



IMAGINING MORE

*How State Education Agencies Can
Modernize the K-12 Education System
to Put Student Learning at the Center*

THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, Bureau of Indian Education, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

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INTRODUCTION

State education leaders play a critical role in modernizing the education system to meet the needs of all learners. In April 2023, at a moment of historic opportunity to improve how schools serve students, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) hosted a national summit, **Imagining More: A Summit on Modernizing Our Education System**, to elevate the urgency and momentum to move from pockets of change to systemic transformation.

The Summit convened leading thinkers and innovators from across the field for an honest conversation about how the nation's schools can truly change from a systemic perspective. The central question of the Summit was simple: How can leaders reimagine the education system to truly put students at the center? Participants explored solutions related to how to think about time and place in and out of school. They considered subjects such as virtual or hybrid learning and learning experiences outside of the schoolhouse, how to best staff schools, the role of communities and students in identifying challenges and supporting solutions and how to know when a student is ready to progress in learning and life beyond high school.

The Summit was grounded on the premise that the nation should better ensure all students receive the support and opportunities they need to succeed and the systems surrounding the students need to be better set up for success. Too many students are not prepared for life after high school, and too many gaps have persisted at all grade levels for too long. The Summit was intended to foster discussion and debate, identify solutions and allow space to release old ways of thinking.



“The COVID-19 pandemic forced us all to do things differently across schools and communities. Some of those things we’re not interested in repeating. But the crisis did require us to rethink our systems in a big way — and fast. Chiefs have said to me over and over since that time ... ‘We don’t want to go back; we want to go forward,’ so thus we are holding this Summit today.”

— Carissa Moffat Miller,
Chief Executive Officer, CCSSO

The ideas discussed throughout the day were wide-ranging and inspiring. Participants represented a range of perspectives, demonstrating the need for voices from across the education ecosystem to come together to create and actuate solutions. While new ideas emerged, much of the discussion focused on ideas and strategies already known to be effective, yet not applied at scale. The Summit was not intended to identify one solution; rather, it was about understanding the landscape of possibility and considering how to apply solutions with the right support. Underpinning all the discussion was the acknowledgement that change cannot be sustained as a top-down mandate. Local communities, families, students, schools and districts need to be engaged in discussions from the start and co-create solutions, while state leaders clear the path for success.



“It was really a reinvigoration of three core points: the importance of rethinking place in terms of where we think learning and school occurs, who actually are the teachers of a generation of children and when does learning actually occur and what are the conditions that states can provide us to be able to push those questions.”

— Sonja Brookins Santelises,
Chief Executive Officer,
Baltimore City Public Schools

From this all-day convening emerged four concrete actions that state leaders can take to move toward systemic transformation that better centers students at the heart of the system:

- Articulate a clear student-centered learning vision and theory of change to achieve it.
- Set the conditions for redefining schools.
- Cultivate state and district capacity to support locally driven change.
- Accelerate and support scaling of new models of education.

State leaders are increasingly leaning into conversations about how to think about time in the context of a student’s education, how educators work together in different ways to support students and how budgets can be reconfigured to allow for new system designs. While many of the decisions about these issues are made at the school and district level, state leaders are instrumental in creating the conditions for change and supporting it. In fact, state education leaders have an opportunity to proactively foster locally led change to better meet the needs of students.


With that context, this report delves into the four concrete actions state leaders can take to foster and accelerate innovation at the school and district level. In the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic, states had to free schools to take creative approaches to engage students. Education leaders have learned too much to revert to previous methods, and this is a moment to leverage the energy from what worked and commit to it going forward. There is not one path forward, though there is a single goal: success for every student.

What is Student-Centered Learning?

Student-centered learning approaches empower young people with opportunities to proactively shape and own their learning experiences. Educators and adults across the community then help create learning opportunities uniquely tailored to students’ individual strengths, needs and interests, ensuring that they can reach their full potential. State leaders support student-centered learning approaches by:

- **REINFORCING RIGOR.** Promote high-quality, rigorous standards, equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce.
- **PROMOTING AGENCY.** Empower students to shape learning experiences that reflect their emerging sense of self and align with their interests and needs.
- **FOSTERING LIFE SKILLS.** Enable students to build relationships, make well-informed decisions and develop social and emotional skills and competencies.
- **ENSURING RELEVANCE.** Connect ideas and theories from the classroom to students’ lived experiences and interests in their communities.

For more, see CCSSO’s resource, [The State Education Agency’s Role in Supporting Equitable Student-Centered Learning](#) (November 2019).



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STATE ACTIONS FOR SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION

1 Articulate a clear student-centered learning vision and theory of change to achieve it.

Why is this a priority?

Having a clear vision for the state's role in supporting more student-centered learning experiences, along with a related theory of change, both unifies the work of the state education agency (SEA) and provides direction. State leaders and SEAs should start with collaborative vision-setting work that prioritizes innovation and, in many instances, centers support for innovation and the conditions necessary for student-centered or learner-centered education.¹ This iterative and collaborative process often begins with big questions framed around hopes and dreams students, families, educators and community members may have for

students in the state. It frequently evolves into a shared vision for a [portrait of a learner or graduate](#), or another way of framing the shared vision for the skills and competencies all students need to attain to thrive in education, work and life.

Once there is a shared vision, state and district leaders, along with other stakeholders, can begin to identify how to support schools to meet that broad vision based on their unique needs and what role the state can play. In doing so, state leaders can reflect on their theories of change, considering what changes the state must make and what ideas get life from the classroom with district support.



¹ KnowledgeWorks. (n.d.). *Create a Vision Focused on Preparing Each Student for the Future*. <https://knowledgeworks.org/get-help/district-partnerships/vision-personalized-learning/>

Finding the Theory of Change

As Summit participants shared examples of different approaches to learning happening in pockets across the nation, CCSSO CEO Carissa Moffat Miller pushed participants and the audience to think about how to create systems change to both allow for and incentivize new approaches to learning at scale. She charged the group, asking, “When we talk about change theory in this room, there are a multitude of perspectives about how we go about doing this systems change. How does systems change happen?”

State chiefs responded with different approaches and strategies that met the needs of the unique state context.

“As state leaders, we have to think about what are the levers that we have, what is our responsibility. We’re not thought of as state leaders who interact with parents. But we do and we have to. That voice has to be part of the work that we do and it hasn’t been up until this point. ... Our theory of change is having the parent and student voice front and center. ... We changed how we communicate with parents our [assessment and accountability] data in Rhode Island. This week is our spring break, [but] 90% of our kids are at school. When parents saw the data ... it was hard, it was difficult, but they made that choice to bring their kids in. So how do you change when school happens, how it happens? And that conversation can’t happen without the parents. For a long time, we’ve been bringing parents into our space as opposed to reimagining what that space could be.”

—**Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green,**
Rhode Island

“In order to move a system, if you try to do it inside the system, the change gets eaten up and doesn’t affect what you want. You need something outside the system to help the system move. We’ve implemented various kinds of programs that are outside the system but proximate to the system, with the goal of helping the system say, ‘Hey, we can do that.’ ... We wanted schools to create these out-of-school learning experiences for students. Truthfully, when we started to push on that, there was a lot of pushback. So we set them up outside of school as a state system ... setting something up alongside the system. I knew we were making progress when schools said, ‘Hey, can we use these Learn Everywhere programs for our school?’ ... That’s our theory of change in New Hampshire.”

—**Commissioner Frank Edelblut, New Hampshire**

“As I looked at starting this change, I wanted to see innovation [where] you’re not bound by time and space, but it’s about the learner. I thought, ‘What do I have control over?’ As a state superintendent, I have control over K-12. And my theory was that when I started to change K-12, obviously higher ed would need to respond, and they did. A decade ago, we had all sorts of conversations about what’s the transcript going to look like if we’re not having Carnegie Units. Well, guess what? When our schools started to move in that direction ... the admissions office started to accept different types of transcripts, began to accept different types of evidence of learning.”

—**Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, North Dakota**

“Those of us in this room all know that the accountability model in education drives everything. And when I took office in January of 2021, we were in the bowels of the pandemic and North Carolina schools were closed and what my team and I noticed immediately was how much the pandemic underscored the limitations of our current assessment and accountability systems. ... Knowing that we did not have a statewide portrait of a graduate, that was really the first thing we set out to do. ... Then we moved on to Phase 2, which is writing rubrics for teachers. ... And then Phase 3, which we are very excited about, is designing performance-based assessment for these competencies. So the other big initiative that goes very much hand in hand with this is changing that accountability model. ... Where we have ended is we have a set of academic indicators and a set of school quality indicators. And now we fortunately have been asked to come and present to the legislature the research that we’ve done and the suggestions that we’re making so that we can once and for all change this legislation to really set us up to be able to redefine school quality and student success.”

—**Superintendent Catherine Truitt,**
North Carolina

What state chiefs can do:

- **Develop a process to authentically engage a broad range of stakeholders to create a vision and a theory of change** that includes the skills and competencies that students need to thrive in education, work and life. SEAs can convene students, families, educators, state legislators, gubernatorial staff, business leaders, civil rights groups, religious groups and education partners. State leaders can get creative about *when and where* they bring people together, hosting meetings at nontraditional sites such as community centers or churches and holding meetings at times and in locations convenient to different stakeholders.
- **Develop a shared language** for this work so there is consistency across the state. Different states use different terms to describe more student-centered approaches, and there is not one right answer. Chiefs should work with stakeholders to determine what makes sense within the context of their state and then be clear in sharing both the language and why it was chosen. This shared language may be refined over time, and state leaders can welcome that evolution.
- **Ensure the SEA dedicates adequate staff** to support this work and find time for intra-agency collaboration. Support SEA staff in coordination and coherence in this work.
- **Provide opportunities for SEA staff to learn about student-centered learning**, including observing it in action and participating in student-centered learning environments in schools.
- **Create a comprehensive framework for student-centered learning** that builds off the state's vision. Engage educators and others in articulating what the skills and competencies look like in the classroom and how to know if students are mastering them.



- **Develop a feedback loop with districts.** Understanding what districts are doing and what they want to do is a critical step in providing the right support. Consider different ways to engage district leaders, such as listening tours, surveys or regional convenings.
- **Engage districts that want to shift to or expand student-centered learning** and help them identify two or three issues to tackle first. For example, a district may want to allow credits earned outside of high school to count toward graduation and engage community partners to provide learning opportunities. Another district may prioritize expanding blended and online learning opportunities. The state and the district can work together to ask what needs to change at the state level and at the district level to allow that to happen.
- **Establish a process to monitor progress** toward the state's theory of change. Identify goals with respect to key priority areas, such as supporting districts that want to rethink staffing models or how they measure mastery. Establish milestones for what the state can do to create the conditions for change. Clearly articulate the state's role in achieving the goals. Utilize data the state is already collecting and foster a process based on the assessment and accountability systems to provide feedback and transparency.

Voices from the Field: Parent Perspectives

Examples of state leadership:

North Dakota: Superintendent Baesler worked as part of a 15-member Innovative Education Task Force to create a statewide strategic vision. In releasing the [final report](#), Baesler said, “The need for innovation has never been more important in our schools. Every classroom teacher, school administrator, parent and student has ideas about how to improve teaching and learning. We must help to set their imaginations free and encourage a thousand ideas of innovation to flourish. We must emphasize individual learning and allowing our students to pursue the passions that interest them. We should allow students to learn at their own pace, rather than follow an industrial learning model that was devised more than a century ago. We must do dramatic things to encourage and develop our students’ skills in communication, collaboration, analysis and problem-solving.”

South Carolina: The [Profile of the South Carolina Graduate](#), which arose from broad stakeholder engagement and was codified by the South Carolina General Assembly in 2016, elevates the importance of rigorous, empowering and relevant learning experiences. The South Carolina Department of Education leveraged this profile to develop the Office of Personalized Learning and the Framework for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning, which districts and schools across the state are using as they shift their instructional approaches to reinforce the knowledge, skills and characteristics outlined in this profile.² The South Carolina framework [states](#), “Student ownership is at the core of creating meaningful learning experiences through flexible learning environments, co-designed learner profiles, and learning pathways. The Profile of the SC Graduate Competencies are infused into instructional practices and priority is placed on meeting the needs of every learner, every day.”

² Council of Chief State School Officers. (2019). *The State Education Agency’s Role in Supporting Equitable Student-Centered Learning*. https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/SEA%20Primer_Student%20Centered%20Learning%20FINAL.pdf

At the Summit, Brandon Pickney, a principal in Baltimore, and Shareeda Jones, a parent from Washington, D.C., spoke with Bibb Hubbard, Founder and President of Learning Heroes, on the important role of parents and families in supporting student success. Building on data that show the often dramatic disconnect between parents’ perception of student learning and student outcomes on assessments, the discussion emphasized the critical partnership between schools and families and ways state leaders can support district leaders to foster that collaboration.

“I’m trying to introduce that parents can understand that we need to have shared power in order for this thing to work. The teachers cannot do it on their own and we cannot do it on [our] own. It has to be a shared power. I started communicating with the teacher. I first let her know that I am a parent that cares about my child’s education. I also let her know that I don’t think there is a parent that does not care about their child’s education; they more so don’t know how to care. And because we don’t know how to care, it may look like we do not care. But the minute they show us how to care and the routines that we need to go about doing it, it will soar.”

—Shareeda Jones, Parent,
Washington, D.C.

“Parents are the experts in their kids; we are the experts in our field of education. The two of us have to partner together to make it work for that particular scholar. We always talk about personalized learning. That can’t happen just in the schoolhouse. We need parents to work with us to make that happen.”

—Brandon Pinkney, Principal,
Walter P. Carter Elementary/Middle
School, Baltimore

Kentucky: Commissioner Jason Glass launched an extensive stakeholder engagement process that resulted in [United We Learn](#), which the Kentucky Department of Education describes as: “United We Learn is our vision for the future of public education in Kentucky. This vision builds around three big ideas: creating a more vibrant experience for every student, encouraging innovation in our schools – especially when

it comes to assessment, and creating a bold new future for Kentucky’s schools through collaboration with our communities. These three big ideas – students, innovation and community – form the vision for the future of public education in Kentucky.” Building on the initial listening tour, the department formed the Kentucky United We Learn Council for ongoing stakeholder involvement in achieving the vision.



2

Set the conditions for redefining schools.

Why is this a priority?

Achieving the vision may require redefining how to think about school and shedding the constraints of (and comfort with) a one-size-fits-all model. During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators had no choice but to change how they interacted with students. Students experienced many different ways of learning, including where they learned, how they learned and what they learned. The lessons learned about what worked and what didn't work from that shift can and should be applied today to continue to push the bounds in moving beyond traditional ways of thinking.

State leaders are uniquely positioned to create the space for districts to explore student-centered learning approaches by removing barriers, providing incentives and then lifting up examples from which others can learn. Moving to more innovative approaches, grounded in student-centered learning, inherently means trying something new that may not fit neatly within current policies and practices. State and district leaders can work together to determine what may need to change to allow space for new approaches. Starting with fundamental changes to funding approaches and policies on the use of time can help lay the foundation for needed changes that will then allow for a more student-centered focus.

"I cannot leave today without talking about money. ... Part of what we need to be including in our vision is how do we structure people, time and money. How do schedules shift in schools to enable the kinds of relationships we've been talking about, to enable the sorts of individual attention, the just-in-time supports? ... Right now, most of the state initiatives that are being played out are adding the dollars on top, adding the new career paths on top, adding the early college on top and not really restructuring how the existing resources are being used and integrated. Until we start doing that ... [if] the resources go away, [then] so does the program. ... If we don't add that resource piece and we don't have a short-term/long-term part of it, then all this discussion is just pie in the sky. ... States have an amazing and major role in the shifting of resources and the restructuring of resources, because that is the really hard work that school leaders and districts have to do. ... States have a huge role to play in facilitating those resource shifts, creating incentives to do it and providing the political cover to make that happen."

—Karen Hawley Miles, Chief Executive Officer,
Education Resource Strategies



What state chiefs can do:

- **Examine state laws and regulations on how districts are allowed to allocate resources.** Consider what changes might be needed to allow flexibility for different approaches to things such as staffing or scheduling.
- **Identify opportunities at the state level to create more funding flexibility.** Consider ways to braid and blend federal funds to support districts in creative ways. Consider resource shifts that the state can make using existing resources to support local innovation on new models, new staffing, etc.
- **Provide guidance to districts on how to structure their own funding** to pursue new strategies. In turn, district leaders can work with school leaders to help them understand how much flexibility they have and where added flexibility might be needed.
- **Identify partners to help district leaders analyze their budgets** and determine how state and local funds can more effectively be used together. Create a resource hub for districts interested in analyzing and ultimately transforming their budgeting strategies.
- **Examine statutory definitions,** such as what constitutes enrollment or attendance, and determine if changes are necessary to allow for new ways of thinking about school.
- **Review graduation requirements and the ways credits can be accumulated to ensure they align with the state’s vision.** Consider how apprenticeships or other out-of-school learning experiences could count toward high school graduation.
- **Advocate for and support legislation that proactively fosters innovation** or gives local districts space to innovate.
- **Be clear about what waivers are available** and support districts in taking advantage of them.³ Proactively communicate about waiver opportunities and give examples of what districts can do.
- **Work with district leaders to identify where additional waivers from statutory requirements may be needed.** For example, if a school district wants to try a hybrid approach to teaching and learning, consider what state requirements may need to be changed to allow for new ways of measuring attendance.
- **Develop efficient processes to support innovative practices.** If a district wants to support credit accumulation through out-of-school activities, for example, create a straightforward process for approving providers.
- **Proactively develop a strategy for seeking flexibility at the federal level.** As districts develop plans for different approaches to schooling, work with them to understand what federal barriers may prevent them from moving forward and develop strategies for seeking flexibility to support local innovation.

³ ExcellnEd. (2022). *National Landscape Overview and Guiding Principles for Strengthening the Use of State-Authorized Waivers for Innovation*. https://excelined.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/ExcellnEd_NationalLandscape_StateAuthorizedWaiversforInnovation.pdf

Revisiting the Carnegie Unit

The Carnegie Unit is a traditional method for measuring mastery of student learning on the amount of time a student has studied a subject. Measuring the time spent in a class is a common way to determine when a student is ready to move on to a new grade level or area of learning. Increasingly, education leaders are calling for a new way to determine when students are ready to move on and considering different mastery-based solutions. With the move away from the Carnegie Unit, new opportunities emerge to rethink how students progress through a school day and year and from year to year.⁴

“In 1906, before Americans had electricity, before we rode on airplanes, before ChatGPT, the Carnegie Foundation, for which I am now responsible, introduced to the world the Carnegie Unit or the credit hour. When it was introduced, it caught fire. Since it was introduced, it has really become the bedrock of currency of the educational economy. ... I expect that we can agree that the conflation of time and learning is problematic ... and the conflation of place and learning is problematic. ... So to be clear, I am not suggesting that the education sector is responsible for the mess we’re in, but I am suggesting that it is the essential engine for getting us out of it. And to do that, we must establish educational systems ... that are legitimately [focused on] outcomes, or mastery, or competency, whatever language you want to use. How do we do that? A big part of the answer is squarely in your hands. States can and should specify the full range of skills students must possess in order to graduate world ready. ... States can and should provide flexibility to schools and systems ... to allow them to decouple time and learning. ... And states can incent the creation of competency-based models that enable students to learn anywhere.”

—Timothy Knowles, President,
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

⁴ Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (n.d.). *What is the Carnegie Unit?* <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/faqs/carnegie-unit/>

Examples of state leadership:

New Hampshire: New Hampshire takes a competency-based approach to graduation requirements. Local school boards in New Hampshire define graduation requirements based on mastery of the state’s mandatory graduation competencies. Credits are based on demonstration of the competencies, rather than on time spent achieving those competencies. Students have the option to demonstrate these competencies through classroom courses, career and technical center courses, distance education, independent study or extended learning opportunities. Building on that, New Hampshire has established the [Learn Everywhere](#) program, which is designed to unbundle education and acknowledge learning that takes place beyond the traditional classroom. The state has created a portfolio of programs that allows students to get high school credits in different ways, including robotics experiences or financial literacy training that take place outside of school.

Nevada: The Nevada Department of Education formed the [Blue Ribbon Commission for a Globally Prepared Nevada](#) in response to the rapid shift in instructional delivery models brought on by the pandemic. As part of its work, the commission “examines existing State laws, regulations, and policies, and makes recommendations regarding revisions that will increase flexibility for districts and schools. Topics addressed in the commission’s work include, but are not limited to, competency-based education, distance learning, independent study, and instructional time.” In an initial set of [recommendations](#), the commission noted that it “seeks to formalize flexibility in how and where instruction is provided, allowing educators the time to develop new measures of engagement.”

This body of work has continued to progress based on expanding stakeholder input. Nevada State Superintendent Jhone Ebert is now working with businesses, educators, students and community leaders across the state to co-create the [Portrait of a Nevada Learner](#) and build out the [Nevada Future of Learning Network](#). “Our next generation will live into the 22nd century. We are giving them the tools to build a home, a life and a future,” said Superintendent Ebert.

Colorado: Colorado has an [Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot Program](#) (ILOP). Through this program, ninth through 12th grade students can be offered a variety of learning experiences that usually occur outside of the classroom, such as work-based learning, competency-based learning or capstone projects. Participating local education providers may count part-time students participating in ILOP as full-time students for purposes of school funding. These learning experiences are “designed to help students develop and demonstrate personal, entrepreneurial, civic and interpersonal, and professional skills” as described in the SEA’s [Essential Skills required in the Colorado Academic Standards](#). The state legislature’s intent is to have 100% of local education providers participating in this program by the 2025-2026 school year.

Tennessee: The Department of Education has allocated over \$500 million to school districts through competitive grants as part of its [Innovative School Models](#) program, building on \$30 million that was [awarded](#) to an initial round of applicants. The program is designed “to encourage strong, strategic and innovative partnerships between Tennessee public school districts, postsecondary education institutions and local employers to reimagine how to prepare students for success after high school.” The program awarded grants to districts committed to rethinking how students experience high school, including districts revisioning the use of time and space, models of learning, scheduling and mentorship and training opportunities, among other things.



3

Cultivate state and district capacity to support locally-driven change.

Why is this a priority?

Systemic change is hard, particularly while still meeting the demands of the current system. Providing capacity of all kinds – financial, human capital, professional learning, resources and partnership – can help enable both SEA staff and district leaders to advance the changes they want to make. This may also involve a culture shift, moving from a traditional state-district compliance-oriented relationship to one of partnership where the state provides support, not mandates, toward achieving a shared vision. Likewise, state and district leaders will hear from schools and communities about what they need and use that to inform the support they provide. Creating open channels of communication and working to ensure that the right support meets the right needs, with appropriate guardrails in place, will help create the necessary capacity to drive change.

“I can’t think of the last time I was in a room where people acknowledge that education is teaching and learning, wherever it takes place. That’s usually the first argument I have with people. ... We are in a situation where the pandemic has revealed there are a number of systems that are waiting and working already with the same set of students and families. The public health system, the public housing system, banking system, finance system, all these folks are waiting to be involved. ... Partners are involved in the envisioning, in the execution, in the reframing when things go wrong, or you learn something differently.”

—Hal Smith, Senior Vice President for Education, Youth Development and Health, National Urban League

What state chiefs can do:

- **Provide incentives to local education agencies** to encourage them to pursue innovative approaches. This can be done through competitive grant opportunities, for example, or by providing flexibility on requirements.
- **Provide tools and resources to district leaders** interested in pursuing different types of innovation.
- **Identify partners at the state level** who can provide support to both the SEA and local districts. Identify partners who can work with districts on targeted issues and share that information broadly. Consider vetting model providers that can work alongside districts and schools to implement student-centered learning models. Think through the role universities and regional education centers could play, for example, in providing added capacity.
- **Explore partnerships with teacher preparation programs** where educators could be trained for student-centered learning environments.
- **Reconsider professional learning for adults in the system.** Offer high-quality micro-credentialing that allows educators to tailor their own learning, just like they are doing for students.⁵

⁵ To learn more, see *Micro-credentials and Education Policy in the United States: Recognizing Learning and Leadership for Our Nation's Teachers*. <https://digitalpromise.dspacedirect.org/items/65a7d0ed-66b1-4d5b-ac51-6bcf25285dd3>

Examples of state leadership:

South Carolina: The South Carolina SEA developed a resource for teachers, *First Steps: A Teacher's Guide to Competency Implementation*, to support educators across the state in learning about competency-based instruction.

Utah: Utah's *Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Program* provides local education agencies an opportunity to offer a variety of personalized learning programs to improve educational outcomes and offers grant funding to support the work. There are three phases of grant funding that districts can apply for, including a planning phase and an implementation phase. The application must describe the "proposed program's mission, theory of change, and the program's intended goals and outcomes." Expansion grants may be awarded following receipt of a planning and an implementation grant.⁷

Colorado: Colorado has a *Blended Learning Initiative*, which supports districts and schools that are implementing learning models that utilize flexible learning arrangements that do not fit neatly within current seat time regulations. Those schools and districts are eligible for a two-year waiver from the guidance. In addition, the Blended Learning Initiative is *exploring regulatory* changes in the fall of 2023 that would move away from physical seat time paradigms to "instructional time" concepts that will qualify more flexible learning designs for satisfying the funding eligibility requirements.

Indiana: Building on work to blur the lines between PK-12, higher education and the workforce, the Indiana Department of Education has launched a comprehensive effort to *rethink the high school experience*.

Specifically, this work is focused on three key areas: diploma requirements (making

IMAGINE A SCHOOL with a set of educators who serve as a mixed-grade team for fourth, fifth and sixth grades. There are lead teachers, certified educators, instructional assistants and community educators who work together dynamically to meet students' needs. Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College has launched a new initiative, *The Next Education Workforce*, which seeks to create those environments by reshaping the way teachers are prepared and work in schools. The initiative aims to "provide all students with deeper and personalized learning by building teams of educators with distributed expertise and empower educators by developing better ways to enter the professions, specialize and advance." The goal is to make schools work better for both learners and educators. To achieve that goal, the Next Education Workforce initiative seeks to prepare educators to thrive in team-based models and to work with schools to create and sustain those models. State leaders in Colorado and school system leaders in 16 states are starting to work with The Next Education Workforce initiative to think about how states can support newly configured staffing strategies for interested districts and schools.⁶

⁶ Next Education Workforce. *Redesigning education for learners and educators*. Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. Arizona State University. Retrieved June 26, 2023, from <https://workforce.education.asu.edu/>

high school diploma requirements more flexible and relevant to students, employers and communities); high-quality work-based learning (improving access to and the number of students earning high-quality work-based learning opportunities); and credentials of value (increasing access to and the number of students earning high-value postsecondary credentials before high school graduation).

Indiana Department of Education continues to engage national experts, state agency partners, educators, employers, students and parents to gather feedback and ultimately ensure every student has access to rigorous coursework that is individualized and purposeful for their unique path.

⁷ ExcelinEd. (2022).

4

Accelerate and support scaling of new education models.

Why is this a priority?

The Summit illuminated many examples of changing how students experience learning. With urgency and momentum for change, state leaders can support and help accelerate effective practices to scale these efforts. As local changes in practice take hold, understanding the process that school and district leaders went through can help inform state-level support. As state leaders better understand what fostered innovative practices, they can build upon that and refine their support, creating more opportunities for others to innovate within their own contexts. State leaders can also share success stories with other districts and ensure district leaders have an opportunity to learn from one another.

Collecting evidence and communicating about it effectively is also a critical part of scaling. Many families experienced more traditional models of schooling and understand the current system. While many may be open to new approaches, it may take time for families to understand what changes are being made and why, and what the impact is on their children. The SEA has a responsibility to help ensure all students have access to high-quality educational opportunities and will need evidence to show that. Establishing a culture of honesty and transparency at the state level, and supporting that at the district level as well, will help the state scale this work and lead to sustainability going forward.

“What is the definition of success? ... [The] Profile of a Graduate, we think, from what we’ve seen across the country, expands the definition of success, connects the dots to looking at communitywide indicators. ... What we have not seen is how it’s operationalized within the school system. ... The best pieces we’ve seen take that profile, create those competencies, then it’s a deliberate co-creation done with teachers and principals in integrating those into the fabric of the curricular structure and pedagogical practice. So the question is: What does that competency look like at Tuesday at 9 o’clock in history class? It is there, that level of granularity is the kind of stuff we see at the ground level that connects to the more macro level of aligned systems. Again this idea of co-creation between the state, maybe a district and teachers and classrooms in schools and having that kind of strategic agility where you see the bottom and the top and that’s where the push happens. All that to say, very often you see lots of gaps in implementation capacity within schools and districts. I think as states, you have the opportunity of building capacity in your shop to support those superintendents and principals in making real what is really pushing out in Profiles of a Graduate.”

—Jean-Claude Brizard, President and CEO, Digital Promise

What state chiefs can do:

- **Facilitate cross-district learning by lifting up models of work.** Share examples on the state’s website or in other communications with district leaders.
- **Provide opportunities for district leaders interested in pursuing innovative strategies to come together** in learning communities. Facilitate opportunities for cross-state observation in schools.
- **Support districts in creating feedback loops with families** to engage them in the change process.
- **Create resources that tell the story of local innovation**, how change transpired and what the barriers and successes were, and work with district leaders and other stakeholders to share those resources across the state.
- **Work with stakeholders to identify indicators of success**, for both the short and long term. As schools transition to new learning models, identify state-level indicators that look across school districts to help ensure all students continue to receive equal opportunities.
- **Make available examples of indicators of student and educator engagement**, through surveys or similar mechanisms, for districts to track progress. Tracking engagement may be an early indicator that these efforts are moving in the right direction.
- **Work with district leaders to identify longer-term measures of impact on student outcomes** and begin to support the collection of baseline data now. Share evidence of progress and impact regularly.
- **Identify partners in the state that are tracking data** pre-kindergarten through the workforce and explore opportunities to both track measures and draw on the data they already collect.

“One of the things that I have found in my classroom as a way of expanding out the opportunities for my students is to bring in more big-hearted adults beyond just the teaching force. ... During the pandemic, we turned our classrooms into boundless spaces through Zoom and other tools. We brought in people and we also amplified our students’ work out into the world. ... In Salt Lake City, we have a group called the Utah Center for Legal Inclusion. ... They offered to volunteer in my classroom and they continue to [do so] to this day. On Fridays for an hour, I have about 20-30 lawyers who Zoom into my classroom and tutor my students on argumentative writing. They give them feedback on their work. ... [O]ne of my students made this comment: ‘Captain, it’s like our classroom is an infinite place.’ ”

—John Arthur,
2021 Utah Teacher of the Year,
Sixth grade teacher at Meadowlark Elementary,
Salt Lake City



Examples of state leadership:

Kentucky: Kentucky has established the [Innovation Learning Network](#) (KY ILN), described as “a partnership between local school districts and the Kentucky Department of Education, providing a shared professional learning space for education leaders dedicated to creating vibrant learning experiences, accelerating innovation, and building a bold new future with communities.” The network provides opportunities for district leaders to convene, share their work and learn from others. Participants in the KY ILN also have access to competitive grant funding to travel to see model sites, ongoing technical assistance and partnerships with national thought leaders, vendors and resources, among other supports. More about this program is available in this article on *Kentucky Teacher: Innovative Teacher Cohort brings deeper learning to life across Kentucky*.

Arkansas: The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) works with schools that want to become [Schools of Innovation](#), which have the flexibility to explore new and creative alternatives to existing instructional and administrative practices. ADE creates a learning community, bringing together diverse stakeholders to plan, implement and reflect to ensure academic success and learning for all. ADE funds and works closely with the Office of Innovation for Education, located at the University of Arkansas, to support innovation throughout the state using an innovation framework, and it provides educators with a [hub of tools](#) to help school leaders rethink schooling.

Michigan: The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) partnered with Michigan State University to [study](#) the implementation of competency-based education programs in seven school districts. Their research includes surveys from educators and students, observation and data analysis. The seven school districts received funding from MDE through a competitive grant process intended to support the use of competency-based learning in classrooms, and the research effort is intended to “help educators and policymakers learn more quickly how education reforms are working, as well as why and for which students and teachers.”

“As you craft these solutions and figure out what’s right for individual communities, I think it’s important to not just deliver from on high ‘the’ solution, if you will. Instead, what processes of change show is that it is far more important to start with leaning into what is not good about the current situation. Understand the struggle, what we call the push of the current situation. What’s causing people to say, ‘This is not working for us’? Then we can start to design the pull of new solutions to really help people lift out of that. Simultaneously realizing that anxieties about that new and habits of the present are going to hold people back. The change is only really going to come when the push and the pull overwhelm those anxieties and habits. ... You need to innovate with the community, not to the community.”

—Michael Horn, co-founder,
Clayton Christensen Institute
for Disruptive Innovation

CONCLUSION

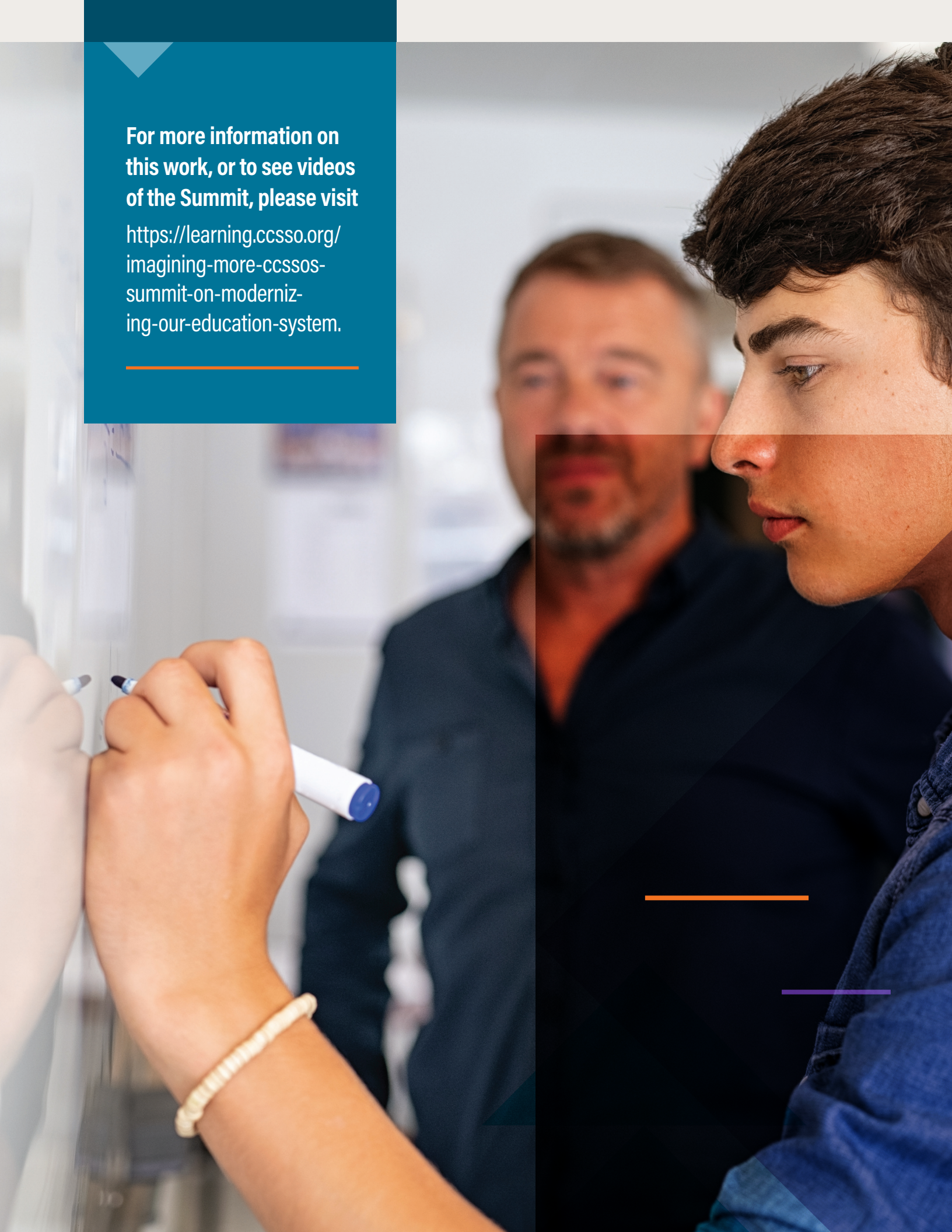
CCSSO's Summit elevated critical issues and opportunities in rethinking how students experience learning. Great work is happening across the nation to release old ways of thinking and create new learning environments, and there is much to be learned from that. The time is now to accelerate and scale what is working and innovate where more can be done. Systemic change takes resources, partnership and sustained commitment, but state leaders and their partners are poised to take on the challenge of imagining more to modernize the education system for the benefit of all students.

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“We’ve been talking and talking and talking about this [for years] and the time is now. I really do feel the time is now, the urgency is here, people are understanding and yet I have to agree ... it will not go anywhere if we can’t validate that it is working for our kids. It might be a test, it might not, but we have to figure out a way to really get that right to gain the confidence of our partners, to gain the confidence of our parents, and most importantly to make sure we are educating our children every day. They are counting on us now more than ever.”

—Margie Vandeven,
Commissioner of Education,
Missouri, and President-Elect,
CCSSO Board of Directors



**For more information on
this work, or to see videos
of the Summit, please visit**

[https://learning.ccsso.org/
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