



MINNESOTA

STATE OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS

EVIDENCE

DECEMBER 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Graduation Requirements	4
Standards, Benchmarks, Career and College Competencies.....	4
Graduation Requirements	6
Flexibility within the Credit Requirement	9
Flexibility within the Standards Requirement	10
Culture of Innovation.....	15
Policy Flexibility	15
Time- and Place-based Constraints and Flexibility	15
Additional Policy Flexibility.....	17
Informed Policymaking and Investment	20
General Reporting Culture.....	20
Alignment of Resources.....	21
Dedicated Funding.....	22
Table 3. Programs and Funding with a Research or Evaluation Focus.....	22
Support the Scaling of Innovative Practices.....	24
Comprehensive Supports for Educators and Leaders	25
Educator and Leadership Competencies	25
Educator Standards	25
School Leader Requirements.....	26
Gubernatorial Activity.....	27
Data Collection.....	27
Non-Governmental Actions.....	28
Related Department of Education Actions.....	29
Teacher Preparation, Professional Development and Equity	30
Competency-based Education Practices in Pre-service Programs.....	33
Pre-service Programs.....	33
Professional Development	33
Authentic and Personalized Professional Learning.....	34
Funding Opportunities.....	34

Strategic Vision Alignment.....	35
Existing Networking Opportunities	36
Educator Evaluation.....	37
Innovative Staffing Structures.....	38
Teacher Diversity	38
Innovative Staffing Structures	39
Systems of Assessments	41
Shared Purpose	41
Historical State Work	41
Federal Opportunities.....	42
Community Engagement	43
Recent Legislation.....	45
Potential Opportunities for Flexibility	45
Connection with State Goals	46
Balance and Coherence.....	46
Minnesota’s Existing Assessment and Testing Resources.....	46
Summative Data Collection and Disbursement.....	47
Educator Engagement	47
Connection to Graduation Requirements and Credits	48
Assessment Size and Scope	49
Quality Assurance.....	49
Equitable Statewide Implementation	50
Connection to Broader State Goals	50
Supports and Intervention Services	51
Educator Capacity and Ownership	52

Graduation Requirements

Framework Description: State graduation requirements enable students to explore career interests and are aligned to statewide competencies, ensuring students are ready for postsecondary and workforce success regardless of pathway(s) chosen.

Standards, Benchmarks, Career and College Competencies

The Minnesota Department of Education’s (MDE) standards-based system overview explains “the practice of making sure students learn what they were taught and actually achieve the expected standards (i.e., that students meet a defined standard for ‘proficiency’)...” Using the state’s academic standards, adopted pursuant to [Minnesota Rules, part 3501](#), benchmarks prescribed under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.023](#) and [career and college readiness competencies](#), Minnesota’s public schools develop K-12 pathways and related strategies to support all students in making successful transitions to college and career. For purposes of statewide accountability, the state legislature defined career and college ready in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#) to mean that a high school graduate has the “knowledge, skills and competencies to successfully pursue a career pathway, including postsecondary credit leading to a degree, diploma, certificate or industry-recognized credential and employment.”

Beginning no later than the ninth grade year, all students work with school district staff to develop a comprehensive personal learning plan. This is required by [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.125](#) to prepare for career and/or college, “help students identify interests, aptitudes, aspirations and personal learning styles” and “integrate strong academic content and career-focused courses and applied and experiential learning opportunities.” In addition to requiring some consideration of personalized learning, school districts must “ensure that the contents of each student’s plan reflect the student’s unique talents, skills and abilities as the student grows, develops and learns.” There is an opportunity to have personal learning plans serve as a tool for encouraging and supporting students for whom demonstration of subject matter mastery in lieu of completion of an academic year of study is a good option. This would ensure not only that the annual review and revision of a plan helps keep students on track to graduation, but also that it furthers personalization of learning leading to credit accumulation.

Under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.11](#), every school board must “adopt a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan to support and improve teaching and learning that is aligned with creating the ‘World’s Best Workforce.’” For plans reviewed and updated after June 30, 2024, the World’s Best Workforce is defined as one striving to:

- Meet school readiness goals
- Close the academic achievement gap among all racial and ethnic groups of students and between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty
- Have all students attain career and college readiness before graduating from high school
- Have all students graduate from high school

This policy supports the development of K-12 pathways and learning experiences that explore and build students’ post-secondary interests. It also supports successful transitions into college and career. By requiring that a plan details a “process to assess and evaluate each student’s progress toward meeting state and local academic standards,” World’s Best Workforce plans should be directly aligned with graduation requirements – particularly the requirement that a student must demonstrate

understanding of academic standards, which MDE interprets in [Understanding K-12 Academic Standards](#) to require satisfactory completion of all state and local standards as “measured through state and local assessments.”

MDE’s [Career and College Readiness Resource Guide: Domains and Competencies](#) (CCR Guide) was designed to address concerns that the statutory “definition of career and college readiness lacks sufficient guidance on what it means to be ready and how to get there.” As part of MDE’s support to districts in creating the World’s Best Workforce, it includes guidance and tools for educators. However, while these are labeled as “competencies,” **it is important to recognize that they do not fully meet the definition of a “competency” for the purposes of personalized or competency-based learning.** A competency in this capacity is a broad, cross-disciplinary and interrelated learning outcome that articulates students’ progression towards mastery across multiple content areas and grade levels. See [North Dakota’s learning continuum](#) for an example of a true competency framework.

The CCR Guide was created by an MDE-led CCR work group, with input from stakeholders across the state and in collaboration with the Midwest Comprehensive Center and the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. It articulates four career and college readiness domains and competencies:

- Employability Skills
- Mindsets and Social Awareness
- Career Development
- Transitional Knowledge

It includes definitions of each competency and sample activities, along with information to help school districts develop CCR goals for inclusion in the district’s World’s Best Workforce plan. While not an explicit reference to personalized, competency-based learning, the CCR guide’s “10 Minnesota Commitments to Equity” includes a directive to “empower students with high-quality options to support every learner’s success.”

MDE explains that these “competencies, integrated with discipline-specific academic knowledge, identify mindsets, skills, abilities and experiences that all students need to enter the workforce or an array of postsecondary options.” For example, Academic Content Knowledge, a competency within the Employability Skills domain, is defined as follows:

“Students draw on information, language, procedures and knowledge they have acquired to complete tasks, create solutions or products and make meaning.”

Each CCR domain and related competencies provides a crosswalk to the components of the personal learning plan. The guide also notes that a strong CCR program assesses the competencies periodically and annually.

As mandated by [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.023](#), benchmarks supplement required state academic standards with specific knowledge or skills that a student must master to complete part of an academic standard by the end of the grade level or grade band. In addition, “[S]chools must offer and students must achieve all benchmarks for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that state standard.”

As part of the standards review and revision cycle prescribed under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.021](#) (also known as the Required Academic Standards) the commissioner must “examine the alignment of each required academic standard and related benchmark with the knowledge and skills students need for career and college readiness and advanced work in the particular subject area.” The commissioner must also, under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.023](#), use benchmarks in developing career and college readiness assessments.

An example of a benchmark that addresses the achievement of higher-order skills or dispositions is:

Grades 9-12 Earth and Space Science

Standard 2.1.1 – Students will be able to represent observations and data in order to recognize patterns in the data, the meaning of those patterns and possible relationships between variables.

Benchmark 9E.2.1.1.3 – Analyze geoscience data and the results from global climate models to make an evidence-based forecast of the current rate of global or regional climate change and associated future impacts to Earth’s systems and human infrastructure.

MDE [resources](#) highlight the ability of educators to “bundle” benchmarks to create efficiency, noting that “[W]ithin and across content areas, the curriculum can be arranged in bundles so that units of instruction can be built using approaches such as themes, authentic processes, problem-based learning, essential questions or big ideas.” The same resource touts efficiencies to be found in creating performance assessments designed to measure multiple benchmarks in one product or task, and engaging students “in synthesis of multiple concepts and skills, leading to authentic and relevant learning.” Although personalized learning is not an explicit focus of these resources, they do support deeper learning.

Graduation Requirements

A school district must adopt local graduation requirements that meet or exceed state requirements. [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.02](#) creates two graduation requirement components that make up the state’s minimum requirements:

1. **Credit Requirement:** Students must demonstrate to their enrolling school district or school their satisfactory completion of credit requirements (as established in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.024](#)). Students must complete a minimum of 21.5 course credits, some of which must be in specific content areas, including English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and the arts. In most subject areas, the credits are required to be “sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards” in the area. In addition, students must satisfactorily complete a minimum of 7 elective credits.

The definition of “credit” (under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.018](#)) allows this requirement to be met in two ways:

- A determination by the local school district that a student has successfully completed an academic year of study. [This option is referred to throughout this section as the “seat-time option.”]

- A determination by the local school district that a student has mastered the applicable subject matter. [This option is referred to throughout this section as the “mastery option.”]

2. **Standards Requirement:** Students must demonstrate to their enrolling school district or school their understanding of academic standards.

No statewide data were found indicating the extent to which the mastery option is utilized.

Minimum state requirements, as defined in statute, are highlighted in the table below, along with applicable interpretative language and guidance from MDE.

Table 1. Minimum Graduation Requirements as Defined by the State

Information below is from **Minnesota Statutes** and documents providing **MDE’s interpretations and guidance**. Text in two columns – labeled Component 1. Credit Completion; and Component 2. Standards Completion – align with language used on the [MDE Graduation Requirements](#) webpage which reads:

In Minnesota, students are required to complete two kinds of requirements by the time they graduate. Students must:

- Satisfactorily complete all state academic standards or local academic standards where state standards do not apply
- Satisfactorily complete the state credit requirements under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.024](#)

COMPONENT 1: Credit Completion	COMPONENT 2: Standards Completion
<p>“Students must demonstrate to their enrolling school district or school their satisfactory completion of the credit requirements under section 120B.024.”</p>	<p>“Students must demonstrate to their enrolling school district or school their...understanding of academic standards.”</p>
<p>Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, the high school level credits required for graduation are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Four credits of language arts sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in English language arts (2) Three credits of mathematics sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in mathematics 	<p>Although not specified in Minnesota Statutes regarding graduation requirements, a separate section of the code establishes that “[s]chools must offer and students must achieve <u>all benchmarks</u> for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that state standard.”</p> <p>MDE’s Understanding K-12 Academic Standards notes:</p>

Continued...

COMPONENT 1: Credit Completion

- (3) Three credits of science, including one credit to satisfy all the earth and space science standards for grades 9 through 12, one credit to satisfy all the life science standards for grades 9 through 12 and one credit to satisfy all the chemistry or physics standards for grades 9 through 12
- (4) Three and one-half credits of social studies, including credit for a course in government and citizenship in either grade 11 or 12 for students beginning grade 9 in the 2024-2025 school year and later or an advanced placement, international baccalaureate or other rigorous course on government and citizenship... and a combination of other credits encompassing at least United States history, geography, government and citizenship, world history and economics sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in social studies
- (5) One credit of the arts sufficient to satisfy all of the state or local academic standards in the arts
- (6) Credits sufficient to satisfy the state standards in physical education
- (7) A minimum of seven elective credits
Students who begin grade 9 in the 2024-2025 school year and later must also successfully complete a course for credit in personal finance in grade 10, 11 or 12.

This can be done in one of two ways, based on the definition of credit:

1. The local district determines that a student has “successfully completed an academic year of study” [seat-time option]
2. The local district determines that a student has “mastered the applicable subject matter” [mastery option]

COMPONENT 2: Standards Completion

“All students, including students with unique learning needs, must meet the credit requirements and satisfactorily complete all state and local standards to graduate. The standards are satisfactorily completed through demonstration of grade-level knowledge and skills in the benchmark... School districts and charter schools determine how their students will meet the standards and benchmarks by developing courses, curriculum and instruction.”

However, MDE notes that a district’s determination of “satisfactory completion of all state and local standards” is “measured through state and local assessments.” As such, it is not clear whether this permits the use of performance-based assessments, rubrics or other assessments designed for classroom use.

COMPONENT 1: Credit Completion

Note: MDE’s [Understanding K-12 Academic Standards](#) explains that:

“All students, including students with unique learning needs, **must meet the credit requirements** and satisfactorily complete all state and local standards to graduate.” It does not provide information explaining the two ways (seat-time and mastery options) in which the credit requirement can be met.

COMPONENT 2: Standards Completion

Note: Regarding the standards requirement, MDE’s statement that a student must **“satisfactorily complete all state and local standards,”** deviates from the statutory graduation requirements text: **“students must demonstrate... understanding of academic standards.”** This appears to be based on the statutory requirement that students must achieve all benchmarks for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that state standard.”

Flexibility within the Credit Requirement

Due to a lack of MDE guidance regarding the mastery option, which can be used to satisfy credit requirements in lieu of seat time, it is unclear the extent to which these requirements actually remove time-based barriers that make it challenging for districts to create meaningful pathways both inside and outside of the school building, school day and school calendar year. To award credit under this option, a local district must determine that a student has “mastered the applicable subject matter” for a specified credit. In a [guide for Minnesota educators](#) on competency-based education, Education Evolving notes that “applicable subject matter” is commonly interpreted to mean the “standards of the subject and grade level of the credit being awarded.” These constraints are rooted in the state’s academic standards and grade-level benchmarks, as well as the “credit requirements” described above which specify, in most academic subject areas, that credits are sufficient to “satisfy all academic standards” (state and/or local) for the particular subject area.

MDE explains, in a resource providing [answers to frequently asked questions](#) on math standards and benchmarks, the relationship between standards and benchmarks, statewide tests and requirements for credit and graduation:

Standards describe the expectations in mathematics that all students must satisfy to meet state requirements for credit and graduation.... Benchmarks are intended to "inform and guide parents, teachers, school districts and other interested persons and for use in developing tests consistent with the benchmarks." Whereas “the statewide MCA tests are based on the standards, and all standards must be tested each year in grades 3-8 and also in 11th grade, not all benchmarks are required to be tested each year.

In addition, as described in the table below (Table 2. Flexibility within the State’s Graduation Requirements), the establishment of requirements for project-based learning in [Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.05](#) (referred to as Definition of Pupil Units), including provisions allowing a specific project-based learning average daily membership calculation for a school’s receipt of general education revenue, calls into question the intended use of the mastery option for credit. Project-based is defined

as an instructional program where students complete coursework for credit at an individual pace that is primarily student-led and may be completed on site, in the community or online; however, for a school to benefit from funding flexibility, it must operate a state-approved program and it is not required to make project-based learning available to all students. Project-based learning can take place without state approval; however, in such instances the school is subject to the standard student membership computation. Beyond these statutory provisions, and MDE's funding-related resources, no information was found on the use of project-based learning for credit accumulation.

Comprehensive Youth Apprenticeship Programs as required under [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.47](#) must "integrate academic instruction and work-related learning in the classroom and at the workplace." Participating employers must use competency-based measures to evaluate learners' progress in the program, and learners who successfully complete the program must receive academic and occupational credentials from the participating school. It is important to note, however, that this provides for a student's receipt of academic and occupational "credentials," not "credit," which can be used to meet graduation requirements.

Flexibility within the Standards Requirement

Information published by MDE in [Understanding K-12 Academic Standards](#), specifically text interpreting the statutory requirement that students demonstrate "understanding of academic standards" to mean that a student "satisfactorily complete all state and local standards," may be understood by districts and schools to limit the use of personalized, competency-based learning as an alternative (i.e., non-seat time based) option. MDE explains that the standards are "satisfactorily completed through the demonstration of grade-level knowledge and skills in the benchmarks... school districts and charter schools determine how their students will meet the standards and benchmarks by developing courses, curriculum and instruction." As articulated in additional resources, MDE notes that student mastery of the standards is measured through state assessments and the local assessments educators use to evaluate "student's progress toward and achievement of learning described in the standards and benchmarks." However, the [MDE Graduation Requirements](#) webpage does not indicate whether performance assessments and other classroom-based assessments often used with personalized learning can be used or whether any such assessments must be standardized.

In addition to statewide testing requirements articulated under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#), each school district must provide a local testing program. MDE's [Testing 1, 2, 3](#) website provides resources that outline how to [assess](#) for learning by using a variety of assessment types and understanding their intended purposes at the classroom, district and state levels and more. The [Classroom Assessment](#) webpage includes, for example:

Student Work Analysis Protocol: "...Teachers can use this resource to make a shift from scoring student work to evaluating student performance and using the information to guide instruction and scaffolds."

While the Classroom Assessment information provided stresses the value of using evidence from the classroom in making decisions about curriculum, instruction and supports for students, it does not indicate how such assessments can be used in making a determination that a student has successfully completed standards for purposes of satisfying high school graduation requirements.

Additional flexibility available to districts and students regarding the state’s credit requirements for graduation, and the limitations on some flexibility (i.e., applicability to only one of the two graduation requirement components), are highlighted in the table below:

Table 2. Flexibility within the State’s Graduation Requirements

Area of Flexibility	Limitations
<p>Criteria for Credit Equivalencies. Credit equivalencies authorized Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.024 allow, for example, a student to have an agriculture science or career and technical education credit fulfill requirements for an elective science credit, chemistry or physics credit.</p>	<p>Minnesota Rules, part 3505.1150 specify that a district granting a student a required science, mathematics or art credit for participation in a career and technical education program, must ensure that the career and technical education (CTE) instructor is appropriately licensed and has successfully passed the required Subject Assessment and Specialty Area Test in the area – science, mathematics or arts – for which the credit is granted. In addition, the district must identify the academic standards that will be met through participation in the career and technical education program.</p>
<p>Youth Service Program. A school board may, under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.19, offer a Youth Service Program that “provides young people with meaningful opportunities to become involved in their community, develop individual capabilities, make career connections, seek support networks and services, become active citizens and address community needs through youth service. A school board may award up to one credit, or the equivalent, toward graduation for a pupil who completes the youth service requirements of the district.”</p>	<p>No significant limitations identified.</p>

Continued...

Area of Flexibility

Limitations

Accelerated or Advanced Academic Courses.

Under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.14](#), a school district is required to grant academic credit to a pupil who attends and successfully completes an “accelerated or advanced academic course” offered by an institution of higher education or a nonprofit agency other than the district, and also passes a district-approved examination.

This flexibility appears to limit the “mastery option” for credit accumulation because it requires a student to pass a district-approved exam rather than giving a district discretion in determining that a student has mastered the applicable subject matter.

Work-based learning. A student may participate in work-based learning while enrolled in an approved CTE program. Work-based learning is [defined](#) by MDE as a structured educational program which provides students with instruction at both the school and at an employer work-site. Students earn credits for both, with the number of credits awarded at the discretion of the student’s district and in accordance with the district’s credit policies.

Credit for work-based learning is limited to state-approved CTE programs. Learning that takes place at a supervised work site is required to be combined with classroom instruction.

MDE [guidance](#) explains that “generally, a course credit is equivalent to a student’s mastery of the applicable subject matter, as determined by the local school district and as documented in the individual learning plan. It is recommended that credit awards are based on how the district awards credits in other disciplines, such as math, science, etc. A general guideline is one-half credit per seminar and one-half credit per actual work-based learning (annually).”

Online Learning. The Online Instruction Act ([as provided by Laws 2023, chapter 55, article 2, section 49](#)) establishes that “an online learning student must receive academic credit for completing the requirements of a supplemental online learning course. If a student completes an online learning course that meets or exceeds a graduation standard or the grade progression requirement at the enrolling district, that standard or requirement is met.” (See also [MDE, Online and Digital Instruction](#))

No significant limitations identified.

Continued...

Area of Flexibility

Project-based Learning. In [Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.05](#) (titled Definition of Pupil Units), the legislature established an alternative average daily membership requirement for project-based learning. Project-based is defined as an instructional program where students complete coursework for credit at an individual pace that is primarily student-led and may be completed on site, in the community or online.

Average daily membership for a pupil in an approved project-based program is the lesser of: (1) 1.0; or (2) the ratio of (i) the number of membership hours generated by project-based credits completed during the school year plus membership hours generated by credits completed in a seat-based setting to (ii) the annual required instructional hours at that grade level. Membership hours for a partially completed project-based credit must be prorated. General education revenue for a pupil in a project-based program must be prorated for a pupil participating for less than a full year, or its equivalent.

Rigorous Course of Study Waiver. A student's parent or guardian may request, under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.021](#), a Rigorous Course of Study waiver to provide flexibility for students to participate in International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), College in the Schools (CIS)/Concurrent Enrollment, Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), CTE and other rigorous learning opportunities "within or outside of the school curriculum."

Continued...

Limitations

A district has the discretion to limit project-based learning. Under [Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.05](#), a project-based program may be made available to all or designated students and grades in a school.

To receive general education revenue for a pupil enrolled in a public school with a project-based program, the school must meet criteria which include:

- State approval as a project-based program at least 90 days prior to starting the program
- Minimum teacher contact of no less than one hour per week per project-based credit for each pupil
- Maintenance of a record system that shows when each credit or portion thereof was reported for membership for each pupil

Under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.021](#), authorization of a waiver requires a school or district to determine that a student meets or exceeds a specific academic standard required for graduation.

As described in MDE [guidance](#), "[Th]e rigorous course waiver pertains only to the state academic standards requirements, it does not replace the credit... If all corresponding standards in a course are met... the district can waive the course requirement. This statute does not waive the credit requirements for students."

Area of Flexibility

Limitations

A student who satisfactorily completes a postsecondary enrollment options course or program or an AP or IB course or program is not required to complete other requirements of the academic standards corresponding to that course of study.

Through [Minnesota Statute, section 124D.085](#), titled Experiential and Applied Learning Opportunities for Students, school districts are encouraged to increase students' opportunities for participating in "applied and experiential learning in a nontraditional setting," such as through project-based learning, career and technical education, work-based schools, place-based learning and more. In doing so, a school district can "declare that a student meets or exceeds specific academic standards required for graduation under the rigorous course of study waiver" and may use these opportunities in meeting the "other accountability measures."

This Rigorous Course of Study Waiver authority also permits a local school board or charter school board to "formally determine other circumstances in which to declare that a student meets or exceeds a specific academic standard that the site requires for graduation."

In addition to the flexibility noted above, [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.07](#) provides that a secondary student who has completed all required courses or standards may graduate before the completion of the school year, provided the student, the student's parent or guardian and local school officials all approve of the early graduation.

Culture of Innovation

From KnowledgeWorks State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning: The state advances personalized learning by empowering educators, researchers, communities and families to design, refine, evaluate and advance new learning models that better support student needs. A culture of innovation leverages policy flexibility coupled with necessary resources and supports to identify and advance practices and aligned policies that drive equity and maximize student outcomes.

To cultivate systems change, states create a culture of innovation by:

- Providing policy flexibility to catalyze improvements to the education system
- Evaluating student-centered practices for informed policymaking and investment
- Establishing learning networks to support the scaling of innovative practices

Policy Flexibility

Framework Description: The state extends policy flexibility to early adopters to test and evaluate innovative ideas and help state leaders translate key insights into systemic student-centered solutions.

State policy empowers districts to implement personalized learning models, including personalized, competency-based learning, in a few discrete ways within Minnesota's minimum requirements for high school graduation. Yet there is no overarching, explicit prioritization of these kinds of innovative models within state policy. In addition to the limited existing flexibility for districts to modify how credits are awarded and graduation requirements are met, some policy flexibility is available to school districts and schools that might seek to test, evaluate and expand on student-centered innovations. However, much of the space this policy flexibility seems intended to create may be obscured by MDE's lack of explicit support for personalized learning, competency-based learning and related interventions. It may also be due in part to time- and place-based constraints that exist in state policy, along with the fact that the state legislature has not given MDE or the commissioner broad authority to grant district's request for waivers of policy for innovation.

MDE's 2014 report titled [Removing the Barriers to Digital Learning in Minnesota](#) notes that "current statutes and rules that tie school funding to attendance and membership hours (seat-time) and traditional calendars inhibit the potential for personalization that digital learning provides." Some progress has been made toward a system free from the types of constraints on personalized learning that were noted, but there is still considerable work to be done.

Unless otherwise noted, the policies highlighted below describe requirements and flexibilities applicable to districts, which includes district schools and charter schools. The recently enacted Online Instruction Act [as provided by Laws 2023, chapter 55, article 2, section 49](#) does address many of the barriers identified in the 2014 report, though only with regard to online instruction. Many such constraints have yet to be addressed more broadly.

Time- and Place-based Constraints and Flexibility

In [Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.41](#), the legislature prescribes the minimum number of days of instruction to be provided for students in grades 1-11 (as a general rule, the minimum is 165 days), as well as the minimum hours of instruction to be included in the annual school calendar, with variation by

grade span (i.e., grades 1-6: 935 hours of instruction; grades 7-12: 1,020 hours of instruction), with exceptions as authorized under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.415](#) only made for school boards having an approved four-day week schedule. For purposes of meeting minimum days and hours of instruction that are required in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.40](#), a school district or charter school may count up to five e-learning days in accordance with [Minnesota Statutes, section 120A.414](#), during which students have full access to online instruction due to inclement weather.

Attendance policies and plans are determined at the local level, working within state policies and data collection systems and processes. State requirements regarding attendance may have the effect of limiting personalized, competency-based learning to the extent attendance is used as a basis for calculating school revenue, and a student not in attendance at least once every 15 days is automatically withdrawn. In addition, the state's accountability system (The North Star system) uses a "consistent attendance" measure as one of five accountability indicators. Consistent attendance is based on students who are not chronically absent.

MDE's [Consistent Attendance Frequently Asked Questions](#) explains that "if a student attends more than 90 percent of the time they are enrolled, they are considered consistently attending." Attendance requirements also appear to limit opportunities for student learning that takes place outside of the school building, sometimes referred to in state policy as "outside of the curriculum." MDE's [Consistent Attendance Frequently Asked Questions](#), notes that "in general, if a school employee is being paid to supervise or provide services to a student, that student will be counted as 'in attendance.'" The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB), with standards adopted regarding [Teacher Coordinators of Work-Based Learning](#), establishes detailed expectations for individuals in this role including, for example:

A teacher coordinator understands how to establish and monitor work-based instruction that focuses on enabling students to learn about work, how to acquire skills and gain a perspective and direction on a career pathway. The teacher must understand:

1. Criteria for determining when work is a learning experience
2. Various placement options and selection of educational options based on the needs, abilities and interests of the student
3. Laws pertaining to employment
4. How to develop and implement training agreements
5. How to match the individual needs of the student to the work-based learning site
6. How to work collaboratively in designing, implementing and evaluating a student's individual training plan
7. Job task analysis and how to use it to appropriately sequence instruction
8. How to teach mentors and students in the work-based learning setting
9. How to monitor, summarize and report the acquisition of the work-based learning outcomes identified in the training plan
10. Performance assessment and how to apply it to assessing student on-the-job learning
11. Performance assessment and how to apply it to assessing student on-the-job learning
12. How to identify, develop and maintain employment sites

Postsecondary Options Enrollment Programs, online learning and project-based instruction programs also benefit from the ability to use alternative approaches in calculating average daily membership (consistent with [Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.05](#)) of pupils in such programs.

Additional Policy Flexibility

Policy flexibility that is designed to be or could be used for personalized learning include:

District-created Site-governed Schools. In 2009, the legislature, through changes to [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.045](#), authorized school board approval of site-governed schools. Statute specifies requirements for a “site-governed school proposal,” including details on the types of schools or education innovations to be created. The school board and the applicable bargaining unit representing district employees must enter into a memoranda of understanding specifying how applicable sections of current contracts will enable implementation. A site-governed school has autonomy and responsibilities that include:

- Creation of a site-governing council
- Establishment of a leadership model for the site
- Budgeting and revenue allocation
- Determination of the learning model and organization of the school, along with formative and summative assessment practices
- Policy-making regarding student promotion, attendance, discipline and graduation requirements
- Setting the length of the school day and year
- Employee work rules covered by the terms and conditions of the employment contract

With some exceptions, site-governed schools are exempt from and subject to the same laws and rules as charter schools. A site-governed school could, but is not required to, use its autonomy and exemption requests to support personalized learning. It is not evident how many site-governed schools are currently in existence or the extent to which any are utilizing personalized learning approaches. During a virtual interview, Minnesota stakeholders seemed to indicate their belief that this flexibility was only available during the first few years after authorization and through a state-administered grant program.

Charter Schools. There are 180 charter schools operating in the state, authorized and governed in accordance with [Minnesota Statutes, chapter 124E](#), with the primary purpose of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement. Additional purposes articulated by the legislature include:

- Increasing learning opportunities for all pupils
- Encouraging the use of different and innovative teaching methods
- Creating different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes
- Establishing new forms of accountability
- Creating new professional opportunities for teachers

Through the blanket exemption provision of section 124E.03, “a charter school is exempt from all statutes and rules applicable to a school, school board or school district unless a statute or rule is made specifically applicable to a charter school,” or included in Chapter 124E. Any such exemption is automatically granted through an authorizer’s approval of the charter school. No specific request for flexibility is needed.

MDE's [New Charter School Affidavit Instructions](#) require a "description of the school's educational program based on the market need and demand study in the geographic community to be served," along with an indication if the new schools is planning to incorporate any of the following, consistent with applicable statutes and rules:

- Digital, online, hybrid or blended learning (Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 55, article 2, section 49)
- Project-based learning (Minn. Stat. 126C.05, subd. 20 [2022])
- Work-based learning (Minn. R. Chapter 3505 [2022])

During the 2023 Regular Session, the legislature established a pilot program [as provided by Laws 2023, chapter 55, article 2, section 62e](#) to support Pillsbury United Communities in developing a framework to evaluate school performance in improving educational outcomes for students. Up to eight charter high schools authorized by the district may apply to participate in the pilot. The framework must:

- Establish school goals
- Measure performance of students beyond test scores, graduation rates and the World's Best Workforce goals (while exempting pilot schools from state-established performance measures and related reports)
- Describe flexible, personalized and innovative instruction provided by the school

Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program. The Innovation Research Zone pilot program allows participating school districts and charter schools to design and implement projects to "develop a research-validated basis that advances educational models and new practices throughout the state." As detailed by MDE in [Innovation Research Zone Pilot Program - General Information](#), an Innovation Research Zone Partnership may include non-school partners, such as postsecondary institutions. Pilot projects must research and implement innovation education programs and models that are based on proposed hypotheses, except that an Innovation Zone plan may "include an emerging practice not yet supported by peer-reviewed research."

Pilot participants may also request and be granted exemptions from some statutory or regulatory requirements. Areas eligible for exemption include:

- Any law or rule from which a district-created, site-governed school is exempt
- Any statute or rule from which the commissioner has exempted another district or charter school
- Online learning program approval, provided the school district or charter school offers a course or program online combined with direct access to a teacher for a portion of that course or program
- Restrictions on extended time revenue
- Any required hours of instruction in any class or subject area for a student who is meeting all competencies consistent with the graduation standards described in the innovation zone plan

In the 2023 annual [Innovation Research Zone](#) report to the legislature, MDE notes the authorizing statute "recognizes that districts are keenly interested in pursuing innovative strategies for serving students. School districts continue to express interests in using innovative practices that engage

community partners, personalize learning, support alternative pathways to graduation and respond to the needs of the whole student.” The program was recently restarted after a “transitory break in programming” and reassigned to the division of Public Engagement in fall of 2022 from the division of State Libraries. As described by MDE, the pilot allows participants to seek approval to test new ideas in K-12 education.

Teacher-Governed Schools. Under state law, [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.04](#), a site team may enter into and implement an agreement that allows the site team to decide who is selected from within the district for licensed and non-licensed positions at the site and to make staff assignments in the site. The legislature authorized a grant program designed to encourage teachers “to explore and develop organizational models for teaching and learning; provide curriculum and corresponding formative, interim and summative assessments; measure and evaluate teacher performance; assign teaching positions and restructure instructional work; provide professional development to support teachers restructuring their work; allocate revenue; assert autonomy and leadership; and pursue other such policies, strategies and activities for creating teacher-governed schools.” The school board and a school site may enter into two types of agreements:

- Individualized Learning and Achievement Contracts set individualized learning and achievement measures and short- and long-term educational goals for each student.
- Education Site Achievement Contracts detail “each student’s educational needs and aptitudes and levels of academic attainment...so as to improve student performance through such means as a cost-effective, research-based formative assessment system designed to promote individualized learning and assessment.” These contracts also are designed to detail assistance provided to the site “if progress in achieving student or contract goals or other performance expectations or measures agreed to by the board and the site decision-making team are not realized or implemented.”

Innovative Incubator Service Learning Grants Program. During the 2023 regular session, the legislature appropriated funds ([as provided by Laws 2023, chapter 55, article 2, section 59](#)) and established that grantee schools and their specified partner organization, which may be a community-based organization, must provide student-designed, student-led service learning opportunities during the regular school day. Grantees may give students the option to supplement their service-learning experiences outside of the school day. Service-learning experiences must be aligned with at least one state or local academic standard and at least one goal of the World’s Best Workforce; however, the statute does not specify the extent to which a student’s participation in service learning can count toward graduation. Grants are effective for the 2023-24 school year and MDE has not yet published guidance on the grant opportunity. As such, it is not clear whether a school could use this grant program to support project-based learning, including for awarding credits required for graduation from high school.

Innovative Delivery of Career and Technical Education Programs. Established under [Minnesota Statutes, section 123D.4535](#), the Innovative Delivery of Career and Technical Education Programs provisions allow groups of school districts to work in partnership with local and regional postsecondary institutions and programs, community institutions and others to “provide innovative education programs and activities that integrate core academic and career and technical subjects in students’ programs of study through coordinated secondary and postsecondary career and technical programs

leading to an industry certification or other credential.” A plan for participation must specify valid and reliable measures including performance assessments in authentic settings and progress toward attaining an industry certification or other credential, which will be used to evaluate progress in realizing plan goals and objectives. It is not evident that the required performance assessments may be used by a district in making a determination that a student has mastered standards for purposes of awarding a high school diploma.

Other Exemptions. The state has also created some opportunities for districts to seek flexibility from state statutory and regulatory requirements, generally in the form of exemptions from specific requirements.

- A district may request approval from the commissioner for an experimental program of study, a four-day school week or a flexible school year program, pursuant to [Minnesota Rules, part 3500.1000](#) (referred to as the Experimental and Flexible School Year Programs), so long as the proposal is designed to improve instructional quality; increase cost-effectiveness; make better use of community resources or available technology; or establish an alternative eligibility criteria intended to identify pupils in need of special education services. In approving any such proposal, the commissioner provides an exemption to state rules based on a district’s request.
- The legislature allows districts to “provide secondary instruction cooperatively for at least one or two years,” as described in a Cooperation and Combination plan developed consistent with [Minnesota Statutes, section 123A.35](#). The plan must identify the rules of the commissioner from which the district intends to request exemption. The plan may provide information about state laws that deter or impair cooperation or combination. No evidence has been identified to suggest or encourage any such plan and exemption request to support personalized learning.

Informed Policymaking and Investment

Framework Description: Ongoing examination and evaluation of innovative, student-centered practices informs policymaking, directs education investments and empowers stakeholders to advance the state’s vision for student success.

General Reporting Culture

MDE collects and analyzes data and information, often at the direction of the legislature, and uses this information to prepare statutorily required reports. One such report is MDE’s Best Practices in High Performing Schools, which includes information from surveys of schools about their use of evidence-based practices. Such reports are made available to the field and broader public through MDE’s Legislative Reports webpage and MDE’s [Data Reports and Analytics](#) webpage. It is not evident that MDE’s organization structure includes a dedicated team of staff that serve as a research and development team with primary responsibility for research, evaluation and dissemination of findings.

In addition, [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.11](#), as amended in 2023 requires the commissioner to annually identify and report on effective strategies, practices and uses of resources by districts and school sites in striving for the [World’s Best Workforce](#). The commissioner must assist districts and sites in implementing strategies identified as effective and the effective use of resources.

The commissioner may require any district not making sufficient progress toward improving teaching and learning in any consecutive three-year period to use up to two percent of its basic general education revenue to implement effective strategies and practices identified by the commissioner.

The commissioner’s annual [Achievement and Integration Report](#) to the legislature details a mandatory evaluation of the efficacy of district Achievement and Integration plans. This report focuses on reducing the disparities in student academic performance among the specified categories of students within the district, improving students’ equitable access to effective and diverse teachers and in realizing racial and economic diversity and integration. To evaluate plan implementation, as well as support continuous improvement within districts, MDE requires annual progress reports. See [MDE - Achievement and Integration, Report to the Legislature \(2023\)](#).

Alignment of Resources

The legislature established Regional Centers of Excellence under [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.115](#). These centers are required to partner with local and regional service cooperatives, postsecondary institutions, integrated school districts, the Department, children’s mental health providers or other local or regional entities. Support provided to districts and schools may include “implementing evidence-based practices, including applied and experiential learning, contextualized learning, competency-based curricula and assessments and other nontraditional learning opportunities.” MDE’s [Regional Centers of Excellence](#) website describes the “statewide system of support role” the centers play, including that schools identified under the accountability system receive targeted support, with particular focus on strategies focused on equity for underserved student groups. Evidence detailing the specific evidence-based practices that are currently the focus of the centers is lacking and there is no information on the MDE website indicating that their work includes support for personalized, competency-based learning.

The goals of the statewide Education and Employment Transition System as articulated under [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.46](#) include:

- Integrating opportunities for work-based learning, service-learning and other applied learning methods into the elementary, secondary and postsecondary curriculum
- Coordinating elementary, secondary and postsecondary education with related government programs
- Establishing performance standards for learners that integrate state and local graduation standards and generally recognized industry and occupational skill standards

State appropriations allow for partnership grants to support local education and employment transitions systems, youth apprenticeship and other work-based learning programs. The focus on work-based learning and other applied learning methods suggests at least some level of coordination and support for personalized learning.

A school district required to submit a plan to the commissioner regarding school desegregation and integration or participating in a multidistrict integration collaborative is eligible to receive grant funding through the Achievement and Integration for Minnesota program as established under [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.861](#) and subject to the revenue provisions of [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.862](#). At least 80 percent of funds received must be used for “innovation and integrated learning environments, school enrollment choices, family engagement activities and other approved programs providing direct services to students.” Rather than targeting populations farthest from proficiency, this

revenue supports districts that are either a racially isolated district, an adjoining district, a voluntary district or because the district has one or more racially identifiable schools. There is no information on the MDE website indicating that the state provides guidance or support to districts regarding the inclusion of personalized learning in their plans.

Dedicated Funding

The state invests resources in a variety of efforts as highlighted in table 3, which could contribute to research, evaluation and dissemination of personalized learning practices. However, there is no explicit or required focus on personalized learning in any of the programs highlighted.

Table 3. Programs and Funding with a Research or Evaluation Focus

<p>Evidence-Based Education Grants</p>	<p>Description: The legislature created an Evidence-Based Education Grants process under Minnesota Statutes, section 127A.20 “to describe, measure and report on the effectiveness of any Pre-K through grade 12 education program funded in whole or in part through funds appropriated by the legislature to the commissioner of education for grants to organizations.” This process requires evidence-based evaluation of all grants awarded by the commissioner on or after July 1, 2022. Each grant application submitted to the commissioner must include a statement of goals (aligned, to the extent practicable, with World’s Best Workforce and federal Every Student Succeeds Act accountability system goals), and a description of strategies that will be used to meet specified goals.</p> <p>Focus on Personalized Learning: There is no explicit focus on personalized learning. However, the extent to which there is any such focus is likely to depend on grant-specific goals and activities.</p>
<p>Assurance of Mastery Program</p>	<p>Description: Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.66, a district may provide an Assurance of Mastery Program, authorized and funded by the legislature, through which a pupil who has not demonstrated progress toward mastering the required graduation standards is eligible to receive additional services. A pupil also is eligible to receive services through an assurance of mastery program if the pupil demonstrates a need for alternative instructional strategies or interventions. The program requires that “direct scientific, research-based instructional services and intervention” be provided under the supervision of the eligible pupil’s regular classroom teacher. Such instruction must be different from the initial instruction provided in the regular classroom setting.</p> <p>Funding Provided: Funding allocated to participating districts is a subset of the Basic Skills Revenue Component of General Education Revenue articulated in Minnesota Statutes, section 126C.10, 126C.10 and Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.66.</p> <p>Focus on Personalized Learning: A district that provides an Assurance of Mastery Program may elect to use personalized learning strategies as part of the</p>

	<p>additional services it provides to eligible students. There is no requirement that they do so, and it does not appear MDE’s responsibilities include providing technical assistance for plan implementation or engaging in research and evaluation using program data.</p>
<p>Graduation Incentives Program</p>	<p>Description: In order to provide incentives for and encourage students who have experienced difficulty in the traditional education system to enroll in alternative programs, the legislature created the Graduation Incentives Program under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.68. Criteria for participation targets students whose performance is substantially below the performance level of pupils of the same age; those behind in satisfactory completion of coursework or obtaining credits for graduation; those who speak English as a second language or are an English learning; as well as those who have withdrawn from school or are chronically truant.</p> <p>Students eligible to participate are allowed to enroll in a variety of programs, including: a state-approved alternative program under Minnesota Statutes, section 123A.05; a postsecondary course under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.09, if the student is a high school junior or senior; and, if between the ages of 16 and 21, any approved adult basic education programs operated under the Community Education Program established under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.19.</p> <p>Focus on Personalized Learning: A participating district must develop and implement a long-term plan, which may include: “innovative and integrated Pre-K through grade 12 learning environments that offer students school enrollment choices” and “increased programmatic opportunities and effective and more diverse instructors focused on rigor and college and career readiness for students who are impacted by racial, gender, linguistic and economic disparities.” A participating district could incorporate personalized learning strategies and support within its long-term plan. There is no requirement that they do so and it does not appear MDE’s responsibilities include providing technical assistance for plan implementation or engaging in research and evaluation using program data.</p>
<p>ServeMinnesota Innovation Act Program</p>	<p>Description: The ServeMinnesota Innovation Act’s program, created under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.39, is designed to “create linkages for a comprehensive youth service and learning program... and coordinate federal and state activities that advance the purposes.”</p> <p>The Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service is established under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.385 to assist the governor and the legislature in implementing the ServeMinnesota grant program, establishing an evaluation plan for the program and administering the federal AmeriCorp program.</p> <p>Grants to Eligible Entities: Using any state appropriation and any available federal funds, the Commission must award grants to established programs for</p>

ServeMinnesota Innovation, pursuant to grant application guidelines requiring grantees to use research-based measures of program outcomes. This is articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.40](#).

Focus on Personalized Learning: An eligible entity could incorporate personalized learning strategies and support into its grant application, and the Commission could thus ensure that the program evaluation plan includes a personalized learning focus. Neither are required to do so.

Support the Scaling of Innovative Practices

Framework Description: *State-supported learning networks facilitate the spread of impactful innovative practices through collaboration with educators, school leaders and experts with a strong track record of successful implementation.*

Evidence that the state targets federal and state resources to build personalized learning capacity at the local level, including to support personalized learning design, refinement, evaluation and advancement, is limited. As highlighted previously, the Education and Employment Transition Systems, Achievement and Integration district grant and Regional Centers of Excellence funding all have a focus on building district capacity to improve student achievement. While these efforts may in theory be used for personalized learning and other innovative approaches, no evidence was found to suggest that these funding streams are being used in this way by the state.

Evidence of state-led learning networks focused on personalized learning is lacking. However, there are networks led by MDE that could be used to support and learn from educators and school leaders who have experience with personalized learning. For example, MDE, in collaboration with the [Minnesota Reading Association](#) and the [Minnesota Center for Reading Research](#), operates a literacy network of school-wide literacy coaches, district literacy coordinators, administrators and other Minnesota educators. This network supports teachers and administrators in building capacity and developing literacy programs based on research-based best practices. Additional networks support standards implementation, instruction and assessment in other areas, such as the Minnesota STEM Network which is sponsored by [SciMathMN](#).

MDE's program evaluations and reports, such as the Innovation Research Zone pilot report, World's Best Workforce report and report on Best Practices of Schools Identified as High Performing, provide evidence of some use of state resources to identify high quality strategies, including personalized learning strategies, and to support districts in schools in implementing effective strategies. Similarly, investment in capacity-building and systems design, such as the Education and Employment Transitions System, Achievement and Integration districts and Regional Centers of Excellence may be being used to expand high-quality personalized learning strategies and access to high-quality personalized learning experiences. Evidence of these specific uses of state resources for personalized learning is lacking.

Comprehensive Supports for Educators and Leaders

From KnowledgeWorks State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning: The state invests in systemic efforts to build professional capacity for the implementation of high-quality personalized learning systems. These systemic efforts align educator and school leader preparation, credentialing, professional development and evaluation systems into a seamless continuum that personalizes supports for educators and school leaders so they can deepen their professional expertise and raise the quality of leadership and instruction.

To build capacity for personalized learning, states create comprehensive supports for educators and leaders by:

- Developing culturally responsive, personalized educator and leadership competencies
- Centering competency-based education practices in pre-service programs
- Encouraging co-designed, authentic and personalized professional learning
- Creating and supporting innovative staffing structures

Educator and Leadership Competencies

Framework Description: All components of the state’s educator workforce system align to educator and leadership competencies that ensure capacity to lead culturally responsive, personalized and competency-based learning environments.

Educator Standards

Minnesota has created clear standards for teacher preparation and teacher practice. While the state has not created a clear vision for personalized learning, some standards do align with the expectations of personalized learning environments. Through [Minnesota Rules, part 8710.2000](#), Minnesota has created educator standards: [The Standards of Effective Practice](#). These standards include the “essential knowledge and skills a teacher needs in order to be effective from ‘Day 1’ in the classroom.” The standards were adopted after the [Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board](#) (PELSB) engaged in extensive stakeholder input and “research on the science of learning and development.” Adopted by the PELSB in 2023, all “teacher candidates completing an initial teacher licensure program in Minnesota and all teachers seeking an initial Tier 3 license via the licensure via portfolio process” must meet these standards. See [PELSB, Tiered Licensure Requirements](#) for more context.

The standards focus on various areas of practice, including student learning, learning environments, assessment, planning for instruction, instructional strategies, professional responsibilities, collaboration and leadership and racial consciousness and reflection. It is worth noting that the [Proposed Standards of Effective Practice](#) included “student-centered classroom engagement” in one proposed standard; however, this was removed in the final draft of standards released in 2023.

The Standards of Effective Practice focus on what educators [need to know](#). However, it is not clear that Minnesota has defined specific competencies to ensure educators can demonstrate their knowledge and skills in personalizing learning environments. Some Minnesota education stakeholders shared in an interview that they consider the standards to have competencies embedded within them. As defined by The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and KnowledgeWorks, [educator competencies](#) in a personalized learning environment should focus on four domains:

- **Intrapersonal:** Developing the internal capacities that personalized learning-centered educators need to reflect
- **Interpersonal:** The social, personal and leadership skills that educators need to relate to others
- **Cognitive:** What educators need to know in order to create personalized learning environments
- **Instructional:** What educators need to do to bring learner-centered pedagogical techniques into the classroom

Using Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments by CCSSO and KnowledgeWorks, the Minnesota standards appear to align with some, but not all, of the competencies included in these domains. More specifically, several of the standards focus on the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains in the Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments, but fail to align with the Cognitive or Instructional Domains. For example, the Interpersonal domain focuses on how educators form a “beneficial relationship with students and their identified family... particularly in culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse classrooms.” Minnesota [Standard 1.A](#) focuses on whether the “teacher understands that students bring assets for learning based on their individual experiences... as well as language, culture, family and community values, and approaches their work and students with this asset-based mindset...” The following standards also appear to align to the educator competencies identified by CCSSO and KnowledgeWorks: Standard 1.D, Standard 1.G, Standard 3.B, Standard 3.E, Standard 3.F, Standard 4.D and Standard 5.J.

While the state has not established clear competencies for K-12 educators in the state, Minnesota has created [Knowledge and Competency Frameworks for Early Childhood Professionals](#). The state explains that these frameworks combine “what an early childhood educator needs to know about research and theory, alongside the skills and abilities needed to work effectively in the field.” Minnesota acknowledges these competencies align with the PELSB standards and show a progression of skill development.

School Leader Requirements

School leaders in Minnesota, including superintendents, principals and directors of special education, must satisfy certain requirements to become licensed. These requirements are established in [Minnesota Rules, part 3512.0200](#) and include a requirement that leaders demonstrate competence in certain core areas. These competencies for superintendents, principals, directors of special education and directors of community education are defined in [Minnesota Rules, part 3512.0510](#). Some of the Core Leadership Competencies for Minnesota Administrative Licenses are aligned with personalized learning principles and have some, but not all, characteristics of competencies, as defined in Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments by CCSSO and the KnowledgeWorks. For example, the state created competencies relating to equity and culturally responsible leadership, which requires demonstration of knowledge and skills to “recognize, respect and employ each student’s strengths, diversity and culture as assets for teaching and learning.” Subsection H. in this rule requires the leader to demonstrate “competence in curriculum, instruction and assessment for the success of all learners.” This must be done through promoting and supporting “instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, is intellectually challenging, is **authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths and is differentiated and personalized.**” [emphasis added] These competencies are further enforced in [Minnesota Rules, part 3512.0400](#) where the state requires superintendents, principals and directors of special education to participate in a situational observation

component, which includes an exit evaluation that focuses on the “knowledge, skills and dispositions in the competencies” established in the Administrative Rules.

Gubernatorial Activity

In 2020, then Governor Walz convened an education roundtable discussion to focus on creating a [Roadmap for Transformational Change in Minnesota Education](#). In order to provide students with “an educational experience that values who they are and supports them to reach their highest potential,” the document encourages the state to “[d]evelop student-centered classrooms that provide personalized instruction to each and every student at the pace each student needs to attain high standards.” This includes:

- Focusing on elevating student and family voices through the development of personalized learning strategies
- Promoting student ownership
- Providing differentiated instruction
- Recognizing the whole student
- Providing students with equitable access to effective and diverse teachers

Roadmap 2 in this document notes that in order for children to be successful, the state “need[s] to create standards that address the modern needs of... society, workforce and democracy.” To make this happen, the roundtable concluded that the state should write standards for teachers to master as well as students, and emphasizes that standards need to be created in collaboration with teachers. The report also notes that other agencies should be engaged, including the Children’s Cabinet, as well as communities, families, school leaders, teachers, policymakers, labor unions and elected leaders. While this roadmap is promising, research for this document was unable to confirm whether any actions have been taken following the release of this report.

Data Collection

Minnesota collects data relating to educators and leaders through several web-based systems. While these systems ensure that educators are teaching in their particular license area of expertise, it is not clear data is being used to increase student access to educators with training and/or demonstrated capacity to personalize learning environments.

The Minnesota PELSB has created the Staff Automated Reporting web-based system. This system collects data on employment and assignment information and allows districts to access the licensure/assignment violation report. Through this system, the state ensures accountability so that licensed educators are only working in those areas for which they are licensed and “for which they hold a proper permission.” PELSB has also created an [Effectiveness Reporting](#) website, pursuant to statute, to report data about teachers who finish their probationary period and continue with a contract in a public school. The state collects data on the effectiveness category or rating of the teacher on summative evaluations, the licensure area taught during the three-year evaluation cycle and the teacher preparation program used by the teacher for their primary areas of instruction and licensure. PELSB also collects a variety of data points through [reports](#) that are divided by data type and year.

PELSB’s [Biennial Report on the Supply and Demand of Teachers in Minnesota for 2023](#), submitted to the Minnesota legislature, provides an overview of trends relating to the recruitment and retention of

educators in the state, using licensure, assignment and permission data, in addition to surveys of school districts, charter schools and educator preparation providers. There does not appear to be any data collected for this report that focuses on teaching in personalized environments.

In 2022, the state partnered with the University of Minnesota, [Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement](#), as well as with other educators and partners, to conduct a [principal's survey](#). Through this data collection, the state received information on leader race, gender and geographic location; time in roles; retirement; principal preparation; working conditions; and professional development experiences and needs. In regards to personalized learning, the survey found that “instructional leadership activities posing the greatest challenge” included “gathering and analyzing student-level data to personalize instructional supports” and behavioral supports.

Non-Governmental Actions

There are also non-governmental actors working in Minnesota to influence the state’s policy environment related to educator readiness to implement personalized learning. Because of their impact, they are being highlighted here. [Reimagine Minnesota](#), an initiative of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD), has sought to implement strategies to align and build capacity for personalized learning in a variety of member school districts, with a “commitment to create lasting equity and excellence in education for all students.” AMSD focuses on “personalized relevant education for all students that guarantees access to rigorous learning and eliminating predictability based on race” through the following:

Provide a personalized education plan for all students:

- Guarantee rigorous course offerings for all students
- Create learning experiences that provide relevant skills and knowledge for the workforce and/or higher education
- Develop meaningful, culturally competent curriculum and instructional programs in all subjects
- Require multiple learning opportunities and curricula regarding differing cultural, social and historical narratives
- Eliminate bias and predictability based on race
- Create school schedule that accommodates personalized learning plans: i.e.: experiential and applied learning programs– time of day, length of teacher day, holidays, calendar year
- Develop a plan that identifies opportunities for family and adult development that supports student success

[Education Evolving](#), a nonprofit, nonpartisan Minnesota-based organization, also created a resource for educators in Minnesota, titled [Navigating Policy for Personalized, Competency-Based Education: A Guide for Minnesota Educators](#). This guide navigates policy relating to competency-based education, by reviewing laws and rules within the state that relate to competency-based education and explains how schools can use these laws and rules to establish competency-based education systems and comply with reporting requirements. This resource could be used to implement strategies to build educator capacity for personalized learning. For example, the Navigating Compliance and Reporting section highlights the difficulty of reporting innovative or personalized experiences. Education Evolving's guide provides information to educators on how to navigate these systems with specific strategies that can be used.

Related Department of Education Actions

MDE has partnered with educators and leaders to work towards implementing some strategies that could align with and build capacity for personalized learning. The state has established [Strategies to Support Teacher Practices](#), which includes instructional observation and feedback, professional learning communities supporting teacher leadership and student learning goals. Through this content, the state provides guidance and support for all of these strategies to be implemented within a school or district. The Department also provides [professional development opportunities](#) relating to professional learning, community leadership, teacher leader networking, goal-setting and Q comp coordinating trainings and other principal and supervisor professional development opportunities. It is not clear whether any of these opportunities provided by the state are aligned to personalized learning instructional strategies or include training as such.

Minnesota has also created pathways through programs developed in statute to work towards strategies that align with personalized learning. [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.861](#) creates the Achievement and Integration (A&I) for Minnesota Program to “pursue racial and economic integration and increase student academic achievement, create equitable educational opportunities and reduce academic disparities based on students’ diverse racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools.” The statute specifies that revenue may be used to “pursue academic achievement and racial and economic integration” through, for example, equitable access to effective and more diverse teachers, trained educators to support and enhance integrated learning environments through innovative programs and access to diverse teachers. MDE has also developed an [Achievement and Integration Plan Guide](#) to give districts the process, resources and tools needed to develop, implement and monitor their district’s A&I plan, which must be submitted every three years by those districts that participate in the program.

[Social-Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Learning Modules](#), created through the use of COVID-19 pandemic relief funds by MDE in partnership with CASEL, seek to train school and out-of-school time staff on social emotional learning. The tools provided on the department website can be used by professional learning communities that may be focusing on social and emotional learning in trainings or by school leaders to support the SEL competencies for educators, as well as students.

Minnesota has created opportunities for educators and leaders to participate in training on diversity, equity, inclusion, culturally responsive practices and instruction. Minnesota has made clear their commitment to equity by adopting the [Ten Minnesota Commitments to Equity](#) to ensure access to, and meaningful participation in, high-quality learning experiences for students.

It is clear that Minnesota supports educators through professional learning communities and other professional development opportunities. While the state’s professional development opportunities provide ongoing educator learning, it is not clear the state is ensuring that students have equal access to educators with demonstrated capacity in the habits of mind or instructional strategies articulated in Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments to teach specifically in personalized learning environments.

Teacher Preparation, Professional Development and Equity

[Minnesota Rules, part 8705.1010](#) requires teacher preparation programs (referred to as “units” in Minnesota) to provide training on diversity. Standard 2 requires the unit to ensure each program provides effective instruction on the “knowledge and skills needed to implement culturally responsive teaching and instructional strategies, including incorporating opportunities for candidates to learn about the role of teachers to disrupt patterns and systems of racism, privilege and oppression.” Further, the program must provide effective instruction on using a student’s “native language as a resource in creating effective differentiated instructional strategies for multilingual learners developing literacy skills.” Additionally, Standard 11 requires that, for candidates seeking an initial professional license, the unit must provide a minimum of 100 field experience hours prior to student teaching that includes “experience with students who differ in race, ethnicity, home language and socioeconomic status.” [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.092](#) requires teacher preparation programs to include culturally competent training in instructional strategies.

The Standards of Effective Practice include various standards with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and culturally responsive practices. By including these standards, the state is signaling that teacher candidates should receive training on all of these topics. For example, Standard 1.L focuses on understanding the diverse impacts of individual and systemic trauma and supporting students using culturally responsive strategies. Standard 2.A encourages educators to collaborate with students to create a welcoming and inclusive classroom that will also reflect the diversity of student cultures. Other standards that focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and culturally responsive practices include Standard 2.D, Standard 2.E and Standard 5.A.

Further, the [competencies](#) for superintendents, principals, directors of special education and directors of community education require these leaders to demonstrate competency in equity and culturally responsive leadership. For example, the competencies require leaders to ensure that students are treated “fairly, respectfully and with an understanding of each student’s culture and context,” and these leaders are asked to “address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.” They also require school leaders to “promote and support instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, is intellectually challenging, is authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths and is differentiated and personalized.” This language aligns in part with effective teaching practices highlighted in KnowledgeWorks Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments.

All educators renewing their license after 2020 must complete cultural competency training. [Minnesota Rules, part 8710.7200](#) requires all applicants seeking renewal of their licenses to “show evidence of professional reflection and growth in best practices,” which includes cultural competency training. For several tiers of licensure, applicants must participate in cultural competency training. See [Minnesota Rules, part 8710.0311](#) relating to Tier 1 licenses; [Minnesota Rules, part 8710.0312](#) relating to Tier 2 licenses. The state defines “cultural competency training” for these rules in [Minnesota Rules, part 8710.0310, subpart D](#).

[PELSB](#) approves [training](#) that will meet the state’s renewal requirement, but other trainings may also satisfy the requirements. For Tier 1 and Tier 2 educator licenses, districts decide if a training will meet the requirement. Tier 3 or Tier 4 licensed educators must confirm approval through the local re-licensure committee, which may include submitting a recent summative evaluation in order to meet this training requirement. The training ultimately must meet the following criteria:

Shows evidence of self-reflection and discussion of the following topics in a way that deepens teachers' understanding of their own frames of reference, potential bias in these frames and the impact of bias on expectations for and relationships with students, students' families and school communities.

- Racial, Cultural and Socioeconomic Groups
- American Indian and Alaskan Native Students
- Religion
- Systemic Racism
- Gender Identity, Including Transgender Students
- Sexual Orientation
- Language Diversity
- Individuals with Disabilities and Mental Health Concerns

While PELSB previously provided cultural competency training, these trainings are now no longer offered. However, PELSB has trained facilitators who can contract with schools and districts to provide the training to those who need it for license renewal. Further, even though PELSB's Committee to Increase Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers [approves training](#), this is not a requirement for districts to offer the training. The approval simply guarantees that the training meets the required standards.

Through [Minnesota Service Cooperatives](#), which includes nine educational service agencies geographically distributed across the state, educators have additional opportunities for [professional development](#) relating to cultural competency and equity. The cultural competency learning course focuses on promoting "self-reflection and discussion around the topics of race, culture and socioeconomics" in an effort to "promote deeper understanding of... [the educator's] frames of reference, learning to recognize... [and] inherent potential biases..."

For certain eligible districts, Minnesota's [Achievement and Integration Program](#), in connection with the state's [School Desegregation/Integration rules](#), creates a strategic planning process that is focused on educational equity. This is defined by the state as the "condition of justice, fairness and inclusion in [the] systems of education so that all students have access to the opportunities to learn and develop to their fullest potential."

In order to ensure the Achievement and Integration Program plans work to increase student performance through a lens of equity, districts are encouraged to align the plans to their [World's Best Workforce](#) requirement. The state's [guidance](#) for the Achievement and Integration Program plan notes that districts must "generate measurable, student-centered goals, strategies based on identified needs and key indicators to track the outcomes of those strategies."

It is important to note, however, that through the recently-administered [principals survey](#), there is a question as to the effectiveness of the state's current training offerings. According to the survey report:

Leaders felt least prepared to leverage students' cultural backgrounds as assets for teaching and learning, support instruction that is culturally responsive and recruit and retain staff. What was missing from their administrative licensure coursework and internship aligned to their overall feelings about preparation. Respondents reported that their coursework lacked content on

culturally responsive teaching, family and student engagement best practices, special education due process and staff recruitment and retention best practices. Relatedly, they noted that their internship experiences lacked opportunities to facilitate conversations about equity and address staff culture challenges.

Competency-based Education Practices in Pre-service Programs

Framework Description: States encourage educator and leader preparation programs to prepare candidates with the skills they need to excel in personalized and competency-based learning environments.

Pre-service Programs

It is not clear that Minnesota has convened stakeholders to develop strategies that specifically align to and build capacity for personalized learning instruction across educator preparation, credential, professional development and evaluation systems; however some work has been done in the state focused on student-centered learning in pre-service programs.

For example, PELSB adopted the new [Standards of Effective Practice](#) for educators which define the knowledge and skills a teacher needs in order to be effective in a classroom. All educators completing an initial teacher licensure program in the state must meet these standards. Some standards align to and build capacity for personalized learning models. For example, Standard 3, relating to assessments, requires teachers to select assessments to “address specific learning goals and individual differences” of the students they are teaching.

All educator preparation programs in Minnesota, whether they are based in institutions of higher education, school districts, charter schools or nonprofit corporations, must meet [Minnesota Rules, Chapter 8705](#) and be approved as a “unit,” the term for a teacher preparation program. [Minnesota Rules, part 8705.1010](#) establishes standards that all educator preparation programs must meet, which are separate from the Standards of Effective Practice. These unit standards are not personalized and competency-based; however, some standards incorporate some aspects of personalized learning systems, for example, by requiring units to incorporate knowledge and skills that are needed to implement culturally responsive teaching and instructional strategies.

[Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.091](#) requires general data collection about teacher and administrator preparation and performance data. According to PELSB’s [teacher training manual](#), PELSB must publish an annual Data Summary Report. The teacher training manual notes that “[t]he Data Summary Report provides important data on the demographics of teacher candidates, trends in licensure areas and training effectiveness. In addition to the annual legislative report, this data is used in PELSB’s biennial Teacher Supply and Demand Report.”

The Data Summary Report has many data points, including entrance requirements for each approved program and summary data on teacher educator qualifications. There does not appear to be any focus within the data collected relating to the capacity of teachers to teach in personalized environments.

Professional Development

It is not clear whether the [professional development opportunities](#) offered by MDE incorporate any aspects of personalized learning systems. The state’s vision focuses on ensuring “[e]very student benefits from diverse and excellent educators.” The mission relating to professional development opportunities to support equitable experiences for students requires the state to provide “collaborative, growth-focused opportunities for education professionals and organizations.” The state then provides

professional development opportunities, policy and technical support and resources and guidance for educators implementing teacher development and evaluation and Q comp. Current opportunities include sessions related to professional learning community leadership, teacher leader networking, book studies relating to professional learning communities, Q comp coordinator and goal-setting trainings, Teacher Development and Evaluation and Q Comp networking and information sessions and principal and principal supervisor professional development.

The state has also created professional development opportunities through the Minnesota Standards Portal, which provides guidance and resources in order to implement the state’s academic standards.

PELSB has created [specific trainings](#) for license renewal. However, these do not appear to align to personalized learning environments as articulated in standards like Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments. These include cultural competency trainings, reading preparation training and suicide prevention.

Authentic and Personalized Professional Learning

Framework Description: *The state empowers educators and leaders to shape their own career development, co-designing evaluation systems and pursuing customized learning opportunities that inform practice and align to professional interests.*

Funding Opportunities

Minnesota’s policy environment offers a variety of state and federal funding opportunities to support the professional capacity of educators and leaders in the state. Some of these opportunities may support personalized learning training for educators.

Through Minnesota’s [Due North Progress – Every Student Learns in a Classroom with Caring and Qualified Teachers](#) report, the state provides information on state and federal funding opportunities. For example, pandemic relief funds were used for trauma information/anti-bias instructional practices and programs to mentor new staff in the teaching profession and training for school leaders, although there is no evidence to indicate these were used to support personalized learning training for educators or leaders. Further, state funds in the 2021 legislative session supported teacher mentoring programs and funding for teachers of color and American Indian teachers. Again, there is no indication these funds went to support the capacity of educators to personalize education in their classrooms.

MDE provides [guidance](#) to educators on eligible activities and expenditures of [Title II, Part A funds](#), used to improve the academic achievement of all students by increasing access to effective educators. While the list in this guidance is not exhaustive, the state does not mention the use of funds for personalized learning professional development opportunities. Similarly, the department provides [guidance](#) to educators on eligible activities under [Title III](#) to provide language instruction for English learners, with no specific references to using funds to support professional development relating to personalized or student-centered learning.

The [principals survey](#) gathered information on professional development opportunities for school leaders, finding that on average, \$1,884 is provided for professional development. While these funding opportunities support the professional capacity of educators and leaders, there is no evidence that

these funds support personalized learning training in any of the domains articulated in standards like educator competencies.

The state has provided funding for teacher professional development for a program called Q Comp through [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.415](#). The Q Comp program is established in [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.414](#). This program seeks to “encourage teachers to improve their knowledge and instructional skills” through career advancement opportunities and additional compensation. MDE notes the four components required in a Q Comp system:

- Career ladder/advancement options (teacher leadership positions and responsibilities)
- Job-embedded professional development (frequently utilizing teacher leaders and professional learning community structures)
- Teacher evaluation
- Performance pay and alternative salary schedules

A report published in 2020 relating to [school finance](#) provides information on funding for the Q comp program. According to this document, only a third of school districts in Minnesota are participating, at a rate of \$169/student in state aid and \$91/student in board-approved levy. While there is a significant investment in this program, the limit on participation and impact on over half of the state’s students “clearly shows large inequities for professional development across the state.” Due to the cap and current waitlist in 2020, districts stopped applying for the program. While this funding could be used to provide professional development for educators and advancement options that are aligned to a system of personalized learning, the lack of available funding and the waitlist means that educators may not be able to take advantage of this additional support.

Strategic Vision Alignment

Minnesota’s [strategic plan](#) focuses on a vision that is “student-centered and anchored in equity, diversity and inclusion” to “make Minnesota the Education State, where the public education system is intentionally designed to ensure that each individual student thrives.” The vision for Minnesota notes that a “world-class education requires a student-centered approach that removes structural barriers, provides the best teacher workforce that reflects the students in our classrooms.” This plan focuses on providing professional development and training for educators to ensure “every student learns in a classroom with caring and qualified teachers” and educators receive training on anti-racist and anti-bias practices, as well as social and emotional development.

In early stages of the creation of the strategic plan, and as discussed in the Culture of Innovation section, the Governor’s office convened stakeholders to create the [Roadmap for Transformational Change in Minnesota Education](#). In addition to encouraging the adoption of personalized learning in classrooms in the state, the roadmap also encourages schools to require teachers to provide “differentiated instruction, recognizing the whole student” and to provide “students and their families with equitable access to effective and diverse teachers.” These recommendations, if implemented, could ensure that effective teachers are molded through high-quality professional development that is focused on personalized learning environments.

Through the [roadmap](#), the state also encourages training for teachers relating to critical self-reflection, disproportionality, anti-bias, racial literacy and combating racism and microaggressions. One of the main priorities identified by the roundtable participants noted that the state needs to have a “continuous

pipeline of diverse, anti-racist education professionals, who are reflective of [the state’s] diverse families.” Roadmap priority three specifies the state needs to “redesign and rebuild systems that are anti-racist and culturally affirming with policy and practice decisions centering on the development of students of color and American Indian students to achieve racially equitable outcomes.” The actions that are needed to address this priority, as noted in the report, include:

- Democratize power with community-governed cultural constituencies given that schools reflect their cultural communities
- Ensure equity in funding to address racial opportunity gaps and empower all children with a quality education
- Ensure culturally relevant and ethnic studies curriculum for all, teaching the truth about this nation’s past and present
- Pass legislation while changing local policies and practices to increase the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers and other staff to more closely reflect the percentage of students of color and American Indian students

Further, the roadmap explains that schools and districts should:

- Provide professional development for teachers and administrators with care for who delivers the professional development that must:
 - Relate to culturally relevant, anti-racist practices
 - Focus on helping adults understand who they are racially and how that shows up in our work
 - Be delivered with culturally-specific community organizations
 - Focus on helping adults understand institutional and systemic racism in schooling and society
 - Address how an anti-racist system benefits all
- Ensure intensive, required training and certification for pre-service and in-service educators (teachers and administrators) in the area of racial equity and culturally relevant practices, including academic rigor, cultural/racial competency and social/political consciousness

While both the roadmap and the strategic plan provide goals to transform the state’s education system to focus on the student, it is not clear whether the state has taken any action following creation of these two documents to practically implement them.

Existing Networking Opportunities

Minnesota has created several networking opportunities for school leaders and educators. Through the [Teacher Leader Networking Series](#), the state offers professional development for teacher leaders focused on enhancing learning and leadership practices, while at the same time providing an opportunity for teacher leaders to connect with other leaders throughout the state. It is not clear from reviewing the current professional learning opportunities available that these network opportunities focus on sharing best practices relating to personalized learning.

The closest the state may get to creating a learning network for educators to share best practices on personalized learning is through the Minnesota Network of [Teacher-Powered Schools](#), a project of [Education Evolving](#). This approach to schools offers teachers “opportunities to connect, to offer each

other support and encouragement, exchange best practices and share advice relevant to Minnesota.” According to the website:

Teacher teams secure autonomy to design and run schools. They make the decisions in areas influencing school success: curriculum, budget or personnel, to name a few. Through collaborative leadership, teachers hold power to make the changes necessary to improve student learning—and transform the teaching profession. Changes like:

- Personalizing learning for students as well as teachers
- Addressing issues of teacher quality by making teaching a more attractive job and career
- Increasing the sense of ownership - and accountability - among teachers, in areas where they have authority to make decisions
- Collaborating with administrators to boost student achievement and advance authentic assessment

Minnesota has created a [network for principals](#) titled the Principal Leadership Support Team. It provides support through individual coaching and mentoring, networks of support and professional development opportunities. The Minnesota Department of Education created this network through a partnership between the Regional Centers of Excellence and the Minnesota Service Cooperatives. The state notes that a [main focus](#) of the support is “[r]ecognizing, respecting and employing each student’s strengths, diversity and culture as assets for teaching and learning (cultural responsiveness and attentiveness to equity).”

Educator Evaluation

Minnesota has a [Teacher Development and Evaluation system](#). Required by [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.40](#), the process for evaluating educators works to “develop, improve and support qualified teachers and effective teaching practices...[and] provide all enrolled students in a district or school with improved and equitable access to more effective and diverse teachers.” Statute requires this evaluation to include an individual growth and development plan, a peer review process and a summative evaluation. Teachers must also have the option to “develop and present a portfolio demonstrating evidence of reflection and professional growth.”

The [state](#) requires districts, in agreement with local teachers’ unions, to create teacher development and evaluation [models](#) or to use the [state example model](#) or [model design rubric](#). To guide this process, the department has created a [checklist and FAQ document](#) relating to the teacher development and evaluation requirements. The state has also released [tools](#) and [implementation resources](#) to support local teams to implement the model. Many of the resources on these webpages are outdated. Additionally, while the system may meet some of the Intrapersonal Domain pieces in the Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments – including the need to reflect on the expectations for oneself that an educator needs to process in order to fully actualize personalized, learner-centered education - the system does not appear to provide for any personalized learning-aligned pieces that would ensure a strong system of evaluation and development.

Districts are also required to create evaluation systems for principals to enhance their leadership skills and support and improve teaching practices within the school. Established in [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.147](#), principal evaluation systems must include certain elements enumerated in statute, but districts still have flexibility to accommodate the needs of the district in evaluating school leaders.

[Amendments](#) in 2023 added a requirement that the evaluation system “support and improve a principal’s culturally responsive leadership practices that create inclusive and respectful teaching and learning environments for all students, families and employees.”

Minnesota offers [policy and technical support](#) to educators and school leaders, including on-site or virtual options. [PELSB](#) offers an interactive tool to navigate the teacher licensure system and provides other supports to both candidates and current educators and leaders.

Because Minnesota lacks a focus or vision on personalized or student-centered learning, the state does not seem to have a seamless continuum of educator and school leader capacity-building systems that supports career-long development and learning for educators and leaders to continually improve their personalized learning leadership and practice along a personalized learning progression.

Innovative Staffing Structures

***Framework Description:** Districts have the flexibility to establish educator roles that support the staffing needs of personalized and competency-based models.*

Teacher Diversity

Minnesota has taken some notable steps to expand access to diverse staff. MDE has a webpage dedicated to the state’s [Educator Workforce and Development Center](#). This webpage notes that in the state, only 5.9 percent of the teacher workforce identifies as teachers of color or American Indian teachers, whereas 36.7 percent of the students identify as students of color or American Indian students. This webpage includes information on professional learning and networking opportunities, readings and other information relating to increasing, diversifying, supporting and retaining the educator workforce.

Through [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.11](#), districts must adopt a long-term strategic plan, aligned to the requirements in statute, that includes a system to periodically review students’ access to effective teachers who are members of underrepresented populations or who reflect the diversity of enrolled students in the district. The state then created [District Equitable Access Tools](#) to help support districts in this review.

MDE released [Diversifying the Teacher Workforce: Inventory of Funded Programs \(2023\)](#), created through a partnership with the state’s Office of Higher Education and PELSB, to “provide users with a high level overview of all the funded programs that could be utilized locally to diversify the educator workforce.” This includes grants that each agency manages, as well as state and federal opportunities.

MDE provides information on “related resources” on the Educator Workforce webpage, including a link to [the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership](#). This partnership works with students, parents, educators, district leaders, leaders in higher education and other stakeholders in the community to “advance racial justice and educational excellence for Minnesota’s students.” The “Big Bold Goal 1” of this partnership focuses on race equity planning to ensure that “Minnesota educational leaders and cultural communities create equitable education systems, structures and public narratives. Other goals focus on ensuring equitable distribution of diverse educators throughout the state.

The state has engaged in some efforts to increase the diversity of educators in the classroom, such as through [Grow Your Own](#) programs. Some Grow Your Own programs provide stipends, scholarships, unique student teaching or field placement experiences, as well as other [incentives](#) to help ensure more diverse educators are part of the workforce. [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.73](#) ensures that programs are funded to “develop a teaching workforce that more closely reflects the state’s increasingly diverse student population and ensure all students have equitable access to effective and diverse teachers.” In [fiscal year 2022](#), 48 adults and 152 students participated in the programs.

There are no Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) nor Hispanic Associations of Colleges and Universities in Minnesota. However, there are several Tribal Nations education committees and organizations that partner with the state to work on recruiting and retaining a diverse education and school leader workforce.

The [Tribal Nations Education Committee](#) focuses on strengthening, protecting and advancing the educational experience and opportunities for tribal students, families and communities, and focuses in part on advocacy on teacher training. MDE also has an [American Indian Education Office](#) that works to strengthen and promote educational outcomes for American Indian students in the state. The office advocates for students by providing education and professional development for educators. Despite these actions focused on Tribal Nations in the state, Minnesota’s [Teacher Preparation Manual](#) notes that there is still a significant disparity in the number and percentage of teachers of color and indigenous teachers, when comparing to the state’s student demographics. The teacher’s manual notes that each provider has been tasked with increasing the number of teachers of color.

Innovative Staffing Structures

It is not clear that Minnesota provides flexibility in the educator credentialing system or to personalize supports for every student in order to empower districts and schools to operate with innovative staffing structures. However, other organizations in the state may be working towards this end. For example, through the AMSD Reimagine Minnesota inter-district work sessions focused on personalized learning, schools and districts are encouraged to “build supportive scheduling and technology for personalized student learning.”

While Minnesota has not encouraged districts to establish educator roles supporting classroom models focused on personalized education, the state does provide for some flexibility in staffing through administrative rules. For example, Minnesota has created [four tiers of licensure](#) for educators. [Tier 1 licenses](#) require the applicant to hold a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, a credential equivalent to a bachelor’s degree or for applicants in career and technical education fields and career pathway courses of study have specific experience, degrees or certification that is aligned to the courses being taught.

Minnesota also permits PELSB to grant waivers, through [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.09](#), to school districts or charter schools “for purposes of implementing experimental programs in learning or management.” This presumably could lead to the creation of educator roles that support classroom models that are focused on personalizing the education of all students. The same statutory provision also allows licensed teachers in alternative education programs to teach students in out of license content areas in order to meet specific needs of students in those classrooms.

Through the statutorily-established District-Created Site Governed Schools articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.045](#), the state provides flexibility for site-governed schools, including the ability

of the school board operating the school to “determine the leadership model for the site including selecting a principal, operating as a teacher professional practices model with school leadership functions performed by one or more teachers or administrators at the school or other model determined by the site.”

Minnesota also provides the opportunity for innovative staffing structures through charter schools. As noted in [Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01](#), one purpose of charter schools is to “encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods” and “[c]reate new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.”

It may be possible for schools and districts to apply for a discretionary variance in order to have the flexibility to operate an innovative staffing structure. [Minnesota Statutes, section 8705.2600](#) provides that these variances may be granted in order to meet requirements in statute other than as specified in rule or to waive the requirement when application of the requirement would result in undue hardship. This contemplates the use of a variance for an innovative staffing structure in order to meet staffing requirements in ways other than what is required in rule.

So while Minnesota does provide for personalization in terms of representation of educators in each classroom, the state is not clearly meeting the intrapersonal domain and instructional strategies domain of the Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments related to personalization in their staffing structures.

Systems of Assessments

From KnowledgeWorks State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning: *Coherent systems of formative, interim and summative assessments advance and validate learning, helping the state and its communities monitor progress against a shared vision for student mastery of knowledge and skills. Rich, performance tasks provide educators, caregivers and students with useful and timely information to personalize instruction, while periodic, common assessments enable system leaders to drive equitable outcomes through more effective resource allocation and support. These systems connect seamlessly to other K-12 systems, including accountability, workforce and postsecondary systems to ensure students are prepared for what comes next.*

To build capacity for personalized learning, states create shared systems of assessment by:

- Aligning systems of assessment to a shared purpose for student success
- Creating a well-balanced system that clearly defines roles and purposes and produces valuable information for monitoring progress
- Creating a system in which assessments are regularly reviewed to ensure that they serve their intended purpose and remain valuable to stakeholders
- Ensuring policies and resources support research, design, implementation and evaluation of high-quality, equitable systems of assessments in every district
- Empowering educators to effectively use innovative assessments to meet student needs

Shared Purpose

Framework Description: *State systems of assessments align to a shared vision for student success and a learning framework co-designed with educators and community members to articulate meaningful learning expectations for mastery of knowledge and skills. Assessments and aligned learning frameworks are designed and developed in deep collaboration with educators, community members and other interested parties to maximize local relevance and instructional value.*

Historical State Work

Minnesota has taken some limited steps toward building the awareness needed for assessment innovation and engaging communities around this goal. Following the passage of the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) began researching the implications of new federal flexibilities including [Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority](#) (IADA), [Competitive Grants for State Assessments](#) (CGSA) and the use of computer-adaptive assessments. In an [early memo](#) from the department, MDE asked for feedback around the flexibilities provided in ESSA and if the state should pursue additional flexibilities through an IADA application. This was an early step in what would transform into deep research and community engagement related to quality and transparency of assessments. [MDE](#) “convened several stakeholder committees to gather feedback and recommendations on specific components of the ESSA law.” Four committees were formed, including one on assessment and one on accountability. According to the state’s [2018 ESSA plan](#), a fifth committee was added later on to study English language learners.

In 2017 the [assessment committee recommended](#) taking advantage of the flexibility provided under ESSA, noting the importance of continued stakeholder engagement and expressed dissatisfaction with the current system. To engage stakeholders, the committee recommended instructional resources such as videos and one-pagers be produced to help explain the assessment system and that parents and

educators be added to the decision matrix for determining the best assessments to give to students. The committee also recommended that MDE lean into ESSA's allowance of locally-selected, nationally-recognized high school academic assessment.

The [accountability committee](#) featured stakeholders as well as technical experts to weigh in on concepts, values and calculations of accountability systems. The committee [recommended](#) several broad themes for improvement to the state's accountability system, though it does not appear that any substantive additional action has been taken at the state level to implement any of these recommendations:

- Accurately identifying schools for improvement to increase educational excellence and equity
- Accurately identifying schools for positive recognition to celebrate success, help others learn and encourage all schools to engage in continuous improvement work
- Helping the state effectively prioritize resources to improve schools where students of color, students from low-income families, English language learners and students with disabilities are struggling the most
- Helping communities and schools understand and address the conditions and actions that affect student outcomes
- Helping the public understand the state of their schools
- Exploring how best to use other sources of data that might not meet all technical requirements for the federal school identification system but that could help the public better understand how schools are doing and how they could improve
- Aligning the federal system under ESSA with the state-level World's Best Workforce goals, process and framework

Separately from its ESSA work, MDE hosted a [Future of Assessment Design Working Group](#) in 2017 to dive into assessment policy and provide recommendations on how the state might consider redesigning their assessment system. Members of the working group included parents, school officials, teachers, business representatives and the public. The group heard from representatives from the CCSSO who shared information about assessments in a national context as well as provided the group with examples from another state (New Hampshire). The [report](#) states that "after considering the potential impact to local-control curricular decisions and the requirements of a standardized assessment administered statewide, the group recommends a broader look at the assessment system. This expanded view includes a change to the administration of the assessments, shortening the length of the assessments and underscoring the importance of assessment literacy and quality support for interpretation of assessment results." However, similar to its ESSA work, it is unclear whether any additional steps have been taken as a result of these recommendations.

Federal Opportunities

It is evident that in the mid-2010's, Minnesota stakeholders were deeply engaged in work related to assessment system improvement. The groups discussed above in this section identified many areas for improvement within the assessment system, including the need to leverage the flexibility provided in ESSA to create more student-centered assessment options and to reduce the assessment footprint. However, Minnesota has not taken full advantage of these flexibilities. Notably, Minnesota has not submitted an application for IADA, and there is no evidence to suggest that Minnesota has considered applying for IADA. While there are many tools and resources to support the implementation of the

current assessment system, there has not been a state-level effort to assist in the restructuring of local and state assessment systems to accomplish these goals.

The U.S. Department of Education’s [CGSA](#) is meant “to enhance the quality of assessment instruments and assessment systems used by states for measuring the academic achievement of elementary and secondary school students.” The CGSA grant is often used by states to fund innovative approaches to assessment. In 2019, the Minnesota Department of Education was [awarded](#) \$3,998,938 through CGSA. The grant application specifies that the funds would be used to explore alternative English language proficiency testing assessments for English language learners who are also cognitively disabled. MDE also received a [CGSA award](#) of \$2,961,888 in 2015. The 2015 CGSA award was to be used to support a collaborative effort between Minnesota and seven other states to improve the assessment process for students with special needs by developing guidance and decision making processes around accessibility features and accommodations.

While it is clear that Minnesota has taken steps to improve certain areas of assessment, they have not utilized IADA or CGSA applications to explore innovative approaches to assessment that could support personalized approaches for assessing learning in the state more broadly. MDE should consider creating a formal system by which alternative assessment systems can be tested, provide the necessary funding to support these trials and ensure that pilot programs or implementation processes are supported with technical assistance either provided by MDE or through qualified technical assistance providers with expertise in state assessments. Additionally, it is not clear that the state has established conditions to determine when and whether districts might be ready for piloting innovative assessments aligned to personalized learning.

Community Engagement

Today, MDE has several groups that allow educators and community members to engage with assessment systems and contribute ideas for improvement. MDE invites educators and community members to join the [Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment \(MCA\) and Alternative MCA review Committees](#). The site includes flyers for disbursement to encourage participation by community members. [Reimbursement](#) is available for individuals who participate in MCA committees. The [purpose](#) of this group is “to ensure state assessments reflect the rich diversity and experiences of all Minnesota students, committees provide feedback that is relevant for all student demographics and learning contexts. Committees that are representative of our student population are essential to the test development process.”

MDE also has several other [advisory groups](#) that support stronger assessment systems:

Advisory Group	Purpose	Members
Assessment Accommodations Review Panel	Conducts reviews of proposed additions to the approved accommodations, supports and non-standard test administration practices listed in the Minnesota Procedures Manual to ensure that they do not invalidate interpretations and judgments based on the resulting test score.	Special Education Teachers, Special Education Directors, English Learner Teachers, Educators of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Parents, School Principals, District Assessment Coordinators, Educational Measurement Experts, University Researchers
Local Assessment and Advisory Committee	Advises MDE on assessment and technical issues.	Superintendents, Charter School Directors, Principals, District Assessment Coordinators, District Program Coordinators
Minnesota Technical Advisory Committee	Serves as an advisory body to MDE and makes recommendations on technical aspects of large-scale assessment including item development, test construction, administration procedures, scoring and equating methodologies and standard-setting workshops. The MN TAC also provides guidance on other technical matters such as practices not already described in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, and continues to provide advice and consultation on the implementation of new state assessments and meeting the federal requirements of the ESEA.	Educational Measurement Technical and Policy Experts by invitation
State Assessments Technology Work Group	Ensures successful administration of computer-delivered assessments by testing software releases and provides feedback to MDE and service providers before, during and after online test administrations as needed.	District Technology Coordinators, District Technology Staff, District Assessment Coordinators

These groups where stakeholders are engaged present powerful opportunities to leverage expertise and momentum for improvements to the assessment system.

Minnesota could take steps to make its assessment system more student-centered through insights from pilot programs and networks and/or state-level policy action. While stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in conversations and recommend changes to the assessment systems, there has not been enough policy movement or supportive structures such as state-led technical assistance or aligned funding sources to pressure test new and more personalized assessment systems at the state and local levels. There has been movement in the state to consider pilot programs to test more personalized assessment systems, but nothing is currently in place.

Recent Legislation

In the 2023-24 biennium session, the legislature considered creating a new program for assessment flexibility. [H.F. 3221](#) would have introduced the ability for districts participating in the Innovation Research Zones Program to use new models of evaluation, assessment and accountability using multiple indicators, including models that demonstrate alternative ways to validate a student's academic attainment that have predictive validity to the state tests and also include other variables such as problem solving, creativity, analytical thinking, collaboration, respecting others, global understanding, post-graduation student performance and other information.

Potential Opportunities for Flexibility

While not a pilot program, Minnesota's [site-governed schools](#) designation allows school districts greater autonomy and flexibility. Among the available flexibilities offered to site-governed schools is the ability to select and develop curriculum and determine their own set of formative and summative assessment practices as articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.045](#). To gain site-governed school status, the local district school board and teacher union must draft an application and must include the types of schools or education innovations that the board intends to create as articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.045](#). Statute requires that submissions must also include participation from parents or other community members. While this is not tied directly to personalized education practices, it may be a tool to expand upon these offerings. See the Culture of Innovation section for additional details.

Another potential avenue for additional personalization of assessment systems is through the state's education site designation, enumerated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.04](#). A participating school board can "assist with research in developing and improving innovative, cost-effective, research-based individualized learning, instruction and assessment." Participants may also choose to enter into a written education site achievement contract for use of student performance data as a means to better target instruction by diagnosing the academic strengths and weaknesses of the student. While this program offers potential for personalized approaches to the use of assessment data, it is not explicitly tied to personalized learning that could improve student learning outcomes and create a more balanced and cohesive system of assessments.

Minnesota has not yet established a state-level framework that connects assessment systems to personalized and competency-based learning goals in the state, to the extent that they exist. While some groups have met to discuss more intentional connection of assessment and the state's overall vision, there is not a formal connection. A potential signal that this may be changing is the write up following the [Governor's Education Roundtable Discussions](#) where the group discussed actions that would be needed to support student-centered educational frameworks and included the importance of multiple and diverse assessment methods as an action item to accomplish this. Currently, assessments in Minnesota do not appear to be tied to any student-centered frameworks.

Connection with State Goals

While the state does not have an explicit connection between assessments and the state vision, statute specifies that assessments must be connected to standards and career and college readiness indicators as articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#), though no priority standards are identified. In fact, in [Frequently Asked Questions about Minnesota’s K-12 Academic Standards](#) it states that “MDE advises against the process of power or priority standards. Minnesota K-12 academic standards are summary descriptions of student learning, and benchmarks are the set of basic skills and knowledge that each student in the state must master by the end of each grade level or grade band. Integration or bundling of standards and benchmarks is one way to gain efficiency of time and learning.”

Standards are developed through committees with a membership that must include parents, licensed teachers who teach the content, principals, higher education faculty in the content area, school boards, the business community and the Tribal Nations Education Council. The commissioner chooses 25 to 45 people from the pool of applicants and posts the roster on the specific academic standards content area webpages. Expert reviewers analyze the revised standards and provide feedback to the committee. Reviewers are people or groups who have been nationally recognized for their expertise in K-12 standards and/or their knowledge of special issues related to K-12 standards in the content area. In addition to general standards, a district must also establish and regularly review its own standards for CTE and ensure that standards align with frameworks developed by the Department of Education, national CTE organizations or industry standards. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.022](#).

Balance and Coherence

Framework Description: *A well-balanced system of assessments, with clearly defined roles and purposes, produces valuable information for monitoring progress. Authentic, instructionally-relevant assessments provide students with meaningful and personalized opportunities to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills while aligned state-level assessments evaluate the quality and equity of state implementation. System coherence ensures students receive tasks aligned to their learning, assessments are aligned to each other and assessment data informs instructional practice.*

Minnesota’s Existing Assessment and Testing Resources

All Minnesota students take some form of the MCA. According to [MDE’s website](#), the “MCAs are given in the spring of each year to students in grades 3–8 in reading and math. In high school, Minnesota students take one last Reading MCA in grade 10 and one last Math MCA in grade 11. The Science MCAs are given in grades five and eight and once in high school.” Minnesota also offers the MTAS assessment, an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Minnesota’s testing site contains an [infographic](#) defining balanced and comprehensive assessment systems in their own terms. These definitions demonstrate the state’s ability and interest in providing students and educators with timely and meaningful assessment data. The [Components of a Balanced, Comprehensive and Equitable Assessment System](#) include additional detail around what these assessments should look like in the classroom, at the district and at the state level.

According to the infographic, a comprehensive assessment system includes:

- Multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning
- Assessments that are coherently linked through clear standards-based learning targets
- Continuous information documenting student progress over time
- Tools and strategies that are accessible and inclusive of all learners, including a range of appropriate challenge and scaffolds

While a balanced system is said to include:

- A variety of assessment types compatible with how students learn the content domain
- Assessments that each have a clear purpose and are not redundant
- Useful information for guiding decisions that match the intended use of the assessment
- A greater emphasis on learning over grading, including formative assessment practices that promote student agency

In addition to these high-level intentions articulated around assessment data collection, the state also outlines specific requirements in policy to support the collection and disbursement of assessment data that is valid, reliable and relevant to learning and culturally responsive. This is most evident in state policy around disaggregation and dissemination of data.

Summative Data Collection and Disbursement

Minnesota's state summative assessment data appears comprehensive and comparable enough to identify equity gaps in outcomes at the district and state level. [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#) specifies the commissioner must ensure that "3rd through 8th grade computer-adaptive assessment results and high school test results must be available to districts for diagnostic purposes affecting student learning and district instruction and curriculum, and for establishing educational accountability." These tests and results must be available for all students in the state. The reporting of these results must be "timely, useful and understandable information on the performance of individual students, schools, school districts and the state," and should include a growth indicator of student achievement. In addition to broader reporting requirements, the commissioner is also instructed to provide schools and school districts with a more comprehensive report that includes testing information that meets local needs for evaluating instruction and curriculum. To support disaggregation of data that represents best practices, the commissioner is instructed to consult with stakeholders and review the American Community Survey. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.31](#).

Not only does the state policy on collection and disbursement of assessment data appear to provide appropriately disaggregated information that can be used to target instruction, but this goal is also explicitly articulated in policy. [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.36](#) specifies that the commissioner shall report "longitudinal data on the progress of eligible districts in reducing disparities in students' academic achievement and realizing racial and economic integration." These data are also used as part of the [Achievement and Integration for Minnesota](#) program. Eligible districts must use the data to develop their plan components and strategies. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.861](#).

Educator Engagement

Minnesota has taken steps to ensure that assessments are culturally responsive and that educators play a key role in the development of assessments and their corresponding accountability system. According to their [2019 CGSA application](#), Minnesota has been a member of the [WIDA Consortium since](#) 2010. As

articulated on the website, the WIDA consortium is “made up of 41 U.S. states, territories and federal agencies dedicated to the research, design and implementation of a high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate system to support multilingual learners in K-12 contexts.” Using input from educators and state department of education representatives, WIDA committees review topics and make recommendations around standards, assessments and professional learning to support multilingual learners in K-12. [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#) outlines that for the purpose of accountability “cultural competence,” “cultural competency” or “culturally competent” ensures that families and educators are able to interact effectively with people of different cultures, languages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

As discussed in the previous section on [MCA Review Committees](#), stakeholders who engage in this committee provide advice on statewide assessments and ensure that the questions closely align with best practices in the classroom. This mechanism also ensures that educators play a role in designing and updating assessments. The website specifically states that these committees must ensure “state assessments reflect the rich diversity and experiences of all Minnesota students [and] committees provide feedback that is relevant for all student demographics and learning contexts. Committees that are representative of our student population are essential to the test development process.” In some instances, specific groups of student populations are named in assessment policy to ensure the reliability and validity of instruments used to assess them (e.g., children with hearing loss). See [Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.63](#).

MDE does provide guidance that seems to prioritize the development of instructionally-relevant formative and interim assessments to better target instruction. In the [Frequently Asked Questions about Minnesota’s K-12 Academic Standards](#) document on MDE’s website, it states that teachers need curricular-specific information for differentiating instruction that can only be gained through formative and summative classroom assessments. These classroom assessments are meant to provide for planning and adjusting instruction to help a student progress towards mastery of the academic standards. The methods for determining student learning of standards and benchmarks are locally determined. While this area of policy provides flexibility for districts and schools, there may be a need for greater clarity and linkages between local assessments and state required assessments. Notably, there is a statutory limitation on state required assessments. The commissioner must not develop statewide assessments in social studies, health and physical education and the arts ([Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#)). This restriction may be to promote the development of these assessments at the local level, though it is not explicitly specified.

Connection to Graduation Requirements and Credits

While there is a pathway for students to earn graduation credits based on mastery, it appears to be underutilized due to a lack of guidance or explicit acknowledgement of its existence on the MDE website (see the section on Graduation Requirements for more details). Performance assessments are important for personalized learning for students, but there is no evidence identified through this research to suggest that MDE is encouraging the use of performance assessments for promotion or graduation. Currently, students can obtain credit for courses through demonstration of seat-time or through demonstration of mastery. Additionally, [high school graduates](#) must complete all state academic standards and local academic standards in order to graduate. An exception is that students with disabilities who successfully complete the objectives in their individualized education program are awarded a standard diploma. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.04](#).

Assessment Size and Scope

While Minnesota has studied its existing assessments and the possibility of reducing their size and scope, no evidence suggests that this has taken place. The 2017 [Future of Assessment Design Working Group](#) included recommendations around the reduction of assessments. Specifically, the group recommended that MDE reduce the length of assessments to the minimum amount required by the federal government and request a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to cease providing individual student strand/sub-strand scores. It does not appear that MDE moved forward with this recommendation. Additionally, no evidence suggests any additional efforts by MDE to reduce the size and/or scope of the existing MCA assessments.

While many groups and committees have explored or are contributing to the development and execution of assessments in the state of Minnesota, there does not appear to be a group of stakeholders actively engaged in advocating for reductions in assessments at the state or federal level in Minnesota. Minnesota has intentionally created systems to engage stakeholders in the development and execution of assessments, promotes cultural competence and balanced assessments, but it is still missing the formal connection to personalized and competency-based methodology and practice that would promote deeper student learning. Recently proposed legislation has attempted to make that connection but failed to pass. [S.F.4547](#) would have defined personalized, competency-based education and included valuable language around the pedagogy of local assessments, stating that they should be “a meaningful, positive and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant and actionable evidence;” and that “local assessments are used to personalize learning experiences for a student” while still requiring that districts adhere to state accountability requirements. S.F. 4547 would have also included money for planning grants to accomplish this. Both a more formalized connection as well as funds to support this work are necessary to ensure equitable and successful personalized and competency-based assessment approaches.

Quality Assurance

Framework Description: *The state deploys strategies in the design, review and improvement of state and local assessments to ensure they serve their intended purpose and remain valuable to stakeholders across the system. Rich professional learning communities build classroom assessment literacy while statewide networks ensure technical quality through educator collaboration, feedback and spot checking.*

Minnesota has many committees and working groups with various stakeholders that help to ensure assessments are high quality and valuable to stakeholders. See the Shared Purpose section above for additional details on these groups.

Educators play a very specific and important role in the test-development process. The [Educator MCA Review Committees](#) “provide advice on statewide assessments for each subject, and ensure test content and question type align closely with best practices in classroom instruction. Committees of educators who are experienced in specific content areas will meet throughout various phases of the test development process to accomplish the following objectives:

- Review test questions, passages and phenomena to judge appropriateness of content, cognitive complexity and ensure inclusive language and content
- Review each test question and its associated data after field testing with students to determine inclusion of the questions in the item bank, from which the tests are built

- Assist in developing drafts of test specifications that outline eligible test content (this process occurs only after new standards are adopted)”

Minnesota districts can use [Title II, Part A](#) funds to support assessment literacy. Specifically, the Eligible Activities and Expenditures document specifies that dollars can be used by districts to “design, develop, align, map or revise curriculum or assessments.” However, this does not appear to be a priority for MDE as it does not offer encouragement for the use of funds to accomplish this, though it does specify that funds must be used in conjunction with the World’s Best Workforce goals.

While Minnesota has many strong supports for ensuring the quality of assessments, there are areas where additional support could prove helpful. For example, Minnesota does not appear to have a formal auditing system for assessments. While the participation of educators and other stakeholders in assessment committees is certainly providing some quality assurance, formal auditing to ensure expectations align to the needs of the state, especially as it relates to desired skills and competencies, could be helpful. While the [Testing 123 website](#) provides great resources for teachers, there does not appear to be a more formal support system or procedures to ensure quality implementation and literacy of assessments. There is also no evidence that MDE has worked in collaboration with community stakeholders to create balanced and innovative assessment practices. These partnerships have proven to be key to the success of balanced and innovative assessment practices in other states.

A barrier to quality assessments can be if technology is insufficient or incompatible with new assessments. While Minnesota has not rolled out a state-wide assessment system that would require advanced technology, there has been exploration around how to leverage new technologies to support better assessment practice. In their [2019 CGSA application](#), Minnesota proposed exploring the possibility of alternative assessment delivery options through computers, iPads and SmartBoards. However, there does not appear to have been movement as a result of this exploration. While there is no evidence of state-wide implementation of these efforts, statute does permit the exploration of technology to support individualized learning, instruction, assessment and achievement as part of the [site-governed schools](#) designation discussed previously. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.04](#).

Equitable Statewide Implementation

Framework Description: *Aligned state policies and resource allocation support research, design, implementation and evaluation of high-quality, equitable, systems of assessment in every district and across the state. Assessment systems effectively interact with other related systems, such as accountability structures, data and reporting systems, high school graduation requirements and those that credential learners or communicate readiness for postsecondary education or the workforce to ensure that implementation is consistent and equitable across the state.*

Connection to Broader State Goals

While Minnesota’s assessment system is not attached to a personalized learning framework to drive measures of student success, it is connected to workforce and post-secondary readiness indicators from the state’s World’s Best Workforce goals. The World’s Best Workforce goals are prevalent from kindergarten entry assessment tool selection as articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.162](#) to performance on assessments and graduation rates as detailed in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.11](#). World’s Best Workforce is designed to support learners meeting readiness goals, close the achievement gap among all racial and ethnic groups of students and between students living in poverty and those

not, and empower all students to attain career and college readiness before graduating high school. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.11](#).

While it appears that the goal is tied to assessments, it does not seem that the assessments are directly tied to workforce readiness goals. However, the [College and Career Readiness Guide](#) could offer a place to begin aligning assessment data with specific workforce readiness goals. While the state doesn't have any formal portrait/profile of a graduate or competencies, there are proto-competencies like the integrated skills one included in the readiness guide. This alignment was a recommendation from the [Future of Assessment Design Working Group](#) who proposed a formal alignment of assessments to college and career readiness assessments. However, there does appear to be less formal alignment between career and college readiness goals and assessments. As part of statewide testing requirement developments, the commissioner must work with the chancellor of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities to establish benchmarks on high school assessments that indicate progress towards college and career readiness ([Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#)). In reporting requirements, the commissioner must share the results from the American College Test among other college and career readiness indicators.

Supports and Intervention Services

Equitable implementation and intervention of assessments also requires support and intervention services using the data from the assessments. [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.30](#) specifies that the commissioner and the chancellor are to align instruction and assessment for adult basic education students and English language learners in a way that allows for targeted interventions, accommodations, modifications and supports to ensure they are ready for postsecondary education or employment without postsecondary remediation. Regional centers of excellence in the state provide research-based interventions and practices to support student achievement, with the regional delivery system supporting an equitable implementation of evidence-based practices, including applied and experiential learning, contextualized learning, competency-based curricula and assessments and other nontraditional learning opportunities, among other practices. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.115](#).

There are many resources across MDE webpages and testing sites that educators can use to help interpret testing results. MDE often prioritizes the use of data for equity purposes. While previous sections of this document have explored the ways in which assessment data is tied to equity, it is also important to understand how the assessment system itself considers historically marginalized student populations in the conceptualization and implementation of assessment systems. According to the [Frequently Asked Questions about Minnesota's K-12 Academic Standards](#), the Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS) should be used to evaluate the equitable implementation of academic standards. However, the FAQ document cautions that this is only one data point for measuring inequity. See the Educator Capacity and Ownership section for additional details on how educators are encouraged to use this data to drive equity in their classrooms.

Specific groups of historically marginalized yet resilient populations are also named in Minnesota statute and have policies to support equitable assessment systems. American Indian students have several supports articulated in state assessment policy. Of note, the position of American Indian Education Director is in part responsible for increasing student achievement including levels of proficiency and growth on assessments. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.791](#). There is also statutory language specifying that all testing and evaluation materials given to American Indian children must not be racially or culturally discriminatory and must be valid for the purpose of assessing American Indian children. See [Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.81](#). Accommodations and protections for students with disabilities also exist. In addition to this support for American Indian students, Minnesota also offers the MTAS assessment for students with disabilities. An individualized education program team can also determine

that an assessment is not appropriate for the pupil and provide an alternative plan to assess the student.

Equitable funding is an essential component of equitable assessment implementation. Providing the additional supports needed to alleviate or eliminate achievement gaps in assessment requires intentionality. In Minnesota, the 2023 legislature passed [H.F. 2497](#), which established student support personnel aid. Student support personnel are individuals with appropriate licenses to service students and the funding is available to add additional staff capacity in schools. Student personnel support aid can be used to support assessment and data-based decision making. The student support personnel aid is equal to the greater of the student support personnel allowance times the student population (adjusted pupil units), or \$40,000 (as provided by Laws 2023, chapter 55, section 63). The state has also applied for and received federal CGSA funding in the past tied to assessments, though these funds have been used to support statewide implementation. No evidence at present indicates that the state is actively exploring applying for additional federal funds.

Educator Capacity and Ownership

Framework Description: *The state implements structures that empower educators to effectively use innovative assessments to meet the needs of their students. Educators have a role in crafting innovative assessments as well as related resources and structures.*

Educators can have a fairly impactful role on the assessment system in Minnesota through participation in working groups and committees, notably the Assessment Accommodations Review Panel (AARP). Additionally, the [Testing 123 website](#) has broad and deep resources that educators can access to better understand and implement state-level assessments. However, there is opportunity in the state of Minnesota for more intentionality around teacher preparation and professional development to improve assessment literacy generally and for student-centered learning practices specifically.

While this research process did not dig deeply into the individual programing or curriculum for individual preparation programs across the state, an initial high-level review did not identify any evidence that teacher preparation programs currently have required units of learning around student-centered assessment practices. However, Minnesota recently updated its [standards of effective practice](#), which includes specific requirements around selecting assessments to address “individual differences” (3.B), address biases in assessment (3.C), helps students in analyzing their own assessment results (3.E) and uses strategies and devices that are nondiscriminatory (3.H). Eventually all educators in Minnesota seeking a tier 3 license will be required to meet these standards of effective practice. Presumably teacher preparation programs will also be required to help their students meet these new standards. Additionally, Minnesota administrative rules specify that core competencies of educators include the ability to “implement state academic standards and a coherent system of culturally responsive curriculum, instruction and assessment that promotes the mission, vision, and core values of the school” as well as the ability to use data from valid assessments to support student progress. See [Minnesota Rules, part 3512.0510](#).

Educators are also supposed to receive some support from administrators. Notably, the state policy section on principal competencies specifies that principals should “support teachers and staff in the implementation of state academic standards, coherent systems of culturally responsive curriculum, instruction and assessment.” See [Minnesota Rules, part 3512.0510](#). This same section of regulation states that superintendents, principals, directors of special education and directors of community engagement must also “implement state academic standards and a coherent system of culturally

responsive curriculum, instruction and assessment” and “demonstrate the ability to use data from valid assessments.”

While teachers are expected to provide a portfolio of assessments during their evaluations as articulated in [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.41](#), there appears to be just a few professional development opportunities that support teachers’ literacy of assessments beyond what is available on the [Testing 123 website](#). [Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.60](#) specifies that staff development activities must provide an opportunity for teachers to use student data to increase student achievement and how to effectively use assessment data to support the development of English learners. As part of this same statutory policy, an advisory staff development committee must develop a staff development plan that supports improvement of student achievement of state and local education standards. While these staffing development opportunities support the use and understanding of the assessment systems, they are very limited in their scope and breadth, and do not specifically address the need for student-centered assessment literacy.

In 2017, the [Future of Assessment Design Working Group](#) recommended the creation of a District Assessment Coordinator mentoring and network program. While there is no evidence that this mentoring and network program occurred, it signals an interest in the development of a network to support assessment in the state. Minnesota may consider if a mentoring network may be a suitable method to support the deepening of educators’ assessment literacy, especially as it relates to student-centered learning assessment practices and possibilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following individuals for their support in conducting the research for, writing and design of this opportunity analysis: Jon Alfuth, Emily Brixey, Patty Casey, Todd Garvin, Andrea Johnson, Jillian Kuhlmann, Anne Olson, Lillian Pace, Amy Starzynski and Kate Westrich.



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.

FORESIGHT LAW+POLICY

Foresight Law + Policy is a national education law and consulting firm. Our professionals support education leaders, nonprofit organizations and entities of all types that are working to strengthen public education and prepare all kids for success. Established in 2014, Foresight provides the education policy insights, expert counsel and visionary supports that public and private sector leaders need to identify and promote innovative ideas for better serving the nation's diverse learners and their families.

GLOSSARY

AMSD = Association of Metropolitan School Districts

AP = Advanced Placement

CCR Guide = Career and College Readiness Resource Guide

CGSA = Competitive Grants for State Assessments

CIS = College in the Schools

CTE = Career and Technical Education

ESSA = Every Student Succeeds Act

IADA = Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority

IB = International Baccalaureate

MTAS = Minnesota Test of Academic Skills

MCAs = Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments

MDE = Minnesota Department of Education

PELSB = Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board

PSEO = Postsecondary Enrollment Options