Transforming to a World of Learning:
An ESEA State Waiver Strategy Document
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About KnowledgeWorks

As an educational operating foundation, KnowledgeWorks has more than a decade of experience implementing approaches to high school education that prepare students for tomorrow’s challenges, teaching them to create, adapt and solve problems. KnowledgeWorks has significant experience transforming persistently low performing schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas, employing an innovative portfolio of high school models in more than 100 schools in more than 25 states to formalize the pathway between high school and postsecondary success.

KnowledgeWorks launched some of the best educational reform centers in the country, including:

**EdWorks**: EdWorks is a school turnaround organization that partners with schools, districts and states to provide effective, long-term solutions to improve student achievement. EdWorks offers different models of school redesign, which focus on rigorous curriculum and professional development, including STEM schools and early college high schools.

**New Tech Network**: New Tech Network supports the start-up and implementation of innovative high schools that provide students with the skills to succeed in a dynamic and competitive global workforce. Through the integration of personalized and relevant technology and project-based learning, students master rigorous content and develop essential skills such as critical thinking, communication and leadership.

**Strive**: Strive helps communities create a civic infrastructure of business leaders, educators, policymakers, philanthropists, and community organizations committed to aligning services around shared goals for raising student achievement to ensure all students accomplish college and career success.
Introduction to the World of Learning

21st century learning should be fundamentally different than it is today. Despite years of investment and incremental reform, our education system lacks the personalization and relevancy to prepare every learner for the careers of tomorrow. The results of this failing system are all too clear: glaring achievement gaps, record high school dropout rates, declining international rankings, and extensive demand for postsecondary remediation. States are in dire need of comprehensive education reform that embraces a new way of thinking – a shift from a world of schooling to a world of learning. In an era increasingly motivated by innovation and international competition, our success depends on our ability to embrace this type of educational transformation. While the emergence of new technologies, school models, and anytime, anywhere learning, have begun to define learning environments of the future, state policymakers must establish the policy conditions to help these innovations thrive.

A Growing Responsibility for States

In an era of increasing flexibility for public education, states have a significant role to play in upholding high quality educational systems. The establishment of comprehensive accountability systems is key to this success, giving states the information to monitor improvement strategies in all schools, while focusing on aggressive solutions for the state’s lowest performing. These strategies should align with state priorities, commit to next generation learning principles, and boast broad stakeholder buy-in at the local level to ensure engagement and relevancy.

States must also reevaluate the role of districts, incentivizing new governance structures and delivery systems, and elimination of duplication. Districts must deepen their connections with community, establishing partnerships that move beyond traditional school-community relationships and focus on the integration of data systems, increased transparency, and shared accountability to serve all students. Alignment of school and community resources can leverage additional funding toward shared community outcomes and provide more opportunities for personalized, relevant learning experiences.

Personalized Learning

As technology continues to transform our daily lives, states have the opportunity to create learning experiences that are relevant, customized, and amplified. Students and families demand such experiences and will choose educational options that best meet their needs. As a result, states, districts and schools will have to adapt services to be effective in a vast marketplace for personalized learning. This includes investments in online, digital materials, mobile and social media technologies. Educators will also demand customized professional development to lead an explosion of new teaching roles. These changes will enhance the quality of learning for all students and provide richer, clearer career paths for educators.

In order to scale these emerging reforms, we must remove traditional barriers like measuring student progress through seat time which have little relevancy to competency based education. Districts should also explore ways to leverage learning experiences beyond their borders, blurring boundaries between the classroom, community, and the world.

Conclusion

The future promises significant opportunities for students if we challenge the way we think about our education system. The following policy recommendations provide a framework for transforming state education systems to support the world of learning.
Recommendations

The Obama Administration’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act waiver package is an active response to state and district requests for relief and greater flexibility from the current “No Child Left Behind” federal accountability system. States, through these waivers, may seek flexibility in the following areas: the 2014 timeline for ensuring 100% of students are proficient, district and school improvement accountability requirements, and increased federal funding flexibility. The current waiver package presents an opportunity to rethink and re-scope the way states support schools and districts by investing in a new accountability system and developing systemic supports for low performing schools. To fully capitalize on this waiver package, states should establish the following:

A New Accountability System- States should establish a new, comprehensive accountability system to ensure continuous improvement of state, district, and school reform strategies. This system should include a new definition for “adequate yearly progress” that more accurately measures students’ preparation for college, careers and beyond. This system should, at a minimum, include the following multiple measures of student learning:

- Evidence of achievement and growth in content as measured by proficiency on state math and English language arts assessments. States should explore inclusion of tests in other subjects to ensure a well rounded education.
- Evidence of achievement and growth in complex demonstrations of learning that measure the full range of knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college and 21st century careers.
- Evidence of rigor and college and career readiness as measured by rates of credit accumulation, the percentage of students taking and passing college-level coursework, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates.

Interventions, Recognition and Supports- States should intervene in more than five percent of their lowest performing schools to create a comprehensive system of interventions, recognitions, and supports that ensures continuous improvement of all schools. This system will target resources strategically, ensuring rigorous interventions in the lowest performing schools and sufficient supports to prevent the next tier of schools, or breakthrough schools, from falling farther behind. States should support priority and breakthrough schools with innovative school models, educational technology, and the establishment of regional communities of best practices.

- Provide A Portfolio of Innovative Options For Priority Schools – States must encourage continued adoption and development of innovative school models that give students in priority schools the opportunity to enroll in rigorous and engaging academic programs. As a part of this strategy, states should take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by the waivers to create state turnaround principles that align with the state’s academic and economic needs. These principles should incorporate innovative school reform models such as early college high schools, STEM academies, and systemic technology redesign.

- Create Networks of Breakthrough Schools – States should provide supports for the cohort of schools on the cusp of the priority category by establishing networks of breakthrough schools. These networks, which may also include priority schools, should implement a comprehensive strategy to raise student achievement in a multi-school, multi-district region that includes all of the following: an aggressive school turnaround strategy that employs a portfolio of innovative school options, a commitment to anytime, anywhere learning that capitalizes on the power of educational technology, and the establishment of a cadre of turnaround leaders and educators with specialized skills to transform low performing schools.
• **Develop Learning Exchanges that Leverage Reward Schools** – States should also establish regionalized communities of practice to leverage successful strategies in the state’s reward schools. These learning exchanges should be planned, purposeful interactions between reward, breakthrough, and priority schools that give teachers and leaders the opportunity to brainstorm solutions to their own classroom and operational challenges. States should use blended in-person and online professional learning communities to ensure learning exchanges span regions in a given state.

**A New Approach to State Takeover of Failing Districts** - As an alternative to traditional state takeover, districts with a significant number or percentage of students enrolled in a priority school should have the opportunity to submit a plan to the State to align student and community services into a more efficient P-16 education system. Under this initiative, a district improvement team consisting of a broad range of education and community stakeholders would establish annual goals based on a needs and assets assessment and use a district-wide P-16 data system to measure ongoing progress in the following areas: School Readiness, Academic Performance, School Climate, Family Engagement, College and Career Readiness, and Alignment of District Systems and Resources.

**Anytime, Anywhere Learning Experiences for Educators** - With the implementation of new college and career ready standards and new teacher and leader evaluation systems, it is critical for states to repurpose their professional development resources to support these changes. As states develop new professional development opportunities, they should at a minimum, include the following:

• Improve the capacity of educators to effectively use technology in an integrative way to drive effective instruction, engage students, increase achievement, and assess student learning in real time.

• Create a force of skilled turnaround principals to improve the quality of leadership in low performing schools. Given the shortage of principals with this expertise, states should invest in principal recruitment and training programs that better prepare principals for the type of reform needed in failing schools. These programs should go beyond traditional leadership training, providing principals with professional development opportunities alongside educators focused on instruction and assessment.

**Digital Learning Standards and Policies** - With technology transforming the workforce, it is critical for states to encourage the establishment and replication of digital learning environments. This will require a state commitment to digital-friendly policies that ensure students have the digital literacy skills essential for 21st century careers. States should, at a minimum, implement the following policies:

• Adopt or refresh the state’s digital literacy standards so they reflect the skills educators and learners need to be successful in today’s global workforce. States, districts, and schools should use these standards to guide decisions around curriculum, instructional program, professional development, and instructional materials.

• Waive outdated seat time, course title, and course sequence laws that prevent districts from implementing competency-based learning environments.

• Waive outdated textbook laws that prevent states from investing in digital platforms, devices, and curricula. Access to digital materials is an essential component of anytime, anywhere, any place learning.