and a self-directed growth mindset. By building these competencies in schools, students leave better prepared to face their futures. To better serve its students, Kentucky is actively applying federal and state policies to implement the deeper learning framework in its schools. While policies can hinder the flexibility necessary for this system, Ohio’s legislature and Department of Education have taken significant steps to incorporate the deeper learning framework into the school system.

KENTUCKY

ESSA Plan

Kentucky’s ESSA plan places a considerable emphasis on equity. The plan has developed a new accountability system that holds students to high performance expectations. While this system has stringent standards requirements, it also implements a focus on ensuring that low-performing students have the resources necessary to boost their achievement to meet these standards. This includes equity across the quality of teachers and educational experiences. The plan also highlights the necessity of developing the college and career readiness of students.

Novice Reduction for Gap Closure Initiative

The Kentucky Department of Education provides a set of online resources in order to inform schools and districts about the best practices to boost student achievement and reduce the number of students who perform below proficiency. The state has taken a four-step approach to addressing this challenge. The first component is the implementation of continuous student assessment in order to develop learning goals that are relevant to students. Second is the development of supportive learning communities, in and outside of the classroom, to address all student needs and make sure they are prepared to learn. The third step is to implement evidence-based core and universal instruction practices that are effective for all students. Finally, Kentucky points to the importance of flexibility in developing curricula and standards. Without flexibility, education may not be tailored to the individual needs of students, which can make it challenging for them to become more proficient.

Districts of Innovation

In 2012, the Kentucky Legislature passed a series of resolutions that allow school districts to apply to the Board of Education to be exempted from regulations, provisions, and/or local board policies in order to redesign their approach to education. The goal of these experimental districts is to increase the college and career readiness of their students. The state defines innovative programs as those that introduce a “new or creative alternative to existing instruction and administrative practices intended to improve student learning and student performance of all students.” In order to receive approval, applicants must create a detailed action plan with focused performance targets, and they must continue to adhere to the same baseline standards that other Kentucky schools are held to, such as health and safety regulations.

There are three cohorts of these Districts of Innovation, the first beginning in the 2013-2014 school year and the third beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. The second cohort, which began in 2014, houses Owensboro Independent School District. Owensboro launched its Innovation Academy in 2016, the states’ first project-based STEM school. Since then, this school has received acclaim from Governor Steve Beshear as an exemplar of good educational practice for the rest of the state. It has also recently acquired more space in order to allow students and teachers to interact with each other more readily.

TELL Kentucky

The Kentucky Department of Education, in collaboration with the nonpartisan New Teacher Center, has developed a survey of the states’ educational workforce. The Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Kentucky survey is a method of collecting data from school staff on a number of different factors measuring school functioning. These factors include community engagement and support, teacher and school leadership, and professional development. The data collected through this survey are intended to inform educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders on how educators perceive and interact with their work environments. This, in turn, can assist in the implementation of evidence-based policies to increase student achievement. The results from the TELL survey also benefit schools and districts, who can use the results to provide support to educators where it is needed and create more effective learning environments.

OHIO

Department of Education Strategic Plan

Ohio’s Department of Education has put together a strategic plan to improve the educational outcomes of its students. This plan intends to address “the whole child” by focusing on equity, partnership, and quality schools. Every strategy proposed by the department addresses each of these principles. The Department states that only through providing equal opportunity to a quality education and community can they ensure the well-being and success of their students. The plan prioritizes the following improvement strategies for 2019 through 2024:

- Prioritizing equity
- Ensuring students have foundational knowledge and skills
- Accommodating all students’ learning and growth needs and aspirations

- Celebrating learning
- Supporting effective educators who achieve results
- Fostering environments that maximize student learning
- Advancing quality in- and out-of-school learning opportunities
- Promoting evidence-based, innovative practices
- Prioritizing early learning
- Striking partnerships to deploy integrated supports
- Emphasizing collective stakeholder impact
- Measuring progress

Competency-Based Education Pilot

In 2015, the Ohio General Assembly adopted a Competency-Based Education Pilot by providing \$2,000,000 for five selected sites to develop and administer competency-based education (CBE) programs over the course of four school years. Applicants included community schools, joint vocational school districts, STEM schools, traditional school districts and educational service center-led consortia. Each pilot site received \$200,000 per academic year for one planning and one implementation year. The pilot aims to promote meaningful learning experiences for students through cross-curricular instruction and out-of-classroom learning. It also requires that mastery be used as an indicator of student placement, and that students are provided with additional supports when needed to reach this level of proficiency. The results of this pilot will be used to inform statewide competency-based education policy reforms. The 2018-2019 school year marks the final year of the pilot.

Ohio Innovation Lab Network Consortium Competency-Based Assessment System

Through the Competency-Based Education Pilot, the Ohio Innovation Lab Network Consortium is developing an innovative competency-based assessment system with the support of Stanford University's Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE). The consortium includes the Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio and six Ohio school districts: Cleveland Heights-University Heights City Schools, Kirtland Local Schools, Maple Heights City Schools, Orange City Schools, Perry Local Schools and Springfield City Schools. SCALE has assisted with the development of customized competency-based assessment materials in grade 6 math, Algebra 1, and US History. The consortium is creating competency-based assessments for project-based learning, blended learning, work-based learning and portfolio/capstone projects. The six school districts will use these assessments to support systematic and districtwide changes in instruction and curriculum while monitoring student achievement toward desired performance outcomes.