

# AMSD-KnowledgeWorks Statewide Survey Summary

**Background.** In late June 2023, the [Association of Metropolitan School Districts](#) (AMSD), supported by the national nonprofit [KnowledgeWorks](#), conducted a statewide Minnesota stakeholder survey. This survey collected information to better understand how statewide policies impact the ability of schools and districts to adopt innovative education practices, as well as begin collecting insight related to potential policy changes. The survey was open to anyone who wished to participate. Questions were geared specifically towards those with a baseline knowledge of education policy and implementation. The survey results will be used to inform the subject areas and content for a series of workshops designed to engage Minnesota stakeholders in ideating around potential policy changes needed to encourage innovative education practices.

**Definition of Innovation.** AMSD and KnowledgeWorks elected to use the following definition of “innovation” for participants in the survey:

*Innovation is defined in the survey as “your ability to make a change that centers education around student needs and that is significantly different than how we’ve traditionally provided education in America”.*

**Participants.** Collectively, 88 unique participants from various geographic regions across the state completed part or all of the survey. Table 1 shows the variety of stakeholders who took the survey:

Table 1: Constituent Categories	
Category	Count
District administrator	39
School board member	23
Principal	19
Community member	18
Parent	14
Other (open response option provided)	11
Other school administrator	8
Teacher	6
Higher education representative	6
Business	2

*Note: participants were able to indicate multiple constituencies. As a result, all values will add up to more than 88 collectively.*

The survey also asked participants to identify which area of the state they were from. As a proxy for this, the survey asked participants to indicate which [Minnesota Service Cooperative](#) (MSC) most represented their location. The results can be seen in Table 2:

<b>Table 2: Geographic Location</b>	
<b>MSC Category</b>	<b>Count</b>
Brightworks (formerly Metro ECSU)	31
South Central Service Cooperative	13
Southeast Service Cooperative	13
Resource Training and Solutions	6
Northeast Service Cooperative	4
Sourcewell	4
Lakes Country Service Cooperative	3
SWWC Service Cooperative	1
Northwest Service Cooperative	0
Unsure which service cooperative I belong to	13

*Note: n = 88 for this question*

**Overall Descriptive Statistics.** As a part of the survey, participants were asked to respond to the statement “select the amount of impact each area has on innovation, from none to very high.” This question used a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no impact and 5 being very high impact. Participants were asked this question independently of whether the impact was perceived as positive or negative. Participants responded to this question across sixteen different categories, representing a combination of identified areas of interest to AMSD and KnowledgeWorks’ [State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning](#). The results, including the average Likert score (closer to 5 equates to higher impact) and the combined percentage indicating the category as “high” or “very high” impact can be seen in Table 3:

<b>Table 3: Overall Descriptive Statistics</b>		
<b>Question Topic</b>	<b>Mean (out of 5)</b>	<b>High or Very High Impact</b>
Vision for student success	2.41	15.69%
Teacher training programs	3.37	49.02%
Existing teacher licensure requirements	2.9	35.30%
Teacher professional development systems	3.41	47.06%
High school graduation requirements	3.02	35.30%
Ability to demonstrate mastery of academic material in innovative ways	3.47	54.90%
Creating new student learning pathways	3.84	66.67%
Virtual learning	2.98	35.29%
State K-12 Assessment structures	2.69	31.38%
State K-12 Accountability structures	2.84	35.30%
Minnesota's instructional hour definition	2.78	31.38%
School calendar requirements	2.82	29.41%
Opportunities for requesting flexibility from state requirements	3.45	52.94%
Existing K-12 funding structures	3.39	49.02%
MDE's existing operating practices	2.8	27.45%
MDE's data compliance and reporting structures	2.75	35.29%

*Note: The total participants responding to this question was n = 51.*

Impact on Innovation. The remainder of the survey asked participants to indicate whether each policy supports innovation, hinders innovation, does both depending on the circumstances, or does not impact innovation. Participants were also able to select no opinion. Table 4 provides an overview of three of these categories - supports innovation, hinders innovation, and can do both:

<b>Table 4: Impact on Innovation</b>			
<b>Category</b>	<b>Supports Innovation</b>	<b>Hinders Innovation</b>	<b>Can Do Both</b>
Vision for student success	4.94%	19.75%	58.02%
Teacher training programs	5.17%	50.00%	32.76%
Existing teacher licensure requirements	1.72%	48.28%	39.66%
Teacher professional development systems	17.24%	29.31%	32.76%
High school graduation requirements	6.15%	33.85%	33.85%
Ability to demonstrate mastery of academic material in innovative ways	30.65%	27.42%	25.81%
Creating new student learning pathways	41.94%	11.29%	29.03%
Virtual learning	19.35%	25.81%	38.71%
State K-12 Assessment structures	7.02%	61.40%	14.04%
State K-12 Accountability structures	8.77%	42.11%	15.79%
Minnesota's instructional hour definition	3.57%	55.36%	17.86%
School calendar requirements	3.57%	67.86%	10.71%
Opportunities for requesting flexibility from state requirements	23.64%	16.36%	40.00%
Existing K-12 funding structures	5.45%	41.82%	36.36%
MDE's existing operating practices	5.45%	38.18%	36.36%
MDE's data compliance and reporting structures	3.64%	47.27%	32.73%

*Note: number of responses ranged from a high of 81 with vision for success, to a low of 55 for the MDE questions. This reflects the proportion of respondents who may have completed a portion of the survey but not the entire survey. In the case of an incomplete survey, partial responses were still captured.*

Category Comparison. In order to compare categories, reviewers leveraged a basic method for comparison that combines the overall impact on innovation with the potential for a negative impact on innovation (see note below table for method). The higher the score, the greater the likelihood that the category had a combined high and negative impact on innovation. The results can be seen in table 5, sorted by highest to lowest score (out of 10 total possible points):

<b>Table 5: Total Impact Score</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Score</b>
Teacher training programs	7.508
Existing K-12 funding structures	7.299
Existing teacher licensure requirements	7.297
MDE's data compliance and reporting structures	6.75
School calendar requirements	6.7485
MDE's existing operating practices	6.527
Teacher professional development systems	6.5135
State K-12 assessment structures	6.462
Minnesota's instructional hour definition	6.441
High school graduation requirements	6.405
Vision for student success	6.2985
Opportunities for requesting flexibility from state requirements	6.268
Virtual learning	6.206
Ability to demonstrate mastery of academic material in innovative ways	6.1315
Creating new student learning pathways	5.856
State K-12 Accountability structures	5.735

*Note: This calculation represents a score out of 10. To calculate it, the “average” impact score from table 3 for each category was added to the sum of the percentages of “hinders innovation” and “does both” from table 4, with the latter of these two scores being multiplied by 5 to give it the same weight as the average impact score (i.e., convert it to a number out of 5). The equation is articulated as:*

$$\text{Score} = (\text{mean impact out of 5 from table 3}) + 5 \times (\% \text{ hinders innovation} + \% \text{ can do both from table 4})$$

Qualitative Responses. In addition to quantitative survey results, participants were also given an opportunity to provide a qualitative response to each category. The bullets below represent high level takeaways from this qualitative portion for each section. Each summary paragraph represents a high-level summary of more frequently expressed views and trends from each section. These summaries should not be interpreted as a comprehensive overview of every perspective expressed.

**Overall Trends.** While specific issues vary considerably depending on the subsection, overall, there were two consistent trends present across many of the subsections. These include:

- *A One-Size-Fits-All System.* Participants regularly expressed frustration with a system that pushes schools towards a one size fits all approach. This was true across areas such as funding and vision, opportunities for demonstration of mastery such as graduation requirements, teacher licensure, state assessments, and school calendar requirements.
- *Too Many Requirements.* Participants frequently expressed their concern that there are too many existing policy requirements placed on educators, schools, and districts, which in turn hampers innovation. This concern was expressed in areas such as funding and vision, opportunities for demonstration of mastery, requirements around teacher licensure and professional development, mechanisms for requesting flexibility, how funding is required to be used, and with the state’s Innovation Zone.

**Vision for K-12 Education.** This category focused primarily on Minnesota’s general vision for education as articulated in its state documentation, funding system, and ESSA plan. Several participants highlighted how, at a high level, the state’s vision generally perpetuates a traditional approach to education and does not actively support or promote innovation. Participants frequently highlighted the broad range of rules and expectations placed on schools in Minnesota as well as the challenges that exist in innovating while following those rules. For example, several participants highlighted the top-down nature of state requirements and how policies can be relatively strict in what they allow. These participants shared that this creates a push towards same-ness and removes the room for local decision making centered on community needs. Other participants highlighted how both policies and funding specifically can constrain innovation, particularly in the context of unfunded mandates.

**Demonstration of Mastery.** This category included areas such as graduation requirements, standards, general ability to demonstrate mastery of academic standards, student learning pathways, and virtual learning. One overarching theme highlighted by many participants is the “one-size-fits-all” nature of education pathways in Minnesota. Participants highlighted the broad range of requirements that push schools towards a more standardized model. Participants also highlighted how policy could generally be rethought to create more flexibility for districts to try new things. Graduation requirements and teacher licensure were cited several times as examples of where rethinking could be beneficial. Some participants cited quality control concerns regarding pathways, with existing grading standards and virtual learning both cited multiple times as examples of how existing standards can allow students to progress even after a lower quality educational experience.

**Teacher and Leader Policies.** This category included teacher training, teacher licensure, and teacher professional development. Responses generally spoke to a broad frustration with how existing policy makes it difficult to recruit and train high quality educators in the classroom. Existing teacher licensure requirements along with Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, were frequently cited as having a negative impact in this area. Several participants also spoke to the lack of innovation in licensure, professional development, and training. Some mentioned how teacher training has not embraced innovative approaches which creates a mismatch between how teacher candidates are trained and what the field needs. A number of participants also highlighted how state mandates and requirements in these three areas often don't lead to meaningful impacts for students. Many participants also cited the lack of training in evidence-based strategies, such as those focusing on training in reading and literacy.

**Assessment and Accountability.** This category included questions related to both the state's existing assessment system and the state's existing accountability structures. It also included a question about federal requirements and whether they support or hold back innovative education practices. Notably, while the section focused on both assessment and accountability, the vast majority of comments referenced state assessment systems. While participants expressed frustration with existing federal requirements, several also questioned why Minnesota has not done more to seek innovation and flexibility where possible within this system. A number of participants highlighted the nature of the one-size-fits-all assessment system which doesn't take into account differences among students. This in turn makes it difficult to personalize instruction. Related, several participants also highlighted that existing state testing data only captures a limited snapshot of student knowledge, which is often not useful to stakeholders. Some participants also referenced the impact that existing assessments have on instructional time, specifically highlighting the pressure it places on teachers and students as well as how it takes time away from meaningful instruction.

**Mechanisms for Enabling Innovation.** This section included questions focused on structural mechanisms impacting school innovation, including school calendar requirements and instructional time requirements. Participants broadly expressed a desire for more freedom to set a school calendar that responds to the needs of their community. Within this, some participants did express support for some sort of minimum requirement in certain areas, such as a required number of hours of instruction. However, participants expressing this view also voiced their support for flexibility within such requirements. Additionally, a handful of participants also expressed their view that existing policy does allow for some innovation in both calendars and instructional time, which could be more effectively utilized by schools and districts.

**Existing Flexibility Opportunities.** This section included a single question focused on how effective Minnesota's existing opportunities for flexibility from state requirements are at supporting innovative education practices. These include the state's Innovative Pilot Program, the state's Project-Based Learning Site Designation, online requirements, alternative programs and independent study, or the Rigorous Course of study waiver opportunity. Most comments in this section centered on the Innovation Zone. Two main themes emerged from these comments. First, several participants noted that applications submitted under the existing law requesting relief from existing requirements are often not

approved, and thus the program is often viewed as less impactful. Second, a number of participants specifically cited the process requirement that MDE approve the applications as a barrier, which they felt can slow down innovation.

**Funding.** This section asked questions about Minnesota’s funding formula as well as other funding opportunities that could be leveraged to support innovative education approaches. Some participants spoke to the impact of inadequate funding on innovation as a whole, with the existing system failing to provide adequate resources to support innovation. A number of participants highlighted the importance of sustainability of funding for innovation, noting that when the funding goes away, in many cases so does the innovation. Other participants highlighted the logistical challenges in applying for innovative funding opportunities when available, with several noting the strain this process places on smaller districts. Lastly, some participants highlighted the reality that the lack of flexibility driven by how funding is mandated for specific uses hinders the ability of districts to use funding creatively for innovative purposes.

**Minnesota Department of Education Practices.** The final section asked questions about whether and how MDE’s existing practices make it easier or harder to innovate. Questions specifically asked about operating practices as well as data and compliance and/or reporting structures. Multiple participants indicated that too much time is spent on reporting, and that what is required to be reported doesn’t always match the needs of students. Several responses also indicated that reporting may make it difficult to innovate as reporting structures are designed around a very traditional approach to innovation. A few participants also acknowledged the reality that MDE as an entity is also not set up to encourage innovation and that an alternative structure may be needed.

Discussion & Workshop Issue Selection. After examining both the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey, both AMSD and KnowledgeWorks identified several high-level trends that were used to determine the focus areas for next steps, specifically for upcoming statewide workshops.

- Teacher and leader policy (e.g., professional development, training, and licensure) made up 3 of the top 10 impactful areas identified in the Table 5 ranking. Additionally, qualitative responses suggested a need for additional flexibility within these systems to promote teacher development around student-centered and innovative learning practices.
- Other barriers to innovation, such as the lack of opportunities to request flexibility from state requirements, the inability to demonstrate mastery of academic material in innovative ways, graduation requirements, virtual learning policies, calendar requirements, and the state’s instructional hour definition, were all identified as impactful barriers to implementation. Qualitative responses indicated that these could pose barriers either to creating new learning experiences or for students seeking to leverage existing ones. These collectively made up 3 of the top 10 impact areas identified in the Table 5 ranking.
- State assessment structures, while lower on the average innovation impact score, had the second highest “hinders innovation” value, 61 percent (see Table 4) after only school calendars. Qualitative responses also identified this as a systemic factor impacting innovation due to the one-size-fits-all nature of existing assessments.



- Student learning pathways, while high on the “impacts innovation” scale, saw the lowest percentage of barriers to innovation responses, 11 percent (see Table 4).
- Several areas, including MDE data compliance and operating procedures, the state’s accountability structure and its vision for student success, were identified as less impactful overall in the quantitative data shared in Tables 3, 4, and 5.



KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what’s next. For more than 20 years, we’ve been partnering with states, communities, and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we’re creating the future of learning, together.