

Network Model School Flexibility

1. The State Board of Education has signaled its intent to support student-centered and learning-focused educational innovation and entrepreneurship with flexibility. Our December 2007 letter to Indiana educators stated in part:

“The State Board of Education welcomes innovative approaches that use the time within a school day in different ways or that award credit based on demonstrated proficiency instead of seat time. ... Waiver requests will not be subjected to intense scrutiny. The Board will be satisfied if the school or corporation states the request has been made because staff believe students will be better served by the waiver. ... The goal is to get to the point where standards are clearly established, but the methods of achieving those standards are determined locally.”

2. One result of such innovation has been the development of model schools that are part of a broader network of such schools. These schools share certain characteristics:

- a. They are student-centered and learning-focused.
- b. They adhere to the tight and rigorous principles, methods and practices of a school model that has been developed and is being implemented in locations across the nation. They openly articulate and expect adherence to their rationale, instructional and learning objectives and curricular program.
- c. They meet a specified need (for example, to provide education to urban youth who have dropped out of high school or are in danger of doing so, or to provide education that reflects 21st century skills and thus aligns to economic and workforce development opportunities and needs).
- d. They have the support of and the expectation of school participation in a network of such schools, within the state or across the country, including but not limited to evaluation of the effectiveness of each school.

3. Communities in Indiana have begun to embrace and seek to implement such network model schools, and they have begun to inquire about flexibility to implement the model as developed and prescribed by, and thus as a part of, the network of such schools.

4. The State Board intends to facilitate, as opposed to frustrate, the educational entrepreneurship and innovation reflected in such network model schools being implemented in Indiana communities, with the expectation that the model is defined clearly, implemented properly and followed rigorously. That intent is supported by the Board's and the Superintendent's authority to waive Board rules and by the principles of Rule 8 addressing nonstandard curriculum.

5. Such a network model based waiver enables the school and its community and network to focus on the students and their instruction and learning, while at the same time providing the State Superintendent and Board with the clarity of the model and commitment to it for which a waiver is being granted. It is useful to communities implementing (or considering implementing) such network models, as well as to those supporting their implementation, to have the clarity and certainty that the network model may be implemented as designed.

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6. The Board has determined that the following network model schools qualify for a waiver (this list may be supplemented by further action of the Board):

- a. Diploma Plus High Schools
- b. New Tech High Schools

7. These qualified network model schools shall have the following flexibility:

- a. The general approval of the Board to implement the school model as developed by, and as a participating member of, the network.
- b. The following specific waivers requested by the network schools, with the assurance that student-teacher contact time is not reduced and course content and materials are consistent with Indiana subject matter content standards (this list is not exhaustive and may be supplemented by decision of the Superintendent without need for resort to the Board):
 - (1) Flexibility in scheduling of student time to match instructional needs and approach (511 IAC 6.1-3-1), including with notice to and approval of the State Superintendent extension of the flexibility to feeder schools for purposes of backwards integration of the model's instructional approach;
 - (2) Flexibility in assignment of licensed teachers (515 IAC 1-1-47 through 1-1-50);
 - (3) Flexibility in course titles, construction and combinations to accommodate the model's more integrated curriculum (511 IAC 6.1-5.1);
 - (4) Flexibility in the use of alternative instructional media in lieu of textbooks;
 - (5) Flexibility in the means by which the physical education requirement is met by students participating in interscholastic athletics.

If and as need for other such specific waivers for a network model arises, the network schools may notify the State Superintendent of additional flexibility. If the State Superintendent concurs, this list may be expanded.

8. The flexibility that is granted to these network model schools does not extend to the ultimate outcomes the state desires of its students and such expectations as student safety and contract compliance. Specifically, the network model schools are still held accountable for such matters as the legal number of days of school and length of the school day; diploma requirements; state-initiated testing requirements; state reporting requirements; all school safety requirements; and all other matters not within the purview of the State (for example, federal regulations, locally bargained collective agreements, etc.). The purpose here is to leave in place local decisions, state standards and learning result expectations and graduation requirements but to allow the network model schools operational freedoms to perform to achieve the student-centered, learning-focused educational results while maintaining the rigor of and fidelity to the instructional design of the network model.