Kentucky Policy Environment: Opportunities and Implementation Barriers

Kentucky State Board of Education

October 2026

KnowledgeWorks



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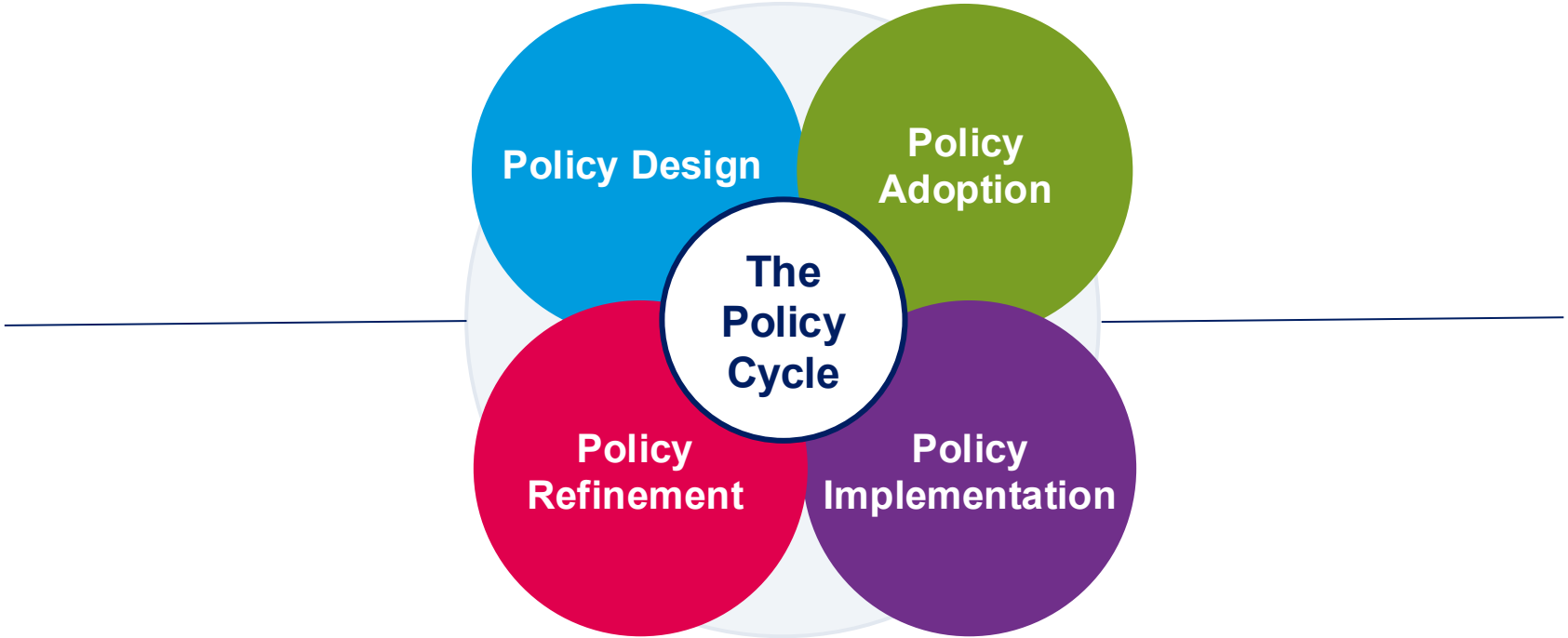
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Policy Change and Opportunity

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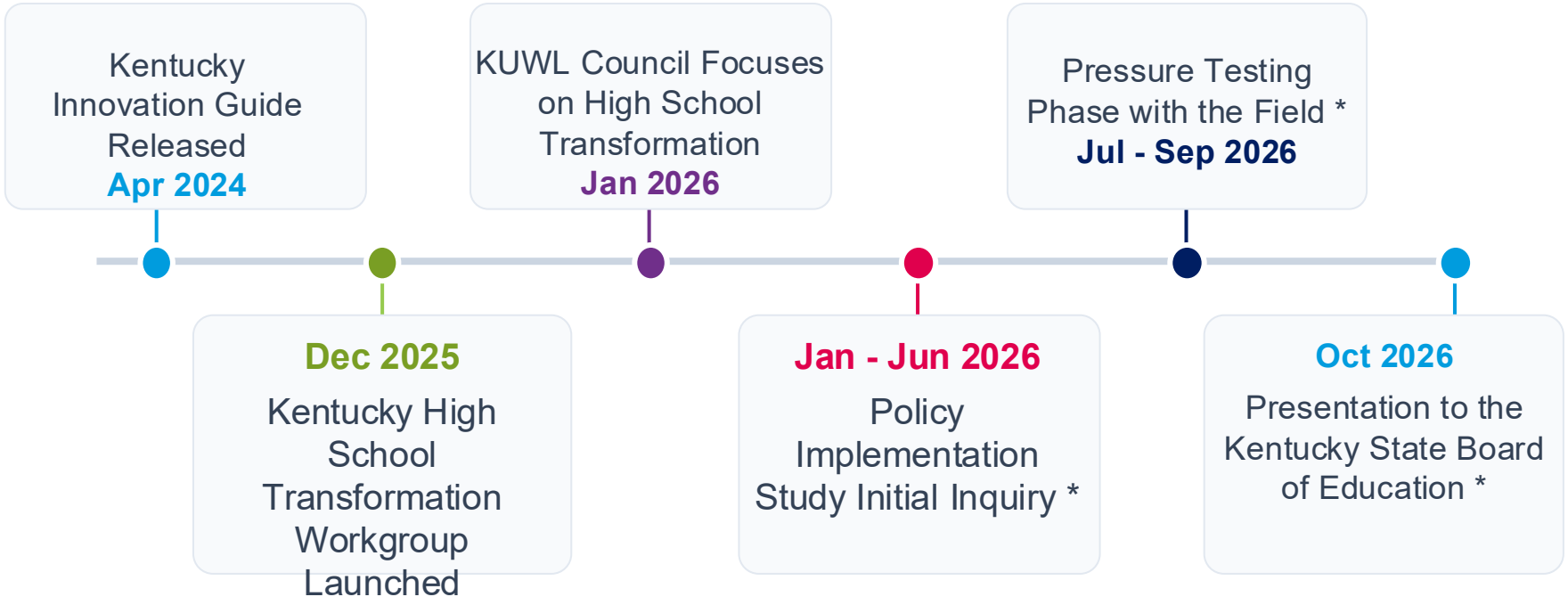
The Policy Cycle



Policy Implementation Inquiry Process

- **Performance-based credit** allows for schools to award credit based on mastery
- **School of innovation policy** allows schools to apply to waive state requirements with justification
- **Local accountability pilots** serve as statewide examples
- **H.B. 257 (2026)** reduces state testing footprint by shifting writing assessment to the local level, provides authority and resources to build local accountability systems

Policy Implementation Timeline



*Resourced through the 2022 Competitive Grants for State Assessment Program

Policy Implementation Study

Initial Inquiry Findings

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Policy Implementation Inquiry Process

- State policy analysis
- District leader focus group and survey
- District deep dive interviews
- Local policy and strategy document reviews
- Pressure testing



Key Themes

1. State's vision and policies for student-centered learning are strong
2. Districts need a coherent implementation system
3. Operational systems have not kept pace with policy
4. Districts seek more coordinated state support
5. Local leadership and community partnership power innovation



Theme 1

State's vision and policies for student-centered learning are strong

Examples:

- Kentucky Board of Education strategic goals justify local innovation
- Local Portrait of a Graduate frameworks aligned to statewide vision
- Strong interest in continuing collaboration with policymakers



Theme 2

Districts need a coherent implementation system

Examples:

- Districts requested implementation planning, technical assistance and leadership coaching
- Practical "how-to" guidance, compliance clarification and implementation examples requested
- Districts sought support operationalizing innovation waivers and competency-based learning



Theme 3

Operational systems have not kept pace with policy

Examples:

- Attendance requirements are a barrier to performance-based crediting and out-of-school learning opportunities
- Innovation waiver application and reporting expectations perceived as burdensome
- Required student information systems cited as incompatible with competency-based grading and flexible scheduling
- Funding for performance-based credit hinders adoption



Theme 4

Districts seek more coordinated state support

Examples:

- Hard to get answers to implementation questions when guidance and support are spread across multiple departments
- Districts want stronger opportunities to inform policy through advisory groups and feedback structures
- Districts want a dedicated state innovation team with collaborative authority to lead cross-functional work across the agency



Theme 5

Local leadership and community partnership power innovation

Examples:

- Leadership coaching emerged as one of the most requested supports; peer learning network opportunities highly valued
- Districts want support on how to engage families and communities
- Districts relied on local advocacy and relationships to sustain innovation, particularly business and community leaders



Six Supports Districts Want Next

- Implementation focused resources
- Leadership development and coaching
- Peer learning opportunities
- Dedicated funding and staffing supports
- Cross-department coordination within the Kentucky Department of Education
- Ongoing district engagement in policy making



Pressure Testing Initial Findings

*** Insights gathered at the September Kentucky Association of School Superintendent's convening and the Regional Learner Network kickoff**

Barriers

- Stakeholder resistance to change
- Lack of knowledge of the flexibilities and how to use them
- Limited capacity (funding, resources, time)
- Sustainability (leadership turnover, political dynamics, resources)

Supports

- Stronger leadership support
- Implementation supports including a coherent process and examples
- Dedicated funding, resources and professional learning
- Sustained and aligned system-wide focus on this work

Next and Final Steps

- Analyze findings from the pressure testing phase with Kentucky Department of Education leadership
- Release comprehensive report end of October 2026