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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- INNOVATION ZONE SCHOOLS

Introduced By: Senators de la Cruz, Rogers, E Morgan, Paolino, DeLuca, and Zurier

Date Introduced: January 12, 2024

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by  
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 114

4 INNOVATION ZONE SCHOOLS

5 **16-114-1. Definitions.**

6 As used in this chapter:

7 (1) "Innovation school" means a school in which a local school board implements an  
8 innovation plan pursuant to § 16-114-2, with the approval of the state board.

9 (2) "Innovation school zone" means a group of schools of a school district or multiple  
10 school districts that share common interests, such as geographical location or educational focus, or  
11 that sequentially serve classes of students as they progress through elementary and secondary  
12 education and in which a local school board implements a plan for creating an innovation school  
13 zone with the approval of the state board.

14 (3) "State board" means the Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary  
15 education (RIDE).

16 **16-114-2. Local planning and approval.**

17 (a)(1) A public school of a school district may submit to its local school board an innovation  
18 plan pursuant to subsection (c) of this section. A group of public schools of a school district or in  
19 multiple districts that share common interests, such as geographical location or educational focus,

1 or that sequentially serve classes of students as they progress through elementary and secondary  
2 education may jointly submit to their local school board or boards a plan to create an innovation  
3 school zone pursuant to subsection (d) of this section.

4 (2) The local school board shall hold a public hearing on the plan.

5 (3) The local school board shall either approve or reject the innovation plan within sixty  
6 (60) days after receiving the plan.

7 (4) If the local school board rejects the plan, it shall provide to the public school or group  
8 of public schools that submitted the plan a written explanation of the basis for its decision. A public  
9 school or group of public schools may resubmit an amended innovation plan or amended plan for  
10 creating an innovation school zone at any time after denial.

11 (5) If the local school board approves the plan, it may proceed to seek designation of the  
12 school as an innovation school or innovation school zone.

13 (b) A local school board may initiate and collaborate with one or more public schools of  
14 the school district or other districts to create one or more innovation plans, under subsection (c) of  
15 this section, or one or more plans to create innovation school zones, under subsection (d) of this  
16 section. In creating an innovation plan, each public school that would be affected by the plan shall  
17 have the opportunity to participate in creation of the plan. A local school board may approve or  
18 create a plan to create an innovation school zone that includes all of the public schools of the school  
19 district.

20 (c) Each innovation plan may include the following information:

21 (1) A statement of the public school's mission and why designation as an innovation school  
22 would enhance the school's ability to achieve its mission;

23 (2) A description of the innovations the public school would implement, which may  
24 include, but not be limited to, innovations in school staffing, curriculum and assessment, class  
25 scheduling, use of financial and other resources, and faculty recruitment, employment, evaluation,  
26 and compensation;

27 (3) A listing of department of education's administrative rules from which the schools are  
28 requesting a waiver and rationale for the waiver request including how and why the waiver is  
29 needed to implement its identified innovations;

30 (4) A listing of the programs, policies, or operational documents within the public school  
31 that would be affected by the public school's identified innovations and the manner in which they  
32 would be affected. The programs, policies, or operational documents may include, but need not be  
33 limited to:

34 (i) The research-based educational program the public school would implement;

- 1           (ii) The length of school day and school year at the public school;
- 2           (iii) The student promotion and graduation policies to be implemented at the public school;
- 3           (iv) The public school's assessment plan;
- 4           (v) The proposed budget for the public school; and
- 5           (vi) The proposed staffing plan for the public school;
- 6           (5) An identification of the improvements in academic performance that the public school  
7 expects to achieve by implementing the innovations;
- 8           (6) An estimate of the cost savings or increased efficiencies, or both, if any, the public  
9 school expects to achieve by implementing its identified innovations;
- 10           (7) A statement of the level of support for designation as an innovation school or school  
11 zone demonstrated by students and parents of students enrolled in the public school, and the  
12 community surrounding the public school;
- 13           (8) A description of any provision of the collective bargaining agreement in effect for the  
14 personnel at the public school that would need to be waived or modified for the public school to  
15 implement its identified innovations; and
- 16           (9) Any additional information required by the local school board of the school district in  
17 which the innovation plan would be implemented;
- 18           (d) Each plan for creating an innovation school zone submitted by a local school board  
19 through collaboration with a group of public schools, may include the information specified in  
20 subsection (c) of this section for each public school that would be included in the innovation school  
21 zone. A plan for creating an innovation school zone may also include the following additional  
22 information:
- 23           (1) A description of how innovations in the public schools in the school innovation zone  
24 would be integrated to achieve results that would be less likely to be accomplished by each public  
25 school working alone;
- 26           (2) An estimate of any economies of scale that would be achieved by innovations  
27 implemented jointly by the public schools within the innovation school zone; and
- 28           (3) A statement of the level of support for designation as an innovation school  
29 demonstrated by students and parents of students enrolled in the public school, and the community  
30 surrounding the public school based upon the public hearing.
- 31           (e) In considering or creating an innovation plan or a plan for creating an innovation school  
32 zone, each local school board may consider innovations in the following areas:
- 33           (1) Curriculum and academic standards and assessments;
- 34           (2) Accountability measures, including, but not limited to, expanding the use of a variety

1 of accountability measures to more accurately present a complete measure of student learning and  
2 accomplishment;

3 (3) Provision of services, including, but not limited to, special education services, services  
4 for gifted and talented students, services for students for whom English is not the dominant  
5 language, educational services for students at risk of academic failure, expulsion, or dropping out,  
6 and support services provided by the department of health and human services or county social  
7 services agencies;

8 (4) Teacher recruitment, training, preparation, and professional development;

9 (5) Teacher employment;

10 (6) Performance expectations and evaluation procedures for teachers and principals;

11 (7) School governance and the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of principals in  
12 innovation schools or schools within an innovation school zone; and

13 (8) Preparation and counseling of students for transition to higher education or the work  
14 force.

15 (f) Each public school and each local school board may seek and accept public and private  
16 gifts, grants, and donations to offset the costs of developing and implementing innovation plans  
17 and plans for creating innovation school zones.

18 **16-114-3. State approval.**

19 (a) A local school board may seek an innovation school or school zone designation by the  
20 state board.

21 (b) A local school board that seeks designation of an innovation school or school zone shall  
22 submit one or more innovation plans to the department for review and comment.

23 (c) Within forty-five (45) days after receiving a local school board's plan, the department  
24 of education shall respond to the local school board with any suggested changes or additions to the  
25 plan, including, but not limited to, suggestions for further innovations or for measures to increase  
26 the likelihood that the innovations will result in greater academic achievement and growth within  
27 the innovation schools or innovation school zones. Based on the department's comments, the local  
28 school board may choose to withdraw and resubmit its innovation plan or plan for creating an  
29 innovation school zone.

30 (d) The local school board shall forward the innovation plan to the state board for review.

31 (e) The state board shall hold a public hearing on the plan. A representative of the  
32 department of education and a representative of the proposing local board shall be present at the  
33 hearing.

34 (f) Within sixty (60) days after receiving a local school board's innovation plan or plan for

1 creating an innovation school or school zone, the state board shall either approve or reject the  
2 innovation plan using reasonable discretion in the assessment of the elements set forth in this  
3 chapter and provide written explanation of the decision to the local board.

4 (g) If the innovation plan is rejected, the local board may resubmit an amended innovation  
5 plan to the department at any time after rejection.

6 **16-114-4. Innovation plans and waiver of regulatory requirements.**

7 (a) Upon the designation of an innovation school or school zone, the state board shall waive  
8 compliance with any administrative rules specified in the local district plan.

9 (b) Each local district shall continue to be subject to all laws and rules that are not waived  
10 by the state board under this chapter.

11 (c) The local board may submit a revised innovation plan pursuant to the provisions of this  
12 chapter at any time if it is determined that additional waivers are required.

13 (d) Each local district and schools not specified in the innovation plan shall continue to be  
14 subject to all rules that are not waived by the state board.

15 **16-114-5. Innovation school and school zone reviews.**

16 (a) Two (2) years after state board approval of the innovation plan and every two (2) years  
17 thereafter, the local board shall review the plan and the progress toward the plan objectives  
18 including improvements in academic performance and any cost savings or increased efficiencies,  
19 or both.

20 (b) The results of the local board review shall be provided to the department of education.

21 (c) If a local school board finds that the academic performance of students enrolled in the  
22 innovation school is not improving at a sufficient rate or that the plan is not achieving the planned  
23 results, the local school board may notify the department and state board that they wish to revoke  
24 the innovation status.

25 **16-114-6. Department of education review.**

26 (a) The department shall review the results of each local board innovation plan review and  
27 analyze the results based upon data available to the department.

28 (b) The department may at any time conduct its own review of the innovation school or  
29 school zone performance.

30 (c) If the department finds that innovation plan performance is not satisfactory, it shall  
31 notify the local board and the state board. The local board may respond or provide a revised  
32 innovation plan pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

33 **16-114-7. Reporting.**

34 The department of education shall provide an annual report on innovation schools and

1 school zones to the governor, the president of the senate, the speaker of the house of representatives,  
2 the chairpersons of the senate and house committees with jurisdiction over education, and the state  
3 board of education.

4 (b) The report shall include:

5 (1) The number of school districts with innovation schools or school zones and the total  
6 number in the state;

7 (2) The number of innovation schools and the number of schools within each innovation  
8 school zone;

9 (3) The number of students in each innovation school or innovation school zone and a  
10 percentage of students in the local district;

11 (4) An overview of innovations implemented;

12 (5) An overview of the academic performance of the students served in innovation schools  
13 and innovation school zones, including a comparison between the students' academic performance  
14 before and after implementation of the innovations, and a comparison with the academic  
15 performance of similar schools; and

16 (6) A list of administrative rules waived.

17 **16-114-8. Rulemaking.**

18 The state board of education shall adopt rules and regulations, pursuant to chapter 35 of  
19 title 42, relative to innovation schools and innovation zones.

20 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- INNOVATION ZONE SCHOOLS

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1           This act would allow for a public school or a group of public schools to implement an  
2 innovation plan through the local school board, as approved by the state board. Each plan would  
3 be subject to review every two (2) years by the local school board, as well as the department of  
4 elementary and secondary education.

5           This act would take effect upon passage.

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