

# Which States Are Innovative In Education: A New Report Card

The report card aims to highlight the sorts of innovations in education that lead to better schools

By Amanda Paulson

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR  
If states truly want to improve their education systems, they need to do away with the rules, regulations, and bureaucracies that stymie innovation.

That's one message from a new report that measures states on how well they foster education innovation, grading them in areas ranging from finance and school management to how well they hire effective teachers and remove ineffective ones.

Ultimately, say the report's authors, they hope not to prescribe new fads or "silver bullet" solutions, but to highlight the sorts of innovations that are leading schools where they need to go.

"A lot of the states have tried some things, but they haven't tried all the things we argue would be useful to creating a more innovative environment for success," says John Podesta, president and CEO of the Center for American Progress, one of the report's authors. "States have a lot to learn from each other."

The report, "Leaders and Laggards," has an unusual consortium of authors: the liberal Center for American Progress, Frederick Hess of the conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce - a bipartisan mix that the authors hope highlights just how much agreement can be found despite the fervent political battles that often surround education debate.

The authors, says Hess, AEI's director of education policy studies, disagreed about some details, particularly when it came to areas like school vouchers and tuition tax credits. "But we like to point out that even folks who look at the world from different perspectives can find a substantial amount of middle ground," he says.

He and the other authors agreed on the prime areas that states need to focus on if they want to foster innovative - and successful - education solutions:

"Having good management, which includes practices such as allowing models like charter schools to flourish and giving principals autonomy when it comes to running their schools."

Setting up efficient methods of funding and spending.

Hiring and evaluating good teachers.

Removing ineffective teachers.

Putting in place and using good data systems.

Harnessing technology effectively.

Having a strong pipeline to postsecondary education.

Creating an environment that

supports reform.  
They graded states on all but the last (and most ambiguous) category, with a wide range of results.

Florida, for instance - one of the states with the best results - gets an A for its data systems (it can match individual students' test scores from year to year) and good marks for having a performance-pay system for teachers. But it gets a D on its efforts to ensure students' college and career readiness and an F for its ability to remove ineffective teachers.

Other states performing well in some (though not all) areas include Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, and New York.

States like Nebraska, Hawaii, and Nevada, meanwhile, receive abysmal grades in at least a few areas and don't shine in any.

The report highlights certain innovations that are already bearing fruit, such as early college high schools in which students can earn college credits, and an extended school day and year in charter schools like KIPP.

But the point, emphasizes Hess, isn't to suggest that any of these programs is the right approach for all districts or students.

"We're saying, 'Look, what would it take for states to create the room and opportunity for problem solvers to do better by kids?'" Hess says. "What can states do to get out of the way, and how can they facilitate this in a manner sensitive to outcomes and quality?"

The first "Leaders and Laggards" report, published two years ago, focused on educational effectiveness. This one says "OK, you looked at all this, made some initial improvements; where do you go next?" says Thomas Donohue, president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

He and the other authors hope that the new report will dovetail, at least to an extent, with the ways in which the federal government is trying to spur reform and innovation through its Race to the Top Fund.

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# PA Adult Education Courses Helping Locals Succeed

By Mary Spicer  
THE MEADVILLE TRIBUNE

MEADVILLE, Pa. (AP) - At Crawford County Career and Technical Center, "night school" definitely isn't what it used to be.

While the evening "hobby" classes traditionally offered at the Thurston Road facility formerly known as Crawford County Area Vocational-Technical School are on hiatus this year as the building undergoes a major makeover, adult education designed for workers looking for serious career advancement or even a whole new career is in full swing.

With three decades in the tool-and-die industry under his belt, for example, Gary Roberts was no stranger to layoffs. When the latest round hit, however, enough was enough.

His last day at work fell on a Monday. Tuesday morning, Roberts, 52, started training for a new career.

"I thought I'd try something different," he said during lunch break on his second day as an over-the-road trucking student in an adult course recently introduced by the career and technical center.

Steven Vielanin was also in the market for a career change. After spending most of his working life in the restaurant industry, Vielanin, 40, wanted to get off unemployment. He's now approximately half-way through a rigorous six-week program that keeps him busy with both classroom and hands-on transportation

training Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

About a decade ago, Bill Wantz made a career change from driving his own straight truck the kind with all its axles attached to a single frame to a job in the security industry. Now that his daughter has married and moved away, he's heading back to transportation. But this time, Wantz, now 50, will be running with the big dogs.

Roberts, Vielanin and Wantz are all enrolled in one of CCCTC's newest adult offerings. However, you won't be seeing any big trucks hanging around the Thurston Road facility. Under a contract with CCCTC, teachers, curriculum and equipment are being provided by Transport Tech, a transportation training provider with facilities in Bessemer and Brookville. The company's new Meadville facility is in West Mead Industrial Park on property owned by Chipsco Precision Services.

The first three weeks are officially considered to be classroom time, "but about a third of that is spent in the yard with the equipment, getting down to basics," according to instructor Robert Madison. In addition, students spend a fair amount of time getting industry-required ducks in a row. "These guys have a lot of loops to jump through just because of the nature of what the industry wants from them," Madison explained. Passports, for example, are required to go into Canada, while entering a se-

cure port requires special identification. By the time students are finished with the course, they're literally ready to go.

As the training facility expands, they'll also be ready to do more than maneuver gigantic trucks wherever they need to go.

"For any type of manufacturing that goes on in any area, transportation is important, Rege Schulz Sr., Transport Tech's owner and chief executive officer, explained during a recent interview. "We've only been here for a couple of months, but already we're hearing that employers need things beyond simply holding a commercial driver's license."

Working in conjunction with

the Community College of Allegheny County, CCCTC is also offering courses in welding technology and machining technology. After completion of a year-long comprehensive course, graduates will leave with both state-of-the-art abilities and 18 or 23 credits toward an associate degree from the college. Those two classes and CCCTC's ever-popular nurse aide program are the only adult-education courses being offered during the 2009-10 school year at the Thurston Road facility.

Online courses ranging from introductory to comprehensive are also being offered through CCCTC.



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