

AMSD Strategy Guide

Enabling Student-Centered Learning Systems in Minnesota

JULY 2024



Contents

Author’s Note and Statement of Purpose	3
Personalized, Student-Centered Learning	4
Developing this Strategy Guide	5
How to Read this Strategy Guide	6
Culture of Innovation Recommendations	7
1. Develop a model state portrait	8
2. Improve policy flexibility guidance	9
3. Improve funding flexibility guidance	10
4. Study policy structures and recommend changes	11
5. Establish sustainable school and district implementation supports	12
6. Establish a student-centered learning network	13
7. Create a dedicated state funding stream	14
Empowering Educators Recommendations	15
8. Expand access to student-centered trained educators	16
9. Create statewide student-centered professional development opportunities	17
10. Revisit teacher development evaluation	18
11. Study high-quality student-centered learning	19
Assessments Recommendations	20
12. Develop a student-centered assessment pilot	21
13. Evolve the state’s assessment system	22
Acknowledgements	24
Appendix A: Reimagine Minnesota Strategies	25
Appendix B: Defining Terms	26
Appendix C: The Four Phases of Work	28
Appendix D: One Path Forward	29
Appendix E: Supplemental Recommendations	30

Author's Note and Statement of Purpose

This strategy guide was crafted after a year of research and engagement with [AMSD members](#) and the broader education community. As you review, please keep four things in mind.

1. **This guide details how AMSD can build on past work and play a leading role in advocating for a state-level policy ecosystem that supports student-centered learning.**

From 2016 to 2018, in response to the Cruz-Guzman lawsuit highlighting inequities in Minnesota's education system, AMSD worked with a large variety of partners to establish a vision and roadmap for an equitable future of K-12 education, titled [Reimagine Minnesota](#). The roadmap proposed nine strategies (see [Appendix A](#)), including a more student-centered system that personalizes learning. This guide's recommendations and action steps are largely grounded in this and other strategies outlined in *Reimagine Minnesota*.

2. **Experience tells us the recommendations and action steps included here cannot be advanced through the work of any single organization.** AMSD speaks on the collective behalf of districts that represent over half of all public school students in Minnesota, providing tremendous opportunities to lead advocacy efforts in the state. However, the changes this guide proposes will impact schools and districts across Minnesota. AMSD should pursue this work in partnership with the broader education community, including the many organizations already dedicated to advancing student-centered learning.

3. **Experience also tells us that implementing personalized learning with fidelity can provide a much more equitable environment for students to thrive.** However, it is important to bring the desired outcomes of all nine

strategies included in Reimagine Minnesota's roadmap into focus to create lasting equity and excellence for all students.

4. **AMSD should consider how to build its own capacity and expertise to best carry out the action steps in this guide.** The work outlined here involves legislative advocacy, a great strength of AMSD. However, strategic action steps also include deeper relationship development and engagement with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and other education partners across the state and require the creation of new entities and networks. It also creates opportunities for AMSD districts to help develop and communicate models for change. For that reason, AMSD will need to carefully consider how to build organizational capacity moving forward.

We want to reiterate our hope that this work continues to move forward, whether by following this guide in full or prioritizing specific recommendations. We have seen tremendous energy and enthusiasm throughout the state for student-centered learning. Schools and districts are looking for ways to personalize learning for their students, and they will continue to do so. The recommendations and strategic actions detailed in this guide represent an important step toward the long-term transformation of Minnesota's K-12 education ecosystem.

Personalized, Student-Centered Learning

Different organizations, districts and schools use varying terminology to describe similar concepts. Student-centered learning, personalized learning, learner-centered education and others are all used to describe transformative education systems that center students' needs and strengths. These approaches share the following characteristics:

- » Guaranteed rigorous course offerings
- » Workforce and postsecondary relevant learning experiences
- » Culturally competent curriculum and instructional programs
- » Diverse and culturally relevant learning opportunities
- » Flexible scheduling
- » Student and adult development strategies

For a more detailed look at definitions of terms, see [Appendix B](#).



Developing this Strategy Guide

Since the release of the [Reimagine Minnesota](#) roadmap, interest in personalized learning across greater Minnesota has continued to grow. AMSD members regularly share their desire to create personalized learning environments for their students, as well as the barriers that may make it challenging to do so. Legislators have introduced bills in multiple sessions to make Minnesota's policy system more amenable to personalized learning. However, AMSD also hears regularly about the barriers that can make it challenging to create these types of environments.

In response, AMSD and [KnowledgeWorks](#) began a four-phased project to review Minnesota education policy structures in areas impacting schools' ability to innovate. The first two phases of that work included a [statewide survey](#) and workshops to glean information from AMSD members and education partners from across the state, which helped inform a [comprehensive policy review](#). The review included current policies and regulations alongside recommendations for the state to consider that could better enable student-centered learning system-wide. This strategy guide builds on those recommendations by providing AMSD strategic action steps to consider as they advocate for more equitable student-centered learning in the state.

Each phase included input and feedback from voices from across the education system.

The following list represents the categories of partners who provided feedback during this research process.

- » District administration
- » School board members
- » Teachers
- » Advocacy organizations
- » Service cooperatives
- » Higher education

To read more detail about each phase of the work, see [Appendix C](#).



How to Read this Strategy Guide

This guide centers on high-level policy recommendations within three strategy areas—**culture of innovation**, **empowering educators** and **assessments**. Recommendations come from the 2023 [opportunity analysis](#) and are arranged to show a possible order advocates might use to pursue policy change. See [Appendix D](#) for a suggested flow.

Each section follows the same format:

- » **Recommendation title**
- » **What it is:** an overview of the recommendation
- » **Why it is important:** a brief summary of how the recommendation can help advance student-centered learning in Minnesota
- » **Strategic action steps to consider:** a list of suggested advocacy action steps for AMSD
- » **Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*:** tags to strategies and action steps found in [Reimagine Minnesota’s roadmap for action](#)
- » **Relevant state exemplars:** a review of states that have implemented similar policy changes

Some recommendations may require AMSD to undertake new activities, build internal capacity beyond its current reach or collaborate with other organizations across the state in new ways. For this reason, the guide also includes organizational recommendations.

[Appendix E](#) includes a set of supplemental state policy recommendations that partners identified as important but not within the scope of AMSD to lead.



Culture of Innovation

Minnesota can build on existing policies to foster a culture of innovation that encourages and supports schools and districts to pursue personalized learning. Minnesota presently has many school- and district-level “random acts of personalized learning.” However, it does not have a statewide culture that encourages and values student-centered innovation. School districts should play a key role in building this culture in order to benefit students, educators and communities.

1

CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Develop a model state portrait

What It Is. Minnesota’s legislature should direct MDE to develop a “model” statewide portrait of a graduate in close collaboration with schools, districts and communities across the state.

Why It Is Important. As new technologies transform the economy in Minnesota and across the country, schools must take steps to ensure that students are ready to succeed in this new reality. Portraits establish a clear state-level vision for the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for students to be college, career and life ready. In a [2023 AMSD survey](#), participants shared their concerns with Minnesota’s traditionally-oriented vision for education, which they feel does not encourage innovation. A model portrait would help establish a more innovative vision, while continuing to honor Minnesota’s culture of local control of education. A statewide model portrait is also an important base for several of the following recommendations in this guide.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Survey AMSD districts and collect examples of existing portraits, engaging with partner organizations to collect examples from Greater Minnesota where possible
- » Begin building legislative support to develop a model statewide portrait

- » Identify a primary bill sponsor to champion the necessary legislative changes in the 2025 legislative session; language should highlight the importance of engaging local and community partners in the process
- » Engage MDE to convey the need for a portrait and ensure they have a seat at the table when designing aligned legislation
- » Continue engaging MDE once the portrait has been developed to ensure the department creates the necessary resources to maximize its implementation
- » Collaborate with colleges and universities to ensure the portrait aligns with post-secondary education expectations
- » Work with local businesses and industry leaders to incorporate skills and competencies needed in the modern workforce, ensuring the portrait is relevant to career readiness

Relevant State Exemplars. At least [16 states](#) have created similar documents. At least one state, [Virginia](#), required the creation of a profile in state law. Other states like [North Carolina](#), [Utah](#) and [Nevada](#) have created the portrait independent of legislation. States like [Kentucky](#) and [Vermont](#) have also released helpful guidance on how to operationalize their portraits.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns directly with *Reimagine Minnesota’s* Strategy B, which calls for creating a common definition and vision of personalized learning.

2

CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Improve policy flexibility guidance

What It Is. MDE should improve their guidance on existing policy flexibilities that schools and districts can use to create student-centered learning environments. The Department should also launch an intentional communications campaign to engage districts with the guidance.

Why It Is Important. Minnesota already has some policy opportunities in place that can be leveraged by schools and districts to advance student-centered learning practices. These are articulated in resources such as [Education Evolving's guide on Navigating competency-based education policy](#). However, the 2023 AMSD survey and 2024 focus group revealed participants' feelings that existing requirements and guidance continue to push schools toward a more standardized model. Participants also shared that they need clearer state-level definitions and common language. MDE has an opportunity to provide additional clarity around these flexibilities.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

» Work with MDE to develop clearer guidance around how schools and districts can use the mastery credit option articulated in Minnesota State Statute 120B.018 to advance personalized learning; guidance should also update existing references to earning credit to include mastery credit through MDE's resources

- » Collaborate with MDE and other state-level partners to craft a comprehensive "how to" guide that details existing flexibilities and ensure the guide is readily available to districts and easily found in statute and regulation via MDE's website; guidance should be informed by successful examples from other states
- » Advocate for a formal working group of district representatives from across the state to identify areas where additional guidance is required, which could include financial systems, data compliance and reporting requirements as well as teacher licensure requirements

Relevant State Exemplars. Nationally, [South Carolina](#) and [Kentucky](#) have crafted innovation guides to help districts envision what is possible. [South Carolina](#), [Montana](#) and [North Dakota](#) also offer examples of how to clearly articulate guidance on innovation. [Colorado](#) maintains a list of innovative schools and approved waivers on its website.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This action step directly aligns with *Reimagine Minnesota's* Strategy B and the action step to "provide technical assistance and support for personalized learning."

3

CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Improve funding flexibility guidance

What It Is. Minnesota should develop specific guidance describing how state and federal funding can already be used to create innovative student-centered learning environments.

Why It Is Important. Before asking the state legislature for additional dollars, it is crucial to understand how current funding opportunities could be used to support student-centered learning. Uncovering existing funding opportunities that promote innovation requires district-level staff time and capacity, often in short supply. Because capacity is limited, districts may not always be aware of what they can accomplish with existing state and federal dollars. MDE has an important role in helping provide clarity.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Survey districts implementing competency-based education; this survey should identify how they are using existing state and federal funding streams, as well as questions they may have, and can provide a starting point for potential guidance

- » Partner with MDE to craft guidance explaining how existing state and federal funding sources could be used to advance personalized learning
- » Partner with member districts and MDE to create training modules for district leaders on how to effectively use existing funding for personalized learning initiatives

Relevant State Exemplars. The Aurora Institute provides [a guide](#) articulating strategies used by various states to fund personalized learning. Page 4 of the guide has examples of how various federal funding sources that are passed through to districts could be used to advance these types of educational experiences.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns directly with two areas of *Reimagine Minnesota*. First, it aligns with Strategy B's action step of providing technical assistance and support for personalized learning. Second, it aligns to Strategy I: Statewide funding equity by ensuring that all districts understand how they can use existing funding streams to advance student-centered learning.

4

Study policy structures and recommend changes

What It Is. Minnesota should create a state department-led group or an action-oriented legislative task force to study existing policy structures and craft recommendations for improvement.

Why It Is Important. AMSD's conversations in 2023 and 2024 suggest that guidance on existing policies alone may not be sufficient. Schools and districts have questions and concerns about how policies in areas such as attendance requirements, funding structures and statewide reporting requirements may inadvertently hinder student-centered learning. A legislatively established working group could serve as a powerful opportunity for the state to study these issues in depth and identify necessary changes.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Work with MDE to create a task force to identify opportunities for legislative policy change
- » Engage with key legislators to help them understand the work taking place across Minnesota and the policy roadblocks embedded in state policy

- » Identify a legislative champion to advance the working group and turn the recommendations into legislative proposals
- » Engage key partners, including AMSD membership, EdMN and MDE, to begin building awareness of the need for this type of action
- » Advocate for the necessary statutory and regulatory changes suggested by the working group above
- » Activate networks of AMSD member-district educators, parents and community members to advocate for the proposed policy changes
- » Use media, public forums and social media to raise awareness about the need for policy changes and the task force's recommendations

Relevant State Exemplars. Nevada's state superintendent convened a [Blue Ribbon Commission in 2021](#). This commission was charged with making policy recommendations to update the state's policy framework so that it meets today's learning conditions.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns directly to Strategy B of *Reimagine Minnesota*, specifically providing technical assistance and providing support for personalized learning.

5

Establish sustainable school and district implementation supports

What It Is. Minnesota should determine how to best delegate organizational responsibility to provide the knowledge, guidance and technical assistance needed to support schools and districts working to personalize education for students statewide. This could be done by creating a new intermediary organization or by adding capacity to an existing organization or organizations who can function as an intermediary.

Why It Is Important. Innovators benefit when innovation is driven by an actor that can pursue new structures and approaches that are distinctly different from what already exists. In K-12 education, intermediary organizations can function in this role. They provide technical support, professional development, network facilitation and give assistance in interpreting state law and promoting innovation. This can be done through state agencies as a distinct division or office, inside an institution of higher education or as part of an existing organization.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Advocate that one of the organization's first charges be to design a set of model statewide competencies to operationalize [Recommendation 1](#)

- » Review examples of technical support organizations from around the country; AMSD should collaborate with its members and others invested in student-centered learning in Minnesota to identify the most appropriate structure for the state
- » Craft a plan of action specific to Minnesota's needs driven by the examples collected
- » Advocate for staff time within MDE to engage with the sustainable structure

Relevant State Exemplars. Intermediaries are already well established in the education world as important actors in the work-based learning and innovative education spaces. States such as [South Carolina](#) and [Kentucky](#) have elected to create separate offices in their state departments of education charged with fulfilling many of the traditional functions of an intermediary. States like [Arkansas](#) and [Colorado](#) have created third party intermediaries that receive both public and philanthropic funds, while others like [Arizona](#) function independent of public agencies.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation directly operationalizes *Reimagine Minnesota's* Strategy B, specifically by creating a common vision of personalized learning, advocating for personalized learning in state content standards/system and providing technical assistance and support for personalized learning.

6

Establish a student-centered learning network

What It Is. Minnesota’s legislature should dedicate public funding to establish a personalized learning network for districts across the state. The network should study the impact of emerging models for the purposes of replication and sharing best practices.

Why It Is Important. Networks are crucial for spreading transformative practices through collaboration. Networks also allow policymakers and other statewide actors to facilitate the spread of best practices across schools and districts and deliver innovative professional development. Networks thrive when leveraging multiple funding streams, which allow them to maintain funding over time. This would likely take place after concluding [Recommendation 5](#).

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Convene member school districts to gauge interest in participating in a regional or statewide student-centered learning network
- » Develop a set of core principles for the network reflecting member interest
- » Engage with partners representing greater Minnesota to better understand whether such a network should be statewide or limited to AMSD’s constituency
- » Actively support creation of a student-centered learning network; the network could be facilitated through the organization established in [Recommendation 5](#)
- » Once established, create a comprehensive communication plan to promote the network and its benefits to a broader audience, including policymakers, educators and the public

Relevant State Exemplars. Several states have established networks to facilitate the spread of personalized learning. [North Dakota](#) operates a personalized learning network with several districts, [South Carolina’s](#) Personalized Learning Team works with districts across the state to share best practices and [Nevada](#) operates the statewide Future of Learning Network to bring together interested schools and districts.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns directly to Strategy B of *Reimagine Minnesota*, as well as indirectly to several other strategies oriented around cultural competency, culturally inclusive curriculum, elevating student voice, building bridges between the school and community and ensuring a high level of skill for leaders at all levels.

7

CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Create a dedicated state funding stream

What It Is. Minnesota should create a funding opportunity specifically designed to support districts seeking to create student-centered learning environments.

Why It Is Important. Schools and districts benefit from additional funding to support the planning and implementation of student-centered learning environments. Existing funding sources are not always sufficient. A dedicated funding stream can be instrumental in empowering schools and districts seeking to implement student-centered learning environments over time.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » While advocating for [Recommendation 3](#), solicit district feedback on whether districts may benefit from additional funding to support the planning, execution and expansion of personalized learning practices
- » Use the results of that feedback process to determine whether to continue advocating for a dedicated funding stream proposal for student-centered learning via competency-based education, similar to that proposed in the governor's [2022 budget recommendations](#) and [companion bills](#) in the 2024 legislative session

Relevant State Exemplars. Nationally, several states have implemented student-centered funding streams via grants. [Washington](#) provides grants for districts engaged in its mastery-based learning collaborative of between \$40K and \$125K, [Utah's](#) state board of Education provides planning and implementation grants to schools and districts that can range from \$50K to \$400K, and [Missouri](#) recently awarded over \$2.2 million grants to districts focused on competency-based education.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation advances *Reimagine Minnesota's* Strategy B around personalized learning, as well as Strategy I for statewide funding that ensures equity, access and opportunity for all students.

Empowering Educators

Educators need a deep understanding of personalized learning practices to make the necessary transformative shifts in their classroom practice. Minnesota can build on its existing structures to improve alignment to student-centered learning principles. This is especially true in pre-service programs and professional development. The state could also consider how best to leverage existing policy tools, networks and research opportunities in this area.

8

Expand access to student-centered trained educators

What It Is. Minnesota’s legislature should create a task force to craft recommendations on how to ensure that students have equitable access to educators with expertise in personalized instruction as well as consistent professional learning and development.

Why It Is Important. Policy flexibilities and state resources provide favorable conditions for educators to advance student-centered innovations in their classrooms. However, this will require capacity-building for many teachers and leaders who were trained in more traditional learning environments. Capacity-building should begin in pre-service programs but also extend to professional development for practicing educators. New types of teacher training and development may also necessitate changes to other policies such as those highlighted in the recommendation text. As these strategies are developed, the state must ensure that all students have equal access to educators with this type of training.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Survey member districts to understand whether current educator training programs adequately prepare educators to teach in personalized environments and where gaps exist

- » Engage with legislators, other statewide advocacy groups and MDE to build awareness of and support for a legislative task force based on the results of that survey; topics of interest include teacher preparation, professional development, compensation structures and career development
- » Identify a champion to introduce legislation establishing the task force
- » Actively ensure strong district-level representation on the task force once established

Relevant State Exemplars. There are a number of state-led efforts that could serve as models in this area. For example, a consortium of New England states [established](#) a task force on diversifying the teacher pipeline with a focus on cultural competency. The University of South Carolina conducted [research](#) into the future of the state’s teaching profession, including an emphasis on the state’s portrait.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns to *Reimagine Minnesota’s* Strategies B and D, focusing both on personalized learning and teacher preparation, recruitment and retention, especially for staff of color.

9

Create statewide student-centered professional development opportunities

What It Is. Minnesota’s education leaders and policymakers should ensure professional development opportunities provide educators statewide with training in student-centered learning strategies.

Why It Is Important. Instruction should be centered around the learner experience. Educators and learners should serve as partners in instructional design and delivery, creating personalized routes through which learners are engaged and empowered in the learning process. To achieve this, educators will require additional training and capacity building in student-centered practices. Statewide actors, including the MDE and the Minnesota Service Cooperatives, have an essential role to play in creating these types of opportunities. Because student-centered learning environments use assessments as a key component of learning and advancement, professional development opportunities should include a focus on leveraging data to improve instruction in real-time through ongoing formative, interim and summative assessments.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Leverage the results from [Recommendation 8](#) in conversations with MDE and [service cooperatives](#) to advocate for the types of professional development that would be most helpful to teachers working in student-centered learning environments
- » Work with MDE to ensure that districts understand how existing funding opportunities, such as ESEA Title II, Part A, can be used to support these activities
- » Work with MDE and the Service Cooperatives to determine whether additional funding should be sought from the state to support professional development around personalized learning during future legislative sessions

Relevant State Exemplars. South Carolina’s Personalized learning team provides free [personalized learning professional development](#) on request to schools and districts across the state. In Missouri, the [Success Ready Students Network](#), which collaborates closely with the state department of education, provides professional learning opportunities for interested schools and districts.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns to Strategies B and D from *Reimagine Minnesota*, which address personalized learning and teacher preparation and recruitment.

10

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS

Revisit teacher development and evaluation

What It Is. Minnesota’s education community should review the state’s teacher development and evaluation system model and suggest how it could better enable student-centered learning environments.

Why It Is Important. Minnesota has already incorporated student-centered elements into its [Standards of Effective Practice](#). While the state provides an [example model](#) for districts to use to create their teacher evaluation structures, the model and its accompanying resources can and should be updated to reflect modernized practices that support personalized learning environments.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » In the survey included in [Recommendation 8](#), incorporate questions about its members’ use of student-centered elements in their development and evaluation models
- » Develop recommendations for both districts and for the state that integrate student-centered strategies into existing evaluation models

- » Engage with MDE and advocate for changes to the state example model based on the survey and recommendations from the previous bullets
- » Identify how to best communicate the advice and recommendations for district evaluation models to its membership

Relevant State Exemplars. Based on our research, Minnesota would be one of the first states in the nation to undertake this type of action. That said, [South Carolina](#) has integrated an emphasis on student-centered learning into its teaching standards handbook.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns directly to Strategy B and indirectly to Strategy D from *Reimagine Minnesota*.

11

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS

Study high-quality student-centered learning

What It Is. Minnesota’s K-12 sector, higher education sector and other preparation programs should consider evaluating the impact of high-quality personalized learning preparation, professional development and other supports on student outcomes.

Why It Is Important. Once Minnesota establishes student-centered teacher preparation and professional development structures, the state should endeavor to track how educators that use them are impacting student outcomes. Minnesota’s robust higher education sector, notably the University of Minnesota, is a tremendous resource that could be leveraged to undertake this task. These data could be collected through the [Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board](#) (PELSB) Data Summary Report or other similar data collection process in the state. The results of this data collection could be used to make adjustments as needed to work undertaken under [Recommendations 8, 9 and 10](#).

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Consider engaging researchers from Minnesota’s higher education sector and teacher preparation programs in its work under [Recommendations 8, 9 and 10](#), building

an awareness of what is taking place and helping create investment on the part of Minnesota’s higher education and teacher preparation sectors

- » Engage with PELSB leadership to determine whether relevant information could be collected through its Data Summary Report
- » As districts adopt student-centered learning structures, act as a facilitator to connect those districts to researchers in the higher education space to study the impact of these new systems and structures
- » Regularly engage with education partners outside higher education and preparation programs (educators, administrators, policymakers and community members) to ensure diverse perspectives are incorporated into the research process

Relevant State Exemplars. Based on our research, Minnesota would be one of the first states in the nation to undertake this type of action.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation aligns directly to Strategy B and indirectly to Strategy D from *Reimagine Minnesota*.

Assessments

State assessments directly impact state accountability systems which in turn helps drive student, teacher, school and district behaviors. In recent years, states across the country have begun to consider how their assessment structures could better support student-centered learning environments. Minnesota could consider how to more deeply integrate student-centered approaches into existing assessments at the state level while creating opportunities for local communities to experiment with piloting new types of student-centered assessment. The state has an opportunity to deeply engage the greater Minnesota community to ensure that all voices are collectively heard in this process.

12

ASSESSMENTS

Develop a student-centered assessment pilot

What It Is. Minnesota should develop a legislative pilot program for districts to test and evaluate student-centered assessment approaches in non-ESSA required subjects.

Why It Is Important. Nationwide, current standardized state K-12 assessments can constrain the scope and sequence of learning, preventing personalization of the learning environment. In AMSD's 2023 statewide survey, 61 percent of respondents indicated that the state's current assessments hinder innovation. However, there are opportunities to innovate within the existing confines of federal law. A pilot program could give districts an opportunity to explore innovative assessments in areas not required by ESSA, as well as in lieu of traditional graduation requirements. The results could be used to inform future, and perhaps more substantial, changes to the state's assessment system.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Survey AMSD members to gauge interest in establishing a district pilot and collect information about any existing innovative practices already in use

- » If the results of the information collection are positive, consider engaging with relevant and influential partners across the state to build support for a pilot program
- » Collectively seek out a legislative champion for this work and begin building support among other legislators with the goal of introducing a legislative pilot during the 2026 legislative session

Relevant State Exemplars. Several states have established innovative assessment pilots. [New Mexico](#) established its Graduation Equity Initiative, which brings together a community of 14 founding districts and schools to create a project-based graduation pathway ending in a senior capstone. [Rhode Island's](#) Learning Champions project built a network of educators who piloted and calibrated scoring of student work on performance assessments. And [Virginia](#) removed some of the state's required assessments in non-federally tested subjects while requiring the state to establish a local performance-based assessment.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation directly connects to Strategies B and C from *Reimagine Minnesota*. Strategy B addresses the need for personalized learning environments, while Strategy C addresses the importance of, among other things, creating culturally inclusive standards, curriculum and comprehensive assessment systems.

Evolve the state's assessment system

What It Is. Minnesota's education innovators should revisit the [Future Assessment Design Working Group](#) recommendations from 2017 and leverage existing state expertise to develop a strategy for an assessment system that better supports student-centered learning.

Why It Is Important. Assessments drive the direction of K-12 practice in our existing education system. Partners emphasized that, in their experience, existing assessments push them toward a standardized model of education and provide a limited snapshot of student learning. The legislative pilot from [Recommendation 12](#) would allow Minnesota districts to begin exploring alternatives to existing assessments, which could then help reimagine Minnesota's existing assessment systems. Federal opportunities for flexibility do exist, and now is an opportune time for these conversations as the federal government has recently indicated an openness to granting flexibility to modify existing assessment systems.

Strategic Action Steps to Consider

- » Directly engage with policy professionals who have knowledge and experience in the state's assessment system around the 2017 recommendations, which could include the Minnesota Technical Advisory Committee

- » Establish a group of relevant entities with knowledge of and influence over K-12 education who can advocate for and inform necessary changes in Minnesota law and guidance, as well as a possible application to the federal government
- » Study other examples of emerging assessment systems in states around the country and understand how they could inform work in Minnesota

Relevant State Exemplars. [Numerous other states](#) across the country are undertaking innovative approaches designed to test new forms of assessments to support student-centered learning. At the state level, [Utah](#) utilized an advisory committee approach with deep partner engagement to understand how it might change its assessment and accountability system. [Montana](#) recently received a forward-thinking waiver from the US Department of Education to pilot a through-year assessment. And [Massachusetts](#) piloted a science assessment consisting of performance tasks.

Alignment to *Reimagine Minnesota*

This recommendation directly connects to Strategies B and C from *Reimagine Minnesota*. Strategy B addresses the need for personalized learning environments, while Strategy C addresses the importance of, among other things, creating culturally inclusive standards, curriculum and comprehensive assessment systems.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Scott Croonquist, Troy Melhus, Laura Oksnevad and Dr. Lucy Payne for their thought partnership, feedback and support in the development process for this strategy guide.

We would also like to thank the following individuals, who offered specific insights and feedback on the guide's content.

- » **Matt Grose**, Superintendent, Grand Rapids ISD
- » **Ann Mitchell**, School Leadership Support Consultant, Minnesota Department of Education
- » **Laura Oksnevad**, Director, St. Anthony – New Brighton ISD School Board; Northeast Metro Intermediate 916 School Board; Incoming Chair, AMSD
- » **Dr. Lucy Payne**, Associate Professor of Teacher Education, University of St. Thomas; Director, Mahtomedi School Board; Director and Clerk, Northeast Metro Intermediate 916 School Board; Board Member, AMSD
- » **Dr. Stacie Stanley**, Superintendent, Edina Public Schools; President-Elect, Minnesota Association of School Administrators; Board Member, AMSD
- » **Scott Thomas, Ed.D**, Director of Education Services, Northeast Metro Intermediate District 916
- » **Krissy Wright Quinn**, Teacher Powered Schools



The Association of Metropolitan School Districts represents 47 K-12 school districts and six intermediate/cooperative districts. AMSD member school districts enroll more than one-half of all public school students in Minnesota, with the mission to lead the transformation of public education.

Cover photo: Independent School District 196

KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 25 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. [KnowledgeWorks.org](https://www.knowledgeworks.org)

Appendix A

Reimagine Minnesota Strategies

Reimagine Minnesota outlined [nine strategies](#) needed to create a more equitable future for Minnesota's learners. Each of the recommendations in this guide can be connected to specific strategies in that roadmap. Primarily, [Strategy B: Personalized Education](#).

Additional strategies aligned to this work include:

- » [Strategy A: Cultural competence](#)
- » [Strategy C: Cultural inclusivity](#)
- » [Strategy F: Adult behaviors](#)
- » [Strategy G: Community bridges](#)
- » [Strategy I: Statewide funding](#)

Appendix B

Defining Terms

Education Evolving, a statewide advocacy organization in Minnesota, created a [student-centered learning framework](#). Additional strategies aligned to this work include:



Competency-based education is often defined similarly to student-centered or personalized learning by organizations. [Education Evolving](#) has identified several elements in competency-based environments:

- » Students get the tailored support they need to address knowledge gaps and interrupted learning, and to receive enrichment and accelerated instruction when they're ready to move on
- » Learning outcomes, i.e. target competencies, are designed to be aligned with state standards and include not only academic knowledge but also applicable skills
- » Students have flexibility in the time, place and pace of their learning in the pursuit of their learning outcomes
- » Students have agency to both learn and demonstrate learning outcomes in ways that are personalized and relevant to their interests, identities and aspirations

Nationally, the [Aurora Institute](#) has crafted what is generally recognized as a field-wide definition. The revised 2019 definition of competency-based education is:

1. Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge and how they will demonstrate their learning
2. Assessment is a meaningful, positive and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant and actionable evidence
3. Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs
4. Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time
5. Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing
6. Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure and pedagogy of schools and education systems
7. Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable and transferable

Appendix C

The Four Phases of Work

1. Statewide Survey

The statewide survey captured perspectives from partners across the state to better understand how statewide policies impact the ability of school districts to adopt innovative, student-centered education practices. It also began collecting insights related to potential policy changes and informed the next phase of research.

88 participants from regions across Minnesota completed all or part of the survey. [View a summary of the results.](#)

Three trends, or strategy areas, emerged as important to address through policy change:

- » **Creating a culture of innovation:** policies that make it easier—or harder—to try new things (e.g., calendar requirements, seat time definition, the state’s innovation zone)
- » **Supports for educators and leaders:** training, licensure, professional development
- » **K-12 assessments:** Minnesota’s existing system of state assessments

2. Collaborative Workshops

In the second phase of work, KnowledgeWorks held a series of three workshops to discuss the results of the survey and better understand current policy barriers. Over 100 participants from AMSD districts and across the state provided feedback about their current experiences with the survey trends and spent time envisioning elements of their ideal future for student-centered learning.

KnowledgeWorks used the information gathered at these workshops to provide context for the next step in the work: developing a policy analysis.

3. Policy Opportunity Analysis

KnowledgeWorks developed an in-depth analysis of the state’s policy environment, including recommendations for possible policy change. This process is referred to as an “opportunity analysis.”

For the [opportunity analysis](#), researchers asked, “What would it take to ensure every student has the opportunity to learn in a student-centered education system?” They also reviewed Minnesota state statute and regulations.

Evidence in the opportunity analysis was collected through an extensive analysis of Minnesota’s laws, regulations, programs and initiatives and interviews with key partners across the state. The recommendations in the opportunity analysis became starting points for conversation in the final phase of the project.

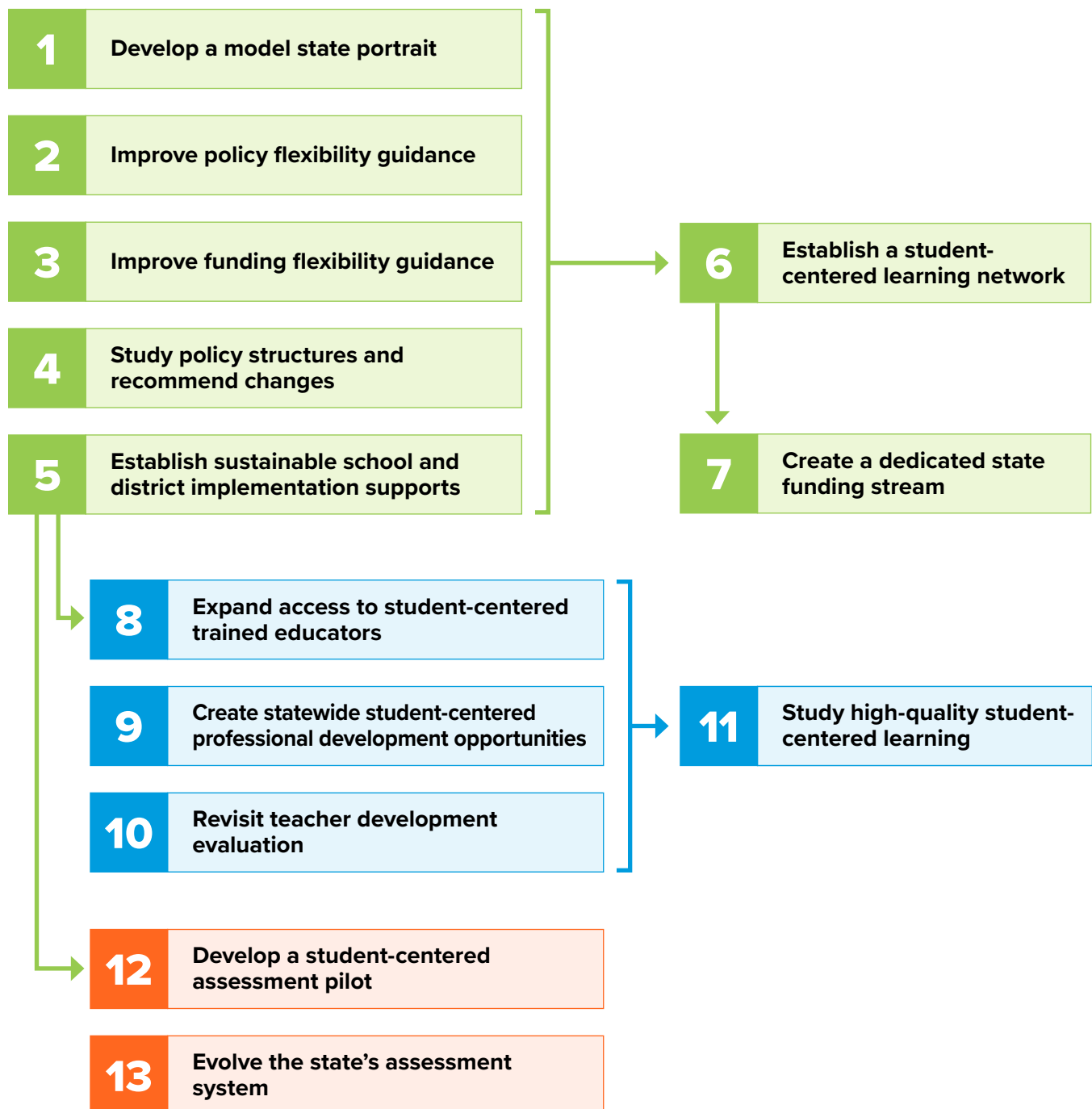
4. Strategy Guide

This strategy guide is designed to help build the capacity of AMSD and its partners to better advocate for policy changes recommended in the opportunity analysis. The guide contains a subset of those policy change recommendations, chosen through a series of prioritization conversations in partnership with AMSD members. The guide includes recommended action steps for AMSD and its partners to take as they consider advocating for policy change, as well as structural recommendations for AMSD to consider as it evaluates its capacity to lead advocacy efforts.

Appendix D

One Path Forward

This visual represents one possible strategy for how AMSD might pursue each of these recommendations, based on feedback from partners. The path forward is suggested in part because advocating for some of the latter recommendations might be difficult to pursue without first laying the groundwork of earlier recommendations.



Appendix E

Supplemental Recommendations

AMSD identified several recommendations for state policy change from the opportunity analysis that are important, but not within the scope of the organization to lead advocacy efforts. These recommendations are included here as a call to action for other advocates with the relevant knowledge and skills to act upon them.

Establish peer learning communities in assessment literacy and deeper learning

Minnesota should consider establishing formal peer learning communities to support assessment literacy and creative thinking around improvements to support deeper student learning at the state and local levels related to assessment. The state might also consider leveraging existing teacher and leader networks for this purpose.

Develop model performance task banks for assessment in classrooms

Minnesota's Department of Education should explore the development of a model collection of performance tasks that educators could consider integrating into their curriculum to support high-quality student-centered learning. These tasks could also provide a basis for awarding credit based on mastery as defined in state statute. Educators and districts should be given an opportunity to contribute locally developed tasks to this bank.

Incorporate student-centered elements into licensing standards

The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) should review and incorporate elements of personalization using a nationally recognized framework (such as educator competencies) for personalized learning at the next opportunity, either when standards are revised or in rule making.

Implement the 2020 gubernatorial student-centered recommendations

Minnesota policymakers should be encouraged to take action on recommendations relevant to educators in the governor's [2020 Roadmap for Transformational Change in Minnesota Education](#). This work would ideally be done in collaboration with teachers, community organizations, the Minnesota Children's Cabinet, families, school leaders, policymakers, labor unions, education preparation providers and elected leaders.

Establish a cross-agency, student-centered research body

MDE should be encouraged to establish a cross-agency research and development team to oversee the Evidence-Based Education Grants evaluation process and use the work to expand and deepen current efforts to identify effective strategies which would support district implementation, with a student-centered focus.