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# **2017 Innovation Research Zone Pilot Projects Interim Report on 2019 - 2020**

Report to the Legislature

As required by [Minnesota Laws 2017, First Special Session chapter 5, article 2, section 52, subdivision 5](#)

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As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1100 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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## Legislative Charge

[Minnesota Laws 2017, First Special Session chapter 5, article 2, section 52, subdivision 5](#) requires that:

Each research zone partnership must submit project data to the commissioner in the form and manner provided for in the approved application. At least once every two years, the commissioner must analyze each innovation zone's progress in realizing the objectives of the innovation zone partnership's plan. The commissioner must summarize and categorize innovation zone plans and submit a report to the legislative committees having jurisdiction over education by February 1 of each odd-numbered year in accordance with Minnesota Statutes, section 3.195.

## Executive Summary

Districts are keenly interested in pursuing innovative strategies for serving students. School districts showed an interest 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 lack of additional financial resources combined with the COVID 19 pandemic and shift to distance learning were cited as significant challenges to implementation for all projects. The lack of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment data means that formal measurement of student achievement was not possible for school year 2020. One project ceased when district priorities changed and staff transitioned.

Applicants were able to request exemption(s) from certain state statutory requirements (Minn. Laws 2017 1Sp C 5 art 2 s 52 subd 2). Exemption requests related to online learning programs (Minn. Stat § 124D.095) were approved and posted to the MDE website; other exemptions, including those related to extended-time revenue, were denied as the law does not authorize the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to provide additional funding. Some applications requested exemptions to statutes that were not authorized in the law or were explicitly removed from consideration. In this year's reports, two projects acknowledge that the shift to distance learning may result in statewide changes to assessment and/or measurement that are better able to acknowledge the success of students across innovative learning settings.

## Introduction

This report summarizes and categorizes the Innovation Research Zone Pilot projects approved under the law. It provides insight into the process of approving and carrying out Innovation Research Zone projects. It also provides an interim analysis of each Innovation Research Zone Pilot project approved under the 2017 law.

## Analysis

The Innovation Research Zone Pilot Project Advisory Panel approved six project applications under the 2017 legislation. The application period opened in September 2017 and applications were due January 25, 2018. The panel approved four applications (three metro area and one greater Minnesota) and gave the unsuccessful

applicants an opportunity to revise and resubmit an application based on feedback provided by the advisory panel. Two additional projects (both greater Minnesota) were subsequently approved; one metro area approved project withdrew in April 2018. MDE reopened the application period in September 2018 to select one additional project from the metro area, which was awarded in March 2019 with a start date of July 1, 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic created sizable challenges for the implementation of all projects. The reliance on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments for measuring results was the most notable disruption in project progress. Job-based internships were likewise difficult to accomplish, though partnerships with potential employers continued to develop and grow. Student interest in participating in new coursework, especially career and technical education, was evident.

The following are project summaries and categorizations of approved projects for activities from January 1, 2019, to December 30, 2020.

## **Bloomington “New Visions for Pathways to Graduation”**

**Partners:** Bloomington Public Schools (BPS), Valley View Elementary, Valley View Middle School, Kennedy High School, Jefferson High School, Normandale Community College, Bloomington Public Health, SERVMN (Minnesota Reading Corps), Insight Works

### **Project Category(ies):**

Alternate pathways to graduation  
Integrated educational system

### **Project Summary:**

Three innovations were sought: 1) Create and pilot seamless integrated “E-5” educational system that locates and unites early learning programming with the district’s traditional K-5 academics under the instructional leadership of the elementary principal; 2) Create and pilot a system to identify “beat the odds” teachers and instructional strategies and use this information to personalize learning more effectively for English Learners; 3) Create and pilot a system of alternative pathways to graduation that provide more flexibility in the way students are able to earn credits and meet state testing and graduation requirements.

### **Project Update:**

A “beat the odds” (value-added) analysis of the effectiveness of pre-K programs within Bloomington Public Schools (BPS) and the community was conducted. A quasi-experimental fixed effects regression analysis used the Minneapolis Preschool Screening Instrument – Revised (MPSI-R) standard scores as the baseline and the Bloomington Early Kindergarten Assessment (BEKA) as the posttest. The statistical model controlled for income (free/reduced-price lunch), English Learner (EL) status, Special Education Status, Non-English, racial/ethnic status, and gender. The results found two voluntary pre-K sites in BPS produced statistically significant positive value-added. Students who had no pre-K experience and one private day care produced significant negative effects compared to the average program.

In order to perform the pre-K value-added study, it was first necessary to convert the MPSI-R scores for each age group into percentiles and standard scores (known as NCEs). Then BEKA norms were transformed using similar methodology so that both distributions would be normal. Then two files of all students who took the BEKA in the fall of 2019 and had a MPSI-R screening from scores were created. The first file included all students who took the preschool screener at least three months before school started. The second file included students who took the MPSI-R less than three months before the start of school. These two files enabled us to do predictive and concurrent validity studies of the relationship between the MPSI-R and BEKA. The predictive validity correlation for 437 students was .631 and the concurrent validity coefficient was .766. These are exceptionally high correlations for early childhood instruments. In a next phase of the innovation zone, the Bloomington REA department will create a technical manual for the BEKA and submit the findings to the MDE.

The BPS Innovation Research Zone also conducted a “beat the odds” (value-added) study of teachers who produced exceptional growth for EL students in 2019. A short video was produced for presentation to the school board and a longer video, [BPS English Learner Teachers Beat the Odds](#), was created for the English Learners (EL) Department for staff training purposes. Another recent value-added study, detailed in the video [Bloomington Public Schools - Beat the Odds 2020: Dave Dorava](#), focused on 2<sup>nd</sup> grade mathematics.

The study of success for EL students has been expanded to the whole state of Minnesota. BPS established a data-sharing agreement with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to identify the most successful schools and grade levels within schools throughout Minnesota. Pre- and post-ACCESS test scores for three consecutive years were obtained for all schools in the state. After conducting the quasi-experimental analysis, MDE will assist BPS in doing site visits to schools with exceptionally positive results.

The BPS Innovation Research Zone was making progress in all its goals, objectives and outcomes prior to the winter of 2019. Because of COVID-19 and distance learning, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment III (MCAIII) and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments were not administered in the spring of 2019. However, the MAP reading assessment was administered to students in the elementary hybrid model. Results found consistently high reading growth across grades, poverty, EL, and Special Education categories with achievement gaps closing. We hope to administer the MCAIII and MAP to all students in spring 2021.

#### **Barriers:**

The biggest barrier this past year has been changes in instructional models due to COVID-19 which did not permit direct assessment of students using the BEKA, MAP, MCA, and ACCESS standardized test measures. With immunization of teachers on the near horizon, we hope to resume standardized testing this spring. We will then be able to do extensive program evaluation including estimating the effects of distance learning and hybrid instruction on growth in academic areas and changes in social-emotional areas.

## Hmong American Partnership “Hmong Language and Culture Beat the Odds”

**Partners:** Community School of Excellence, Prairie Seeds Academy, New Millennium Academy

### **Project Category(ies):**

Teacher Preparation

### **Project Summary:**

The project is designed to address the unique problems of Hmong students in developing language, cultural immersion and accelerated growth in reading and math through “beat the odds” teacher preparation. The project involves the use of Swivl technology to capture ongoing instruction in lessons throughout the year. An advisory team will coordinate activities. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic postponed aspects of the project based on the Swivl technology.

Working to certify teachers fluent in Hmong language and culture and developing Hmong Immersion programs where specific literacy instruction and Hmong language and culture are taught every day, we believe that the percentage of students exhibiting Hmong language and culture proficiency will increase 10% per year, national norm literacy growth in reading will increase 3% per year, economic proficiency gaps will be decreased and the percent of students making state norm growth on the MCA III assessments in reading and math will increase 2% per year.

### **Project Update:**

The project has two innovations. One, involving the use of Swivl technology, is specific to classroom-based instruction. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this aspect has been postponed. The project has implemented Professional Development opportunities SY 20-21 to engage teachers in utilizing best practices such as integrating language and content strategies for distance learning, integrating Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies and GLAD unit development, attending the Minnesota Council on the Teaching of Languages and Cultures (MCTLC) fall virtual conference, attending the session for the release of the new Hmong standards and Hmong resource hub from the National Hmong Coalition of Educators, and attending the Association of Two-Way & Dual Language Education (ATDLE) virtual conference on the Hmong Language and Culture strand. The Hmong teachers also participated in the mentor and mentee program offered by the National Hmong Coalition of Educators.

Hmong language teachers participated in GLAD strategies and GLAD unit development training to be more familiar with research-based language teaching strategies pertaining to English Language (EL) learners. Hmong teachers have attended four, two-hour sessions of GLAD training. Hmong teachers have access to resources and materials that will allow them to integrate language games, activities, strategies, and resources in the classroom. Hmong language teachers will implement the variety of strategies in daily classroom lessons to improve the rigor of the content taught in the Hmong classrooms. We will continue to emphasize the use of GLAD strategies in the

Hmong language classrooms and have follow-up professional development as deemed necessary for further development of our GLAD implementation plan.

Hmong language and culture teachers are continuing the work in a large and collaborative Three Hmong Language Coalition (3HC) professional learning community (PLC) in addition to each individual school's Hmong PLCs throughout the year in order to combine resources, implement the use of GLAD strategies, co-create GLAD units, and provide co-planning opportunities. Hmong language teachers are collaborating to better improve resource development and language teaching methodologies.

We have started giving Hmong language teachers opportunities for peer observation learning in particular areas of focus depending on the need and/or interest within schools and will look into inter-school peer observation arrangements.

### **Progress on Outcomes:**

We want to have students who take Hmong language and culture at 3HC schools to gain a sense of respect for ethnic diversity and Hmong culture while learning the Hmong language. We have high hopes that the linguistic learning benefits will also be an added boost to our students' academic achievement overall. With this in mind, we can take the Hmong Language and Culture program's learnings and connect them to some key World's Best Workforce (WBWF) goals that also align with it for a more systemic flow of overall student outcomes.

WBWF Goal 2: All students reading well by Grade 3. Hmong teachers work in collaboration with English Language Arts (ELA) teachers to incorporate reading skills and strategies by aligning curriculum to support reading. In the three charter schools, 100% of scholars at the elementary levels take Hmong language classes.

WBWF Goal 3: Closing achievement gap between student groups. This is referenced in our IRZ application under Theory of Change: "...The percentage of Prairie Seeds Academy students making national norm growth on the Fastbridge Reading Assessments will increase from 32.5% in 2018 to 42.5% in 2020. The percentage of Community School of Excellence students making high or medium growth on the MCA Reading will increase from 27.5% in 2018 to 31.5% in 2020." There are no MCA data to report since the MCA assessment was waived due to COVID-19 in spring 2020.

WBWF Goal 5: All students' college and career readiness will be assessed by linking MCA III, Fastbridge (K-8, Math & Reading), NWEA Map test scores (HS, Math, Reading, and Science) and ACT scores to College and Career enrollment in Statewide Longitudinal Educational Data System (SLEDS). Prairie Seeds Academy and Community School of Excellence high schools will address WBWF Goal 5 for college and career readiness in relation to Hmong language programming via participation in the Hmong Bilingual SEAL program from MDE. We have at least 75% of students taking Hmong language as a World Language class or Hmong Studies. There is no assessment data regarding Hmong Bilingual SEAL since students did not participate due to COVID-19 school closure.

The unveiling of the new Hmong Language and Culture standards this winter provides our work with solid guidance on how to cross-examine and further improve our Hmong curriculum. Plans are still underway regarding how to roll this out to the 3HC Hmong Language and Culture teachers. Standards alignment work is a

fairly new process to teachers and we want to ensure that implementation is smooth and scaffolded. Leaders at each school site will convene to plan an introductory presentation of the new Hmong academic standards to the teachers on January 6, 2021. From there, each school site leader will implement and monitor their own school site and reconvene to debrief, discuss and form the next reasonable action steps.

**Barriers:**

As a less commonly taught language, Hmong language, literacy and culture programs rely almost solely on native speaker teachers. Being a less commonly taught language also means that there are extremely limited opportunities to find resources to support their teaching. It is critical for the Innovation Zone team to continue to work together to build curriculum and materials, engage in Professional Development and learn best teaching practices from each other.

Not only are there limited resources, but there are also new guidelines that must be created and built in to pave the way for creating an existing licensure area for Hmong Language and Culture teachers to be certified and to be more standardized. We are experiencing a stall in partnerships with credentialing programs to give our Hmong Language and Culture Program teachers a chance to obtain credible and MDE-backed teaching preparation opportunities.

As for actual growth proficiency or growth scores, we are unable to compile this with accuracy due to COVID-19 school closures, distance learning interruptions, and not enough students testing. Similarly, the instruction of the Hmong Language and Culture Program in distance learning format came with difficulties. Student participation had decreased and student work submission suffered due to distance learning.

## **Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton “Vision 2020”**

**Partners:** St. James Public Schools, Fairmont Area Schools, Waseca Public Schools, St. Peter Public Schools, Sleepy Eye Public Schools, Tri City United, Granada, Huntley East Chain, South Central Service Cooperative

**Project Category(ies):**

Personalized learning  
Career Technical Education (CTE)

**Project Summary:**

By bridging equitable access to programming across districts, the project seeks to close the opportunity gap. Using student-centered learning environments, the project offers personalized learning and alternative pathways to graduation and mastery of standards. Vision 2020 creates equitable access to shared programs, staff, and learning management systems and improves equitable access to CTE programming, industry certification and college credit in all participating schools.

**Project Update:**

Five to six school district representatives have met bi-monthly for the past three years. During student registration for the 2020-2021 school year, multiple opportunities were given to students to take classes from a different high school in the region.

**Progress on Outcomes:**

With the advent of COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning, no students have yet participated.

**Barriers:**

The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to distance learning has posed a significant barrier to the project. Nonetheless, the project is ongoing.

## **Montevideo-Benson “BEST (Building Exceptional Student Talents)”**

**Partners:** Montevideo Public Schools, Benson Public Schools, Minnesota River Valley Education District, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Montevideo Economic Development Authority, Montevideo Area Chamber of Commerce, Chippewa Valley Ethanol Company; CNH Industrial

**Project Category(ies):**

Personalized Learning

**Project Summary:**

Students will work with their advisor to develop personalized learning plans. Plans will take into account student strengths and weaknesses and vocational assessments to develop a learning plan with courses and experiences, and mutually agreed-upon measures of success related to the courses and experiences.

**Project Update:**

Despite the challenges we faced with implementing the innovation zone (specifically the denial of our waiver requests and COVID-19) we were able to create educational opportunities that are relevant and personalized and expand opportunities for students to learn outside of the school building. Most notably for Montevideo was receiving a grant from the Bush Foundation for a Career Coordinator, increased business tours and job shadowing opportunities, and new classes focused on career and technical opportunities. Benson’s accomplishments included an increased emphasis on personalized learning, increased number of extended internships, and additional partnerships with businesses in support of career and technical education.

## **Progress on Outcomes:**

### Objective 1:

For the 2018-2019 school year, 50 students (juniors and seniors) will have personalized learning plans that allow the students to excel at their own pace and according to their interests, aspirations and unique needs.

#### Actions:

- Ninety students are participating in the Innovation Research Zone project.
- All students at Montevideo High school have started their personalized learning plans.
- Sixteen students are engaged in coursework/study/work experience as part of their personalized learning plans.
- All juniors and seniors at Benson have met with our counselor to develop their personalized learning plan/career path.
- Twenty-nine students are engaged in work experience/extended internships.

Students are using Minnesota Career Information System (MCIS) and a draft learning plan template that addresses areas not covered in the MCIS. Assessments for identifying student strengths, weaknesses and student preferred learning styles are being explored. MCIS and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) are used as vocational assessments to identify potential career pathways. Principals are measuring engagement and empowerment of students during walkthroughs and teacher evaluations. The team is developing a student survey to measure student perception.

### Objective 2:

By June 1, 2018, teachers and administrators will identify innovative ways to measure competency-based outcomes which can be used to demonstrate mastery of standards, earn credits and meet other graduation requirements.

#### Strategies:

Competency outcomes used in other districts to fulfill standards, credits and other graduation requirements are being researched. The team is working to develop a process to document and validate learning that takes place beyond the school day and school walls. Due to limitations not relieved by a waiver, the team has not spent as much time on this particular strategy.

### Objective 3:

By August 1, 2019, at least 10 teachers will develop multidisciplinary, real-world, inquiry-based, and student-directed designed to make learning more engaging and relevant.

#### Strategies:

We have 18 teachers identified as participants in the Innovation Zone program. These teachers continue to develop innovative models and experiences that are being used by students.

#### Objective 4:

By June 1, 2019, at least 10 businesses will be identified as partners that will allow for students to gain work experience and/or industry credentials.

#### Strategies:

Thirty-six businesses have been identified and are willing to host students for job shadowing, mentoring, entrepreneurship, service learning, volunteering, internships, other cooperative work experience, youth apprenticeship, or employment.

The following is a cumulative list of businesses who have participated in this program over the past two years:

- AgVise
- Ametek
- Anderson TeBeest Funeral Home
- Benson Municipal Airport
- Burger King
- Burmeister Auto Body
- Chandler Industries
- CCM Health
- Cornerstone Chiropractic – Montevideo
- Case/IH
- Custom Rotomold
- Chamberlin Oil
- CVEC
- Darold's SuperValu
- Discovery Kids
- DoMat's
- Fagen, Inc.
- Glacial Plains
- Golden Living Center
- Granite Falls Energy/Ethanol
- Ice Castle
- J & D Construction
- Jennie-O
- Luther Haven Nursing Home
- Minnesota Valley Cooperative Light & Power Association
- Molden Concrete
- Montevideo Veterinary Clinic
- Nelson, Oyen & Torvik Law Office
- PrinsCo

- Riverview, LLC
- Running's
- Shell - (Dooley's)
- SpecSys/Ritalk
- Subway
- Swift County Health Services
- Willmar Electric Service

An orientation checklist/contract (which includes a list of expectations for students and business supervisors, and evaluation protocol) has been developed for participating students and businesses. There is a framework in place for job shadowing.

Individuals who seek a job shadowing experience have an application to fill out.

We believe this project has already exceeded the expected outcomes in regards to students having more experiences that are individualized, personalized, and authentic. Examples include:

- Providing more student-directed learning and choice within our school districts.
- Increasing student awareness and direction regarding career pathways for post-secondary options.
- Increasing the number of school to community connections for student internships, worksites, and job shadowing opportunities.
- Providing more connections with community experts through career fairs, presentations, interviews and tours of area businesses.
- Providing innovative curriculum/classes with cutting edge technology (CNC plasma table, CNC router, CNC 3D printer) which allow students to think creatively beyond the normal classroom setting.
- Hiring a Career Coordinator in Montevideo.

These experiences are doing a better job of preparing them for post-secondary and career endeavors. In terms of graduation standards and increased MCA, Accuplacer and ACT scores, we have been unable to gather reliable data due to COVID-19.

#### **Barriers:**

Obviously, COVID-19 has side-tracked some of our efforts. Our teachers have been called upon to respond to teaching and interacting with students in a virtual environment. Their focus has been on surviving the uncertainties of learning models and the complete upheaval of teaching outside of their comfort zones. That being said, we continue to work with teachers on the project and gently encourage them.

We remain disappointed in the denial of our waiver requests. It was our understanding that this program was designed to remove barriers to the status quo and allow for innovative and creative strategies to be utilized to meet student needs. While we have done some programming that is new and different, we feel like we still have a number of barriers that prevent us from implementing our ideas to the fullest extent.

## **Norman County West “Norman County West Innovation Program”**

**Partners:** Norman County West, Halstad Living Center, Compass Business Consultants, Dekko Foundation/Shockn’Awe, Magnell Custom Cabinets and Woodworking, Halstad Elevator Company, Halstad Telephone Company

**Project Category(ies):**

Career Technical Education (CTE)

**Project Summary:**

The intent was to provide programming that motivates and inspires students to achieve their potential and academic goals. To help students make informed decisions about future academic and educational plans; engage in career-oriented environments authentic to hands-on learning and technology; be prepared for career or expectations for education after graduation; partner with area school districts to provide an authentic hands-on learning experience in career and technical areas where it is currently difficult to find licensed teachers.

**Project Update:**

Discontinued in June 2019.

**Progress on Outcomes:**

With no progress, project was discontinued.

**Barriers:**

Lack of sustained district interest and lack of funding.

## **Saint Paul Public Schools “Graduation Program for EL Students”**

**Partners:** LEAP High School, Gateway to College ALC (GtC), Saint Paul Public School District

**Project Category:**

English Language Learners

**Project Summary:**

Create program to identify and recruit older-than-average EL students from traditional high schools to enroll at LEAP or GtC and work with families to select an alternative learning center program and design a graduation plan. Use flexibility to provide access to educational services to EL students until age 22.

**Project Update:**

Discontinued in April 2018.

**Project Outcomes:**

n/a

## TriDistrict “TriDistrict College and Career Readiness Initiative”

**Partners:** Inver Grove Heights Community Schools, South St. Paul Public Schools, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Public Schools, Intermediate District 917, North American Trailer, Twin Cities Orthopedics

**Project Category(ies):**

Career Technical Education (CTE)  
Personalized Learning

**Project Summary:**

As part of a larger goal of improving and increasing career and college readiness for all students, the goal is to increase the racial, ethnic and socio-economic diversity of students enrolled in rigorous immersive learning experiences. Partners will develop immersive career-focused courses and/or series of courses (pathways) open to all students. CTE focus may include internship/mentorship; rigorous coursework aligned with personalized postsecondary education plans.

**Project Update:****Progress on Outcomes:**

Since the inception of this application, we have created four programs/courses that meet our definition described in the theory of change (“relevant, hands-on, authentic and real-world career and college readiness programming, opportunities, and career-relevant courses.”). These courses are in the areas of Healthcare, Transportation, Business and Entrepreneurship, and Education. All four of the programs include an aspect of career exploration, professional skill development, and an internship/volunteer/service-learning component. All but the Education course also include an English Language Arts (ELA) aspect of the course, with students earning core ELA credit that is required for graduation. Internship experiences are at least 120 hours in duration. We are also currently in the early development stage of an Information Technology / Computer Science program/course that is being created with the same structure and goals of the other four.

All of these courses involve deep collaboration with local community and business partners. Our partners serve as program advisors, mentors, guest speakers, field trip sites, host sites for our courses, and host sites for our internship experiences. Partners serve on our advisory committees for our programs, and help our courses to be iterative on an annual basis, review the prior year’s course, its strengths, areas for growth, updates needed for the course based upon industry changes, etc.

We have also extended college and career experiences that support these four programs/pathways in both the individual high schools in our collaborative, as well as experiences that span the collaborative, where we bring students from all schools together. Examples include:

- Redevelopment of the high school course catalogs to be presented with sections based upon career pathways, rather than just content areas.
- Creation and implementation of 9<sup>th</sup>-grade and/or 8<sup>th</sup>-grade seminar courses or homeroom structures that have a significant career and college planning/exposure aspect to them.
- Creating, implementing, and participating in a variety of career fairs, college fairs, and job fairs designed specifically for high school-age students
- Creation and implementation of a mentor program, focused on career exploration and awareness.
- Creation and implementation of a college and university summer visit program, known as the “TriDistrict Summer College Road Trip.” In this event, eight colleges and universities in Minnesota are visited in a week, at no cost to students.
- Partnership and collaboration with Genesys Works, an IT internship and professional skill development organization.
- Adding courses to each school-site’s course catalog to reflect career pathways that align with our internship courses above (e.g., we have added courses in computer science, healthcare, and business departments across all three districts).
- In adding courses, we have also increased staffing in the content areas of our internship courses.
- To meet the goals of our application, we have engaged in specific recruiting of underrepresented student populations to our courses.
- We have also expanded the concurrent enrollment capacity of all of our member districts by supporting the attainment and maintenance of the required HLC accreditation by post-secondary partners for our teachers to teach concurrently.
- We continue to expand our partners in the community through purposeful engagement with local chambers of commerce, county work groups, and other for-profit and non-profit organizations.

In the four programs created specifically as a part of this pilot project, we have had an estimated 245 students participate in our four programs in areas of healthcare, transportation, business and entrepreneurship and education. For all of these students, we have been intentional about: changing our instruction to be more experiential and hands on, ensuring career/college experiences, viewing our enrollment and recruitment through the lenses of equity and inclusion, leveraging the supports of our member high schools to provide supports for academic success and progress toward graduation with peers, and ensuring that each of these courses includes an in-depth, authentic learning experience such as an internship, volunteering, or service learning component. In terms of the number of students impacted by the TriDistrict Career and College Readiness as a function of related activities and corollary course and program development, the number is closer to 2,000.

The project is meeting our outcomes in terms of graduation standards. In our courses, students earn credits commensurate with the same number of credits as they would otherwise earn for any elective course. In addition, as our courses are interdisciplinary in nature, students also are able to earn credit in the required area of English Language Arts.

## **Barriers:**

Perhaps one of the greatest barriers we've experienced is the cost of transportation for our programs. We look at our programming through an equity lens, and do not want access to individual transportation be a barrier to participation. Many programs like ours do not offer school-provided transportation, and as a result, only those students with the means to their own transportation are able to participate in these types of programs. Our collaborative made a very conscientious effort to break down this barrier. However, it does come at substantial cost.

An additional barrier has been the additional resources that would have been available had our initial request been granted. In our initial application, we requested exemption from Statute or Rule number 126C.10, General Education Revenue. We requested this exemption as a part of our goal to make these profession-based learning opportunities more accessible to more students, and to support the success of our underprivileged students in particular. Many of these students have not had the background and support that others do. Our request for this exemption was to provide additional supports for students to better ensure their success in these courses. The need for this additional support has been especially noticed in our work to help develop professional skills, or soft skills, with our students. We notice that especially in our students who are disadvantaged socioeconomically, as well as in our underrepresented populations that the precursors to these skills are especially lacking.

A final area of challenge is in the area of licensing. There is a large amount of overlap with our programs and CTE programming. There is a significant lack of post-secondary institutions that offer the licenses that our programs need. Currently, there are no colleges or universities in the state of Minnesota that offer the coursework for licenses in healthcare fields of education. The only pathway in this area is through a portfolio process that is expensive, cumbersome, and frequently requires experience in the healthcare field. Our teachers are teaching. They don't have time for a second job in order to obtain the license they need.

## **Conclusion**

Several themes have emerged as implementation has progressed.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been a tremendous barrier to project implementation and success. From the need to observe physical distancing to the challenges of distance learning and lack of assessments, the impact has been pervasive.
- The projects that are seeing the greatest success are those that had a robust project design and high degrees of commitment from all parties. These projects are ongoing and have been successful in adapting to distance and/or hybrid learning.
- Most projects were modified to some extent to adapt to the realities of education during a pandemic.
- Appropriate licensing for teachers is difficult to discern, given the multidisciplinary nature of the new courses created.

## **Bibliography**

Innovation Research Zone Pilot Project Reports on 2019 - 2020, submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education by:

- Bloomington Public Schools
- Hmong American Partnership
- Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton
- Montevideo-Benson
- Norman County West
- TriDistrict