It’s Time for Missouri to Embrace Innovation in Education

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Missouri is one of 13 states without any statewide programs to promote Next Generation Learning (a term coined by the advocacy group ExcelinEd to describe a set of innovative education models that can be tailored to each state’s unique circumstances). Most other states give schools more flexibility to explore methods like mastery-based education (see below), among others. Missouri, however, continues with its one-size-fits-all approach, apparently uninterested in experimenting with better ways to educate students. Meanwhile, student performance in our state continues to fall behind. And what, exactly, are other states trying?

- In Nebraska, Scottsbluff High School received an innovation grant from the state department of education to establish career academies within the school. The academies began operation in 2016, and students have the opportunity to graduate with college credit, job offers, and even associate’s degrees in six different career fields.
- In Florida, the Principal Autonomy Program Initiative began in 2016 in order to encourage principals to embrace innovation by relaxing certain regulations in return for improved student achievement. What started out as a pilot program was made permanent in 2018.
- Four states—Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, and Utah—created programs to promote competency-based education, including grants to help schools transition to the
competency-based instruction model. Instead of students taking classes at the same speed as their peers and either passing or failing a course, competency-based learning requires students to master certain skills but allows them to do so at their own pace. They advance as their skill set grows, not because the semester or school year is over.

Of course, states need to evaluate these new programs to ensure they are working and are a worthwhile use of tax dollars. Before launching any program, school administrators should establish specific metrics and goals by which the program will be assessed. For instance, career academies should be tracking graduation rates, training-related job placement, and the number of students earning industry-recognized credentials. If programs are not meeting expectations or are too costly, then they should be phased out so resources can be directed to programs that are delivering.

Whether it is grants for new programs, waivers for certain regulations, or embracing models like charter schooling, why doesn't Missouri's state education policy welcome local innovation and reward high performance? Sitting on the sidelines while educators in other states experiment with new ways of teaching the next generation of students isn't working.

**About the Author**

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