

iNACOL 2019 STATE POLICY PRIORITIES

iNACOL
ISSUE BRIEF

iNACOL's 2019 state policy priorities highlight top issues within the K-12 education system and offer recommendations to address them.

These policy priorities are equity-driven and future-focused; they seek to achieve long-term change by empowering state and local stakeholders. The following policy priorities and issues are informed by the learning sciences and lessons learned from high-performing education systems in other countries. They are intentionally constructed around the idea to move states from their [current state of education to future education systems](#) capable of preparing all students with the knowledge, dispositions and skills to achieve success, contribute to their communities and advance society.

State policymakers can improve student outcomes and create lasting change by setting a long-range vision for state education systems to transform them into personalized, competency-based learning environments that prepare all students for a lifetime of success.

2019 STATE POLICY PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE



PRIORITY #1

Redefine student success to ensure students are prepared for college, career and civic life with the knowledge, skills and mindsets for healthy and prosperous futures.

PRIORITY #2

Create meaningful qualifications that are based on mastery, rather than seat time.

PRIORITY #3

Redesign accountability systems for continuous improvement to achieve equity and excellence, empowering stakeholders with multiple, balanced measures and reciprocity processes.

PRIORITY #4

Build balanced systems of assessments to certify student mastery of knowledge and skills and provide timely feedback on where students are in their learning.

PRIORITY #5

Develop educator capacity for next-generation learning by modernizing educator preparation and development systems and increasing workforce diversity.

PRIORITY #6

Build leadership capacity for creating and sustaining change for personalized and competency-based education through preparation, professional development and culturally responsive teaching, learning and leading throughout the K-12 education system.

PRIORITY #7

Establish enabling state policies to create and launch innovative new learning designs and multiple pathways in schools and systems through innovation zones, pilots, credit flexibility, mastery-based diplomas and mastery-based transcripts.



TRANSFORM U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEMS

State Policy Priority #1: Redefine student success to ensure students are prepared for college, career and civic life with the knowledge, skills and mindsets for healthy and prosperous futures.

Redefining success using a [profile of a graduate](#) is one strategy states are using to clearly articulate holistic definitions of student success. With clear, comprehensive definitions of student success, states can begin to transform their education systems, and do so in a coherent manner, so stakeholders are working together to ensure all students succeed.

The [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) gives states and local communities the opportunity to partner with local stakeholders to develop new definitions of success so that all students can be prepared to thrive in postsecondary education, employment and civic life. Reading and math proficiency are necessary, yet not sufficient. States may now use multiple measures of school quality and student learning for federal accountability purposes. States have the opportunity to consider new definitions of success with the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for future success.

State Policy Priority #2: Create meaningful qualifications that are based on mastery, rather than seat time.

Should academic credit be awarded based on time exposed to a subject, or should students earn credits by demonstrating mastery of the knowledge and skills needed for success? There is a debate around what makes a meaningful qualification and how to define credits for a high school diploma. A more meaningful high school credential would focus on the knowledge, skills and competencies for which students could demonstrate mastery, rather than on seat time. Through approaches such as [qualifications frameworks](#) and [proficiency-based diplomas](#) aligned to a profile of a graduate, state policymakers can ensure qualifications are meaningful to students, postsecondary institutions and employers in terms of the skills, knowledge and dispositions students have mastered upon graduation.





State Policy Priority #3: [Redesign accountability systems for continuous improvement to achieve equity and excellence, empowering stakeholders with multiple, balanced measures and reciprocity processes.](#)

Under ESSA, states and localities are rethinking accountability. With transparency of data and by empowering stakeholders at all levels of the system to do what is best for students, new accountability models can ensure quality, equity and excellence, while driving continuous improvement. Accountability as continuous improvement recognizes the developmental nature of learning and improvement so that every student, school and educator can build and grow on their path to achieving high standards for learning. It is necessary to have transparent information to accelerate achievement, close gaps and attain high, rigorous standards. In this type of environment, every level of the system is accountable for contributions to produce high-quality learning for all.

State Policy Priority #4: [Build balanced systems of assessments to certify student mastery of knowledge and skills and provide timely feedback on where students are in their learning.](#)

State policymakers and local education leaders have the opportunity to rethink the purpose and role of assessments in K-12 education with new flexibility under ESSA. Balanced systems of assessments¹ are designed to support students' deeper learning and to report on achievement outcomes. Balanced systems of assessments can more meaningfully support student learning, allow for demonstrating mastery through authentic work and enable performance assessments creating evidence—and also for accountability purposes. ESSA now allows statewide systems of assessments to include assessments that measure student learning at levels below and above grade level, incorporate computer adaptive assessments, use the results of multiple assessments over time to create a summative determination of student proficiency and incorporate different types (such as performance assessments) to allow students to demonstrate evidence of mastery. Several states are exploring these new flexibilities, both within ESSA's federal requirements and outside (in other subjects not required for testing in ESSA) to rethink their statewide systems of assessments. Also, there is a new U.S. Department of Education program under ESSA that allows states to participate in the [Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority \(IADA\)](#). Up to seven states can pilot new, innovative systems of assessments in a subset of districts by applying to the IADA. State leaders are revisiting policies to enable more balanced and authentic systems of assessments at the local level.

¹ According to Chattergoon & Marion (2016), balanced systems of assessments meet the following criteria:

- » Coherent systems: "The assessments in a system must be compatible with the models of how students learn content and skills over time" and "curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be aligned to ensure that the entire system is working toward a common set of learning goals";
- » A well-articulated theory of action that articulates how each part of the system relates to the others. In other words, what purpose does the system as a whole serve, what different needs does it meet for different stakeholders, and how does it meet them? "A set of assessments, even if they cohere, will not fulfill the intended purposes if the information never reaches the intended user"; and
- » Assessment efficiency means that systems are providing stakeholders with the full range of information that it is intended to provide. "For example, if a state wants to give educators information to help them adjust instruction, its assessments must be tied to the curriculum that is being used. These assessments should in turn yield timely, detailed information about the knowledge and skills being assessed at the local level."



**BUILD CAPACITY
BY INVESTING
IN PEOPLE**

State Policy Priority #5: [Develop educator capacity](#) for next-generation learning by [modernizing educator preparation](#) and development systems and increasing [workforce diversity](#).

State policymakers need to invest in [developing educator capacity for next-generation learning](#) by modernizing educator preparation and development systems. Transforming K-12 education systems requires teacher capacity for personalized, competency-based learning models rooted in the learning sciences. State education leaders and stakeholders need to revisit the outdated policies and structures of teacher preparation program accreditation, standards for educator licensure and certification, teacher professional development systems and standards for educator quality to ensure that teacher-leaders are equipped with the competencies and skills to create personalized learning environments. Additionally, through cultivating [assessment literacy](#), educators will develop the knowledge and skills to assess student learning, provide meaningful feedback and personalize learning. State leaders should also seek to increase diversity within the teacher workforce to better reflect student backgrounds.

State Policy Priority #6: Build leadership capacity for creating and sustaining change for personalized and competency-based education through preparation, professional development and culturally responsive teaching, learning and leading throughout the K-12 education system.

School leaders need preparation, support, vision and skills to transform K-12 education systems to next generation learning. To do this, state policymakers can [build system and school leadership capacity for change](#) through personalized and competency-based preparation and professional development systems rooted in the learning sciences. A core requirement of education leadership should be the belief that with timely, individualized supports, all students have the ability to succeed. It is time to build system and school leadership capacity for change through personalized and competency-based preparation and [professional development systems](#). Additionally, state leaders should intentionally increase workforce diversity to better respond to the diverse needs of students. Simultaneously, intentional and strategic efforts are needed to increase diversity within district and system leadership.





State Policy Priority #7: Establish enabling state policies to create and launch innovative new learning designs and multiple pathways in schools and systems through innovation zones, pilots, credit flexibility, mastery-based diplomas and mastery-based transcripts.

State policies and mechanisms that create space for innovation are essential to transforming education systems. State policymakers can enable policies to create space for innovation and new designs to support personalized learning, such as providing multiple pathways, creating innovation zones, launching competency-based education pilots and moving from seat-time to mastery-based learning by allowing credit flexibility, mastery-based diplomas and transcripts. These are among a number of entry points—along a continuum—for state policymakers to pass enabling mechanisms for competency-based, personalized education systems in their states. These begin with relatively simple credit flexibility policies and innovation zones and progress to more complex policies and initiatives, such as multiple pathways and mastery-based diplomas for empowering stakeholders to do what is best for students.

Learn More

INACOL – 2019 State and Federal Policy Priorities

INACOL – Current to Future State: Issues and Action Steps for State Policy to Support Personalized, Competency-Based Learning

INACOL – A National Landscape Scan of Personalized Learning in K-12 Education in the United States

INACOL – State Funding Strategies to Support Education Innovation

INACOL – Innovation Zones: Creating Policy Flexibility for Competency-Based Personalized Learning

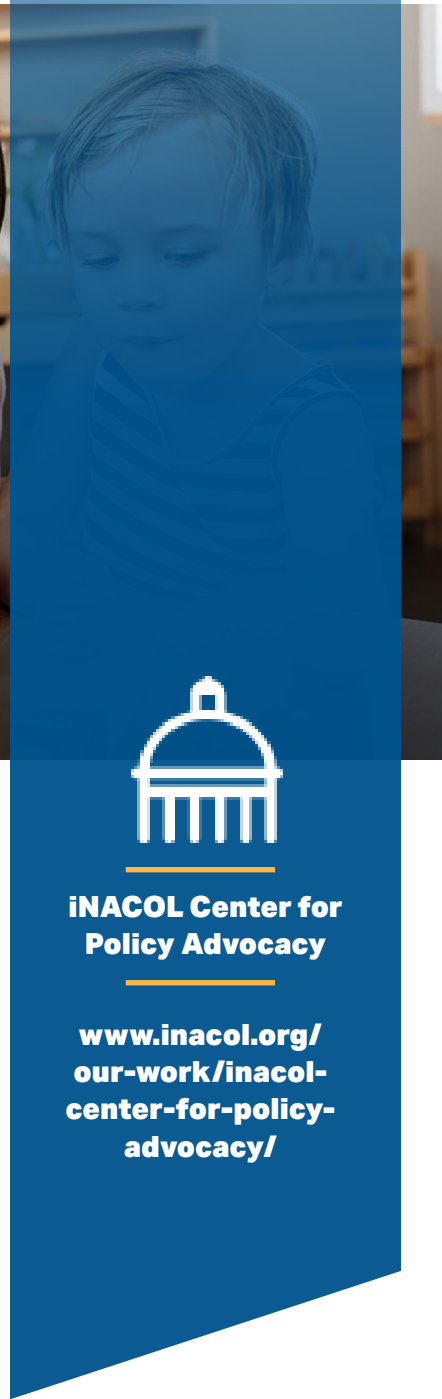
INACOL – State Policy & K-12 Competency-Based Education

INACOL – Redesigning Systems of Assessments for Student-Centered Learning

INACOL – Redefining Student Success: Profile of a Graduate

INACOL – Rethinking State Accountability to Support Personalized, Competency-Based Learning in K-12 Education

INACOL – State Strategies to Develop Teacher Capacity for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning



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The mission of iNACOL is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all.

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