

Districts of Innovation Report – Owensboro Independent

Cohort II - 1st Monitoring Year
2015-16 School Year

Background

The 2015-16 school year was the third year of implementation for the first cohort of Districts of Innovation, and the second year for the second cohort. The Owensboro Independent monitoring visit took place on April 26th and involved site visits to schools and discussions with staff, as well as meetings with the leadership team and designated point of contact. Additional site visits were made in Owensboro during the 2015-16 school year.

A 3-part rubric was developed for the monitoring process. Parts 1 and 2 referred specifically to requirements listed in the regulation and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by each DOI. Part 3 was tailored to the individual innovation plan of each district.

Monitoring was discussed with participating districts during the 2013 DOI retreat and again at the fall 2014 retreat. Additional discussions pertaining to monitoring were held individually between the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), Division of Innovation staff and each DOI leadership team. Districts were asked for input regarding additional measures they felt would provide evidence of the effects of the innovation plan.

Both Cohort I and Cohort II districts were asked to provide updated reports to KDE staff by October 31, 2015 using the 3 rubrics.

Executive Summary

Owensboro Independent has made excellent progress in implementing its DOI plan. The Owensboro Innovation Academy (OIA), aligned with the New Tech system, is completing a successful first year of operation. Students in the initial freshmen class were drawn from Owensboro Independent, Daviess, McLean and Hancock Counties, Owensboro Catholic, as well as Christian school and homeschooled students. The 2016-17 school year will see the addition of a second freshman class plus returning sophomores. The OIA provides pathways in computer science, engineering, bio-health and entrepreneurship.

The district established the Bluegrass Scholars Program which is designed to give students an opportunity to complete a course of study with greater emphasis on global competencies. The program is service oriented and content includes leadership skills as well as core global competencies. The district is developing a competency-based postsecondary pathway program as part of the Bluegrass Scholars Program.

The district continues to move toward a competency-based system and has developed a competency-based diploma. In 2016-17, the district will develop a series of competency-based open, digital badges, and exhibitions for use in the competency-based diploma.

The Early Learning Academy at Estes Elementary is another successful component of the DOI plan. The program is designed to meet the needs of 4 and 5 year-old children who arrive at school unable to access the traditional kindergarten curriculum. The district created a full day preschool experience similar to a Canadian model where 4 year-old preschool children are working in an environment with 5 year-old kindergarten students.

The district has ensured that faculty and staff have training and resources to support the innovative practices being implemented. The district promotes continuous improvement and rewards risk taking. Owensboro is committed to a strong arts program and ensures all students have access to the arts and are assessed on their skill levels.

The district maintains an open line of communication with KDE staff and communicates in a timely manner.

Topic: Incorporation

Pursuant to 701 KAR 5:140, the district has incorporated the innovation plan into the comprehensive district improvement plan and has established a district leadership team.

Topic: Leadership Team

The district reports that all members of the leadership team are involved in the planning and implementation of activities to move the innovation plan forward. The leadership team meets regularly to reflect on outcomes and to plan initiatives to ensure full implementation of the DOI plan.

Topic: Teachers

The district provided a list of certified teachers participating in the innovation plan, and their roles and responsibilities, pursuant to 701 KAR 5:140. The district maintains that all teachers are participating in the innovation plan.

Topic: College and Career Readiness

The district has implemented a number of programs to provide a variety of approaches for students to become college- and career-ready. The emphasis on project-based and competency-based learning and the continuous effort to expand and improve these strategies provides a solid foundation for college- and career-readiness. The OIA is located in a building that also houses an Economic Development Incubator that provides a unique opportunity for student learning extensions. Trust, respect and responsibility are core school values embedded in all aspects of learning within the Owensboro Independent schools.

Topic: Certified and Classified Staff

The documentation of certified and classified staff operating in a non-traditional environment, pursuant to 701 KAR 5:140, was sufficient.

Topic: Extended Learning Opportunities

The district is required to provide documentation of any extended learning opportunities in which students in the school of innovation participate for the purposes of earning or recovering credit, including qualifications of instructors, time spent, student outcomes, and other measurable outcomes specific to the district's innovation plan as described in the initial application or through modification of the original plan.

As the OIA grows, more opportunities for extended learning opportunities will materialize through internships, virtual coursework, apprenticeships, etc.

The district is also working to implement a high school/college campus model they feel will be one of a kind in the state. The vision is to house grades 7-14 in one facility that would offer high school college programs that lead to industry certifications as well as stand-alone college courses. All programs would have a New Tech overlay and utilize proven models of success.

Staff Comments

The district should continue moving forward with its DOI plan and explore ways to expand the opportunities provided by the OIA and the Bluegrass Scholars Program. The district has an opportunity to be a leader in the development of competency-based courses that provide a meaningful assessment of what students know and can do.

Waiver Requests

Waiver of funding structures to allow the creation of a new, stand-alone career technical institute. KRS 157.069(2).

Implementation of this waiver was specific to the creation of the Owensboro Innovation Academy (OIA). The district has provided ongoing information about the development and opening of this school. The Career and Technical Education office within KDE has provided guidance to ensure the design of the school is in keeping with the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 and meets the expectations for career and technical education programs and the goals of college- and career-readiness.

Waiver of traditional certified job certifications to create new job classifications for the New Tech School. KRS 157.390(6).

The district consulted with the Education Professional Standards Board and created a facilitator position that is eligible for additional compensation due to the loss of a planning period during normal instructional time.

Waiver of minimum school term. KRS 158.070.

The district uses this waiver to accommodate students who complete projects outside the school building. As the district develops competencies for courses and the competency-based diploma, this waiver will have increased usage.

Waiver of School-based Decision Making Council Membership for the Innovation Academy. KRS 160.345.

This waiver was approved based on the designation of the Innovation Academy as an A5 school. Governance for OIA includes an advisory council consisting of Central Office Administrators and Business Partners for Year 1. Year 2 includes adding parents and students.

Noteworthy

Owensboro Innovation Academy is providing students with opportunities for flexible scheduling, integrated classes, and creating links to real world applications of learning. Students are engaged in their learning and look forward to coming to school. Parents indicated that their children are more vocal, confident, and interested in learning. The possibilities for expanding the OIA are being explored by the district with a next step the integration of a New Tech School at the middle school level.

Early Learning Academy at Estes is reaching children who have traditionally not been participants in the preschool arena and meeting their academic and social/emotional needs so they are truly ready for kindergarten and beyond. ELL students learn beside their peers and thus are integrated from the beginning of their school careers. The LiteraSci program introduces science at an early age and significantly improves language and literacy skills in addition to teaching science content and science process skills.

The district, in collaboration with Daviess County, is exploring opening a hub school within the new regional hospital to provide students with the opportunity to be exposed to medical professions in a real-world environment. The hospital has enormous needs in health care related staff, as well as Information Technology workers. Students will have a direct pipeline for employment through the hub school.

Appendix

The monitoring team for Owensboro Independent was composed of the following:

- David Cook, Director, Division of Innovation, KDE
- Beth Peterson, Branch Manager, Division of Innovation, KDE
- Leslie Slaughter, Office of Career and Technical Education, KDE
- Kathy Mansfield, Office of Next Generation Learners, KDE

Visits were made to the following schools:

- Owensboro Innovation Academy
- Estes Elementary

Meetings were held with the following:

- Dr. Nick Brake, Superintendent
- Dr. Matthew Constant, CAO
- Monica Rice, CCR Counselor, Bluegrass Scholar coordinator
- Beth Benjamin, Head Teacher, Innovation Academy
- Shari Flagg, Principal, Estes Elementary
- Jeff Johnson, Preschool

Informal conversations occurred with teachers and students during school walk-throughs.

The district will submit their revised innovation plan no later than July 31, 2016 and will sign a new Memorandum of Understanding no later than September 1, 2016.