



# SFIC Phase 1 and 2 Connections

Excellence at Scale: Exploring  
Top Performers  
&  
Connecting the Innovation  
and Excellence in Education  
Working Group with the  
broader SFIC mission



# Our Agenda

- Introductions
  - Who is NCEE? - A brief reminder
- Excellence at Scale
  - The NCEE High Performers
- Phase 1 & Phase 2
  - A Brief Overview
- Connecting to the Recommendations
- Discussion Questions



# The National Center on Education and the Economy

## We believe in...

shared prosperity, robust democracy &  
building lives of purpose and hope.

## We work with partners to...

Discover, Design, & Deliver high performing  
education & workforce development  
systems—with a commitment to young  
people furthest from opportunity.



Grounded in **global benchmarking**



Intensive state partnerships: **policy & practice** alignment



Centers **leadership** development &  
support



Excellence at  
Scale:  
The NCEE High  
Performers



# Our changing world





# Education for Human Flourishing:

- shared prosperity
- security and safety
- lives of purpose and hope



# NCEE High Performers: 3 key pillars



***Excellence***, as measured by academic performance across multiple grades, positive student attitudes toward learning, and well-being



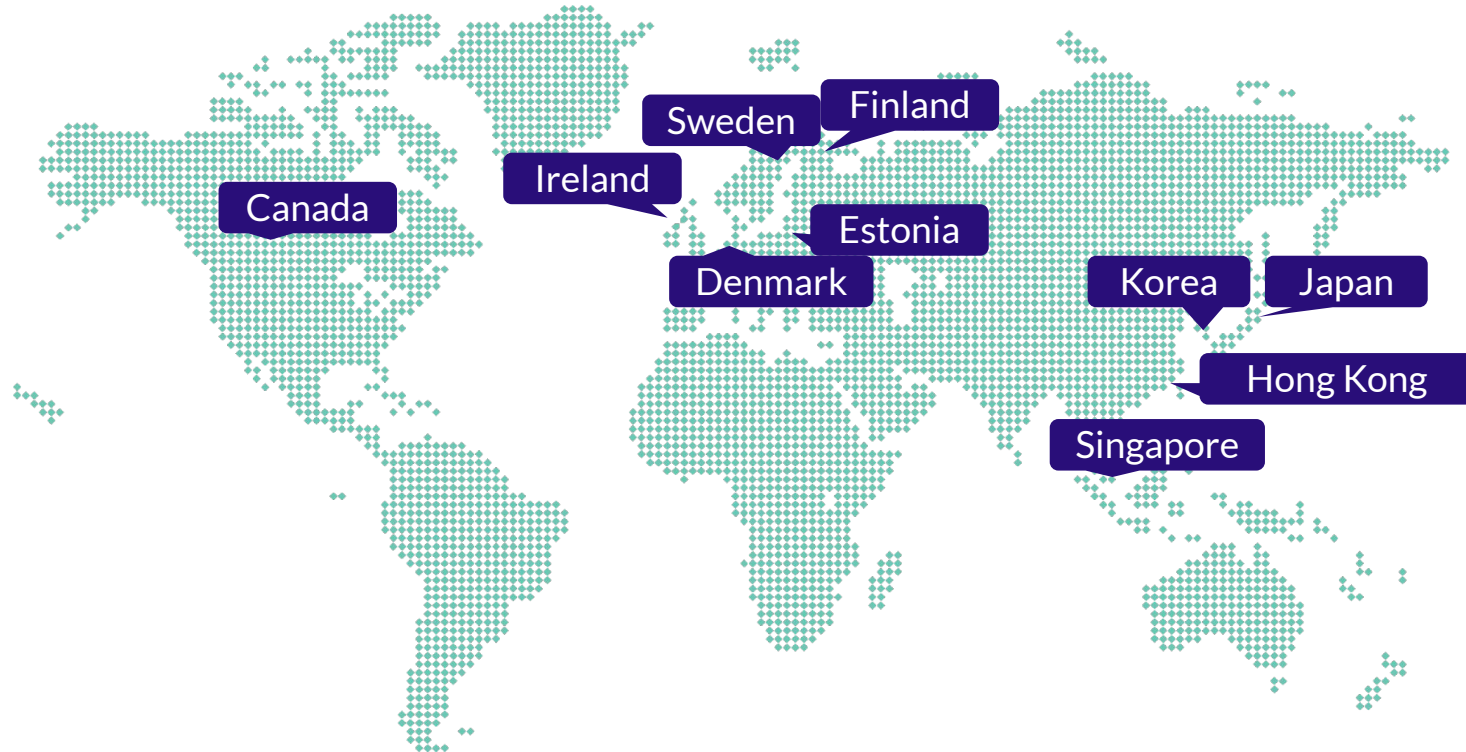
***Equity***, as measured by narrowing achievement gaps between students at different socio-economic levels; relationship to learning and well-being



***Efficiency***, as measured by return on investment in performance; and later life success and earnings


# NCEE 2026 High Performers

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# NCEE High Performers

- Excellence can be engineered: **6 of 10 systems have made our list every time**
    - Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore (since 2009)
    - Estonia (since 2015)
    - Consistent, resilient, adaptable - AT SCALE
  - Ireland, Denmark and Sweden maintained strong performance through the pandemic and are notable for their long-standing support for all students
    - NCEE Ireland Case Study coming soon
    - [ncee.org/top-performing-countries/](https://ncee.org/top-performing-countries/)
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# High performers have different strengths



Badges for

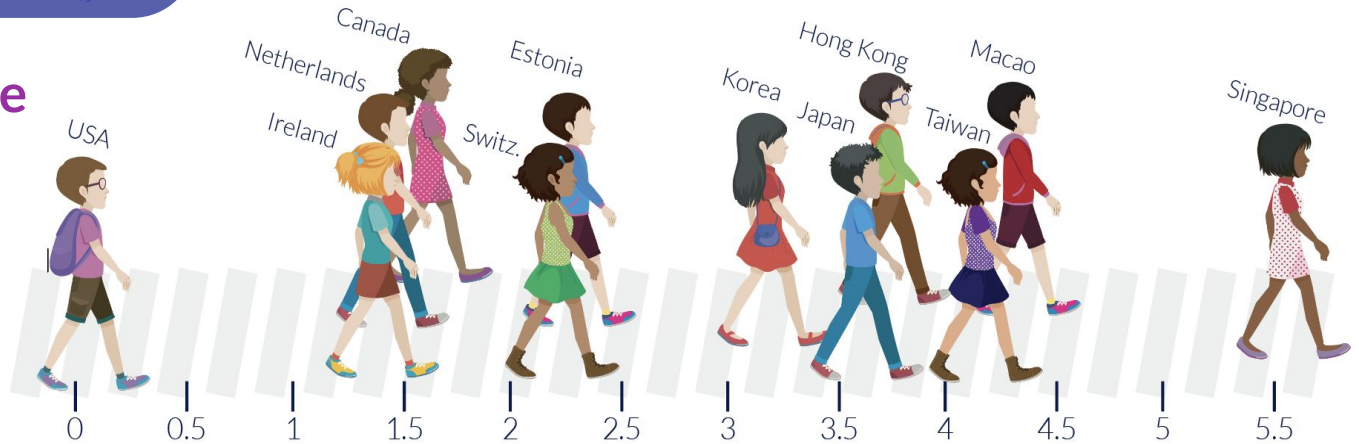
- Excellence
- Equity
- Efficiency



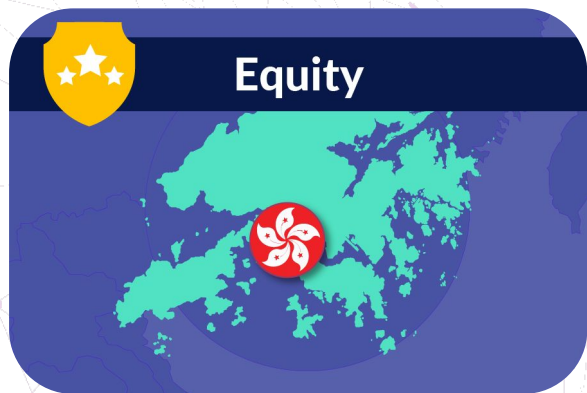
# Badge winner: Excellence



Singapore

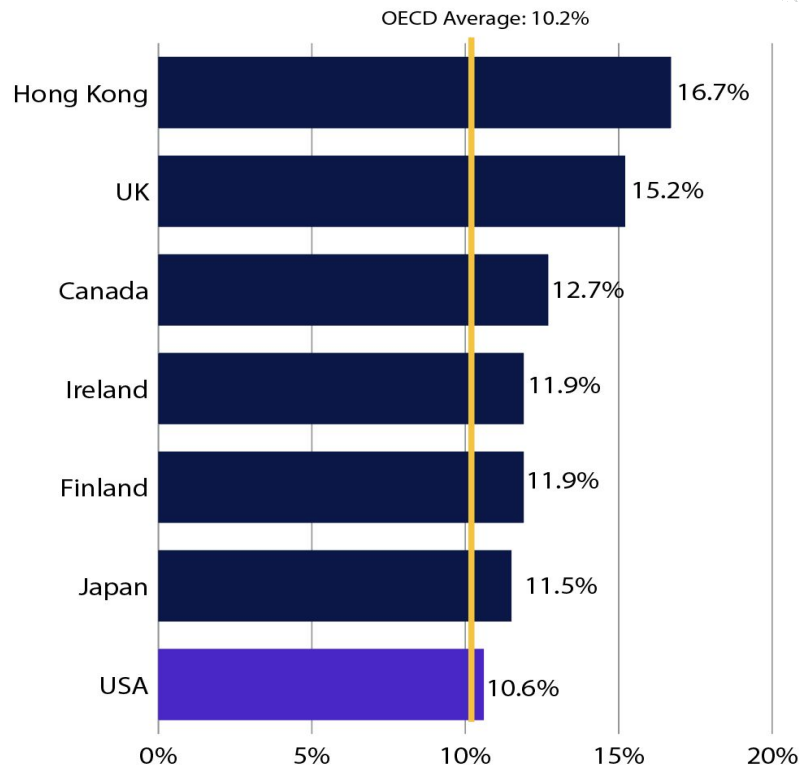


# Badge winner: Equity



Hong Kong

## % of Resilient Students

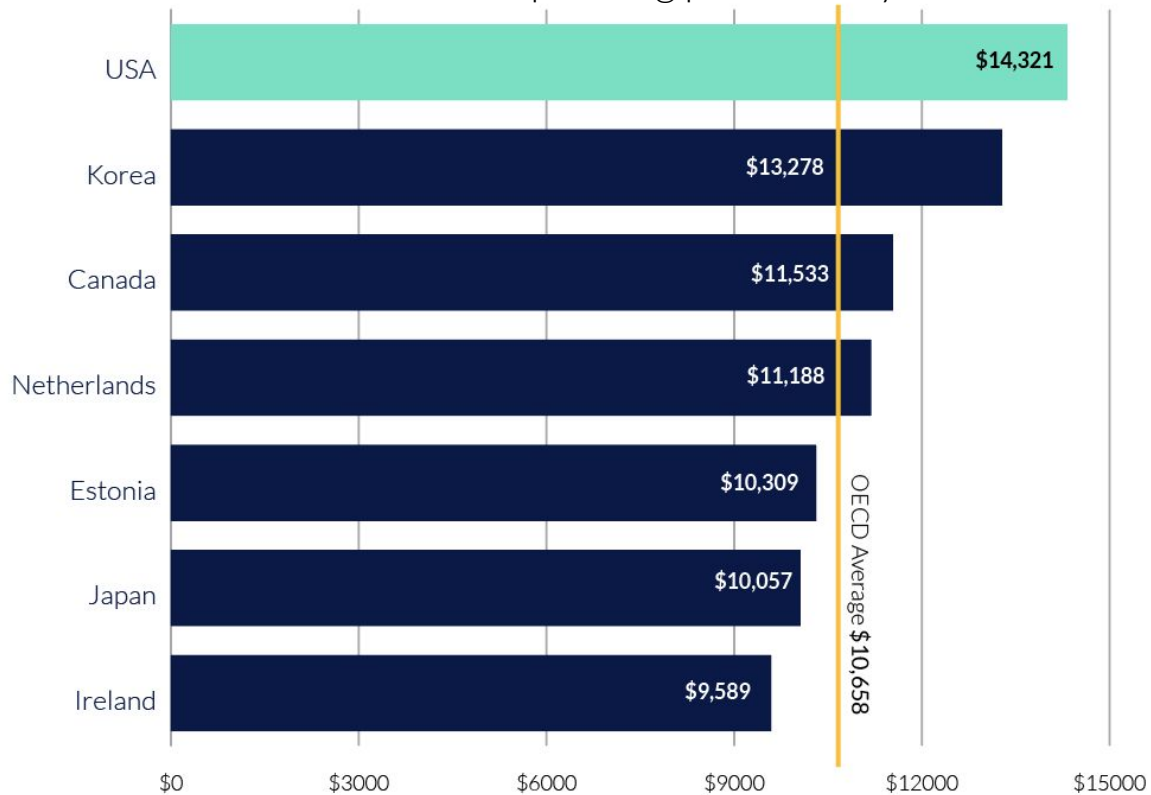


# Badge winner: Efficiency



Ireland

Annual Spending per Primary Student





# Excellence at Scale

## What is common to the high-performing systems?

- Tight connection between **economy and education** - purposeful, strategic, adaptive
- **Designed as systems** – parts fit together and reinforce each other
- **Future-focused** – proactive rather than reactive; look around corners
  - Skills, credentialing, AI. Also: flourishing



# What this means for Montana



<b>What we heard from high performers</b>	<b>Where it already shows up in Montana recommendations</b>	<b>What SFIC may need to consider</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● talent</li><li>● coherence</li><li>● equity by design</li><li>● future orientation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● transforming teaching</li><li>● early learning</li><li>● pathways</li><li>● governance alignment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● formula levers</li><li>● incentives</li><li>● statewide capacity</li><li>● implementation infrastructure</li></ul>



Connecting the  
Innovation and  
Excellence in  
Education  
Working Group  
with the broader  
SFIC mission

Excellence at Scale





# The Statutory Charge

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## The Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group

The IEEWG was tasked with:

- Comparing the education policies of Montana with the policies of high-performing international and domestic educational systems;
- Developing recommendations to adapt the appropriate education policies of high-performing education systems for the public education system in Montana;
- Developing an implementation plan for the recommendations; and
- Publishing its recommendations and implementation plan no later than January 30, 2026.

# How the IEEWG fits with(in) the SFIC

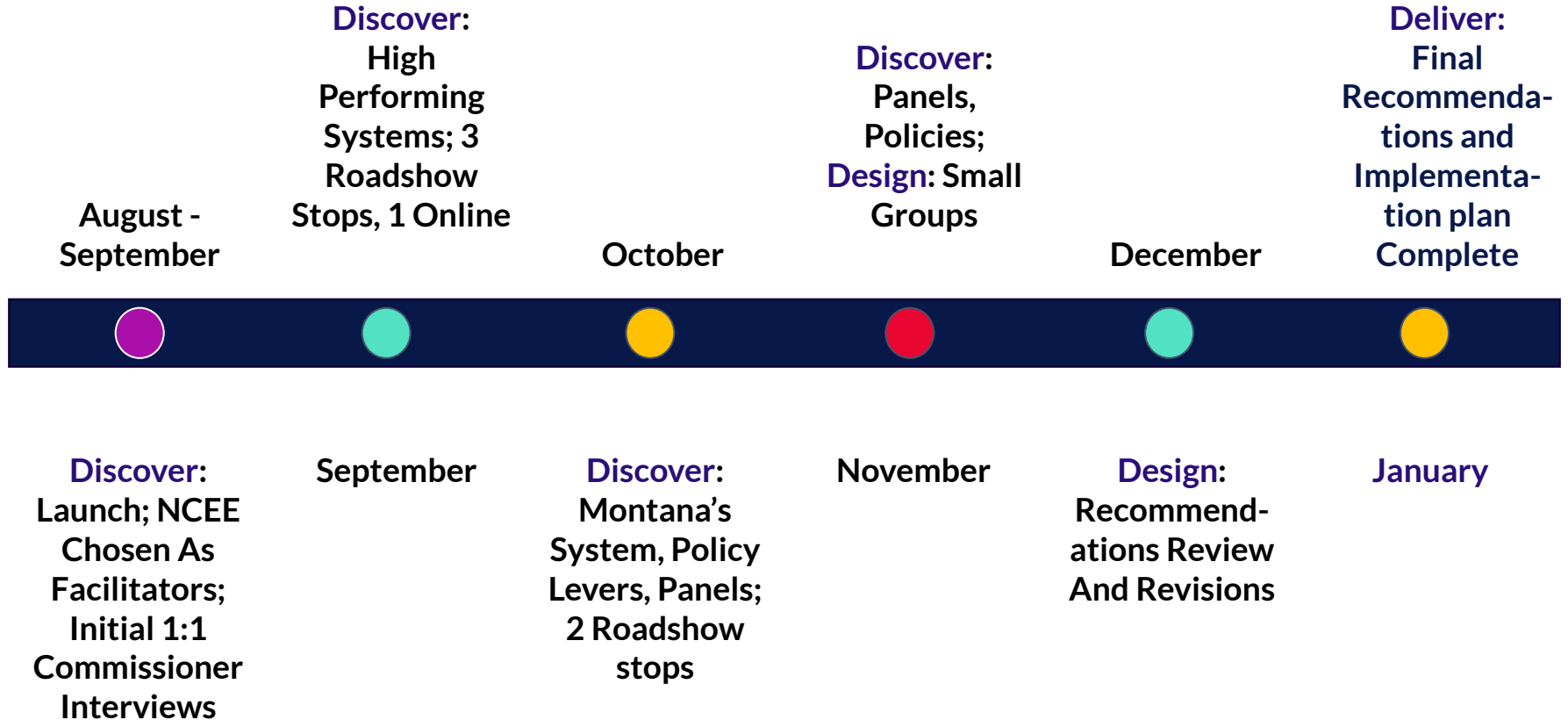
## Phase I: IEEWG

- What do high performing systems look like?
- What can we borrow to look more like them (and improve our results)?
- How should we implement it?
- What are the costs?

## Phase II: Funding Formula / Funding

- How do we fund our education system?

# How did we get here?



# Recommendation Development Process

## Review Policies/Programs

- Collect prominent education policies related to discussed topics
- Review policies alongside leg. staff, agency and Montana independent experts
- Discuss those policies
- Suggest changes

## Resolve policy/program issues

- Validate the policy
- Modify the policy
- Prioritize policy changes

## Prioritize changes

- **Critical** issues were the focus of the recommendations report
- **Important** issues were not included in the report but should not be dismissed
- **Desirable** issues were not included

# Plan design features

## The plan is

- An initial plan to guide the implementation of the recommendations in the report
- Co-created by Commissioners and stakeholders (December 'small groups')
- A time bound approach
- Specific proposed strategies and/or policy levers
- A plan that includes anticipated impacts

## The plan is not

- A reconsideration of the funding formula itself (Phase II)
- A binding, fully developed plan imposed upon the implementers
- An exhaustive compilation of all of the possible strategies



# A note regarding the report

- The report **represents a collaborative effort** among the broad and diverse stakeholder groups represented by our Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group (IEEWG)
- There is **not complete consensus**, given the many policy priorities of the IEEWG, the ambitious nature of Montana's constitutional guarantee, and the breadth of our policy recommendations
- Commissioners agreed that **the report is faithful to the substance of the deliberations**
- All **recommendations warrant further discussion** as the plan continues to evolve
- The report **represents a strong foundation** with significant agreement about the direction Montana's education system must take

# Discussion Questions

Please keep these questions in mind while reviewing the recommendations.



**Which  
recommendations  
should be  
considered as  
factors in the per  
pupil allocations?**



**Which  
recommendations  
require policy –  
not funding –  
considerations  
other committees  
can address?**



**Which  
recommendations  
are best addressed  
via other  
governance?**

# Transforming Teaching

## SFIC In Scope

- Ensure Competitive Compensation
- Expand Support for National Board Certification

## Committee Policy Changes

- Redesign School Staffing Structures

## For future consideration

- Strengthen Recruitment and Preparation Pathways
- Build a System of Real-Time Professional Growth
- Create Career Pathways that Retain Excellent Educators
- Develop a Continuum of Leader Preparation and Support
- Create the Conditions for a Voluntary, Opt-In Early Learning Program

“We must **attract high-quality teachers** – and pay them as the professionals they are.”

“Teacher preparation, mentoring, and meaningful professional development are essential; pass along the best practices that actually work.”

“Young adults no longer want to become teachers because of low salaries and lack of support; that pipeline is drying up.”

# Early Learning

SFIC In Scope

Committee  
Policy  
Changes

For future  
consideration

- Update Funding Formulas to Include Early Childhood Education
- Provide Upfront Funding to Launch Early Targeted Intervention Programs
- Establish A Single Suite of Statewide Universal Screeners
- Continue to Allow Communities to use Community-Based Programs to provide ECE
- Develop clear “policy triggers’ that provide clear “go/no go” decision rules for expansion
- Provide Early Childhood Educators with High-Quality Professional Development and Instructional Materials
- Provide Transportation Reimbursement for Early Childhood Programming Participants
- Create the Conditions for a Voluntary, Opt-In Early Learning Program

“It should be our priority to ensure **all children have access to high-quality early literacy and numeracy programs.**”

“Early intervention works, so **fund Pre-K, K, 1st & 2nd grade**; if kids aren’t reading by the end of 1st grade, they rarely catch up.”

# Pathways to Graduation

## SFIC In Scope

## Committee Policy Changes

- Increase Overall Funding for Middle School Career Exploration.
- Increase the Number of Funded Middle School Career Exploration Experiences.

“Work-based learning experiences – job shadows and internships – let students apply skills, build networks, and evaluate career paths.”

“Provide more opportunities for **flexible accreditation** so schools can create innovative programs aligned to real-world skills.”

# Learner-Centered Design

## Committee Policy Changes

- Resolve And Reconcile Competing Definitions
- Develop a Roadmap for Learner Centered Design

“Truly meet students where they are and take them further; benchmarks and assessments must stay flexible, not fixed by age or seat-time.”

“Individualize education; **don’t standardize everything.** Kids don’t learn at the same rate or in the same way.”

“Break down the four walls of traditional classrooms and **provide multiple experiences for ALL students to learn and grow** – they’ll be more engaged and empowered to take risks.”

# Governance and implementation

## Policy design features

- Harmonize policy language and nomenclature
- Write specific policy 'triggers' into enacting legislation and policy

## Performance management and monitoring design features

- Provide sufficient state capacity to conduct state and local continuous improvement activities
- Clarify processes for resolving reporting challenges that arise from policy changes
- Develop clear performance-based 'on-ramps' and 'off-ramps' for recommendation implementation initiatives
- Provide consistent, clear, public quality of opportunity checks
- Identify and support "innovation laboratories"

## Governance design features

- Seek coherent state governance
- Reconsider existing governance - don't just add new governance
- Design new systems structures to coherently govern implementation

"Local control and decision-making for small and rural districts—communities know what is best for their students."

"We need to revamp the entire system; the traditional model isn't meeting 21st-century needs."

# Governance and implementation (cont'd)

## Infrastructure Policy Design Features

- Consider how any expansion in transportation services is funded and for whom
- Develop solutions for providing necessary infrastructure upgrades
- Design new infrastructure for the needs of the future, not the past

## Educational program design features

- Ensure statewide information about and access to high quality instructional materials
- Pursue statewide efforts to improve student mental health and school culture
- Consider the impact of the school year on Montana's education system

## Public engagement design features

- Provide consistent avenues for consistent public engagement

“Create a **statewide process that values teacher and parent input** when designing curriculum and assessments—voice matters.”

Alignment:

## Defined Horizontally and Vertically



### → Horizontal alignment

- ◆ State agencies are linked through an enduring vision, aligned goals, and complementary plans
  - Engage a **broad array of stakeholders across government, advocacy, business, community, and civil society sectors**
  - Co-create **policy principles, recommendations, and implementation plans to foster co-ownership**

### → Vertical alignment creates the infrastructure needed to drive change

- ◆ Connect the **schoolhouse to statehouse and back.**
  - **Continuously engage stakeholders to align actions**
  - **Develop leadership and technical capacity to implement**
  - **Build performance management systems to sustain feedback loops**





# Options for Maintaining Horizontal & Vertical Alignment

## State Legislative Commissions



Nevada, Maryland,  
Montana, Pennsylvania

- + Have legitimacy, resourcing, launch new management structures
- “Commission fatigue”; concern a report will “die on a shelf”

## High Leverage Initiatives for Long-Life Learning



Utah, Indiana,  
Michigan, Vermont

- + Early, highly visible policy wins to incentivize long-term alignment plays
- Risk silo-ing w/o follow-through, resourcing

## Coalitions & Leadership Capacity Building



Kentucky,  
Michigan, Mississippi,  
Pennsylvania

- + Creates a groundswell of support from the field before / while creating the enabling policy vision
- May be misperceived as less sustainable or legitimate

# Maryland

## Governance

The Commission on  
Innovation and  
Excellence in Education

## Strategy

Develop Blueprint for  
Maryland's Future  
Accountability &  
Implementation Board  
(AIB)

The Kirwan Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education was a multi-year initiative to research and develop major funding and policy reforms to improve the quality of Maryland's public education system to benefit each of the nearly 1 million students, which will in turn benefit the State's economy and quality of life for all Marylanders.

Specific policies implemented as a result:

- **Developed the Accountability and Implementation Board**, an independent unit of State government created to ensure that the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is implemented as intended.
- Developed a **10 year implementation plan** aligned across 5 pillars, with clear related outcomes and measures.



# Maryland: Open Questions and Tradeoffs



How can Maryland sustain a 10 year effort to implement a plan written in 2022 across multiple federal and state electoral landscapes with different economic and social contexts?



How can AIB maintain legitimacy and coordinate across many statewide agencies in an environment where local and regional contexts require differentiated strategies and tactics?



# Nevada

## Governance

The Commission on  
Innovation and  
Excellence in Education

## Strategy

Use the Commission's  
membership  
organizations to foster  
shared understanding  
and co-ownership in the  
field

The Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education has been charged with developing a long-term vision and plan to vault the state to world-class performance.

Specific policies implemented in the past year (2024-2025) include:

- Co-designed **roadmap and implementation plan** that: advances learner-center, future-ready learning; cultivates high-capacity educators; and bolsters work-based learning.
- **Invest in professional learning networks for educators:** Networks of teacher prep institutions working to align offerings; \$1.9 million in funding restored for aligned continuum of professional learning
- **Expanded career-connected learning:** Improved career counseling ratio, improved rural access to career counselors, mechanisms for stronger alignment b/t industry needs and CTE pathways.
- **Redesigning accountability:** Ongoing alignment between school performance and district performance frameworks; alignment on wider set of metrics to measure for school, student, and system success; working over the next year to build a dashboard.



# Nevada: Open Questions and Tradeoffs



How does NV connect the intent of a future-focused Innovation Commission (operating on a 5-10-year time horizon) to communities focused on the here and now?



How does this work demonstrate the potential for Commissions to achieve impact in partnership with the field? How does NV mitigate against “Commission fatigue” by demonstrating progress with educators and communities?



How can visions and policies sustain senior leadership transitions (e.g., Governor, state chief, board chair, etc.)? How can NV enlist new leaders in seeing our work as potential for legacy building?





# Pennsylvania

## Governance:

State Commission on  
Education and Economic  
Competitiveness;

## Strategy:

Leverage national partners  
and local intermediaries to  
knit Commission's policy  
together with grassroots  
advocacy campaign,  
leadership capacity  
building, and WBL coalition  
into a cohesive strategy  
that amplifies impact

Taken together, these strategies promote grassroots and grassroots solutions to improving the teacher pipeline, fostering stronger lifelong learning pathways, and joining forces to ensure all young people through.

## Public Will & Practice Changes

PANeedsTeaches Coalition, with 100s of members and reaching 1000s across sectors

Changes in practice captured in Solutions Playbook - with new ways to engage youth

## State Policy Shifts

New student teachers stipends, with \$30M FY26

New teacher Apprenticeship funding from Department of Labor (\$7M)

New scholarships for aspiring teachers

New legislation requiring data collection on teacher pipeline





# Pennsylvania: Open Questions and Tradeoffs




How can PA continue to ensure the new state policies for teacher recruitment sheltered and sustained? How can PA continue to center the educator pipeline as the driver of workforce development?



How can coalitions continue to build public will and engagement to create the enabling conditions for teacher retention? What are the roles of different stakeholders– and how can they best be engaged to build ownership?



How does PA continue to connect the dots between state policy and districts to ensure vertical alignment and a virtuous cycle of ongoing improvement for both?



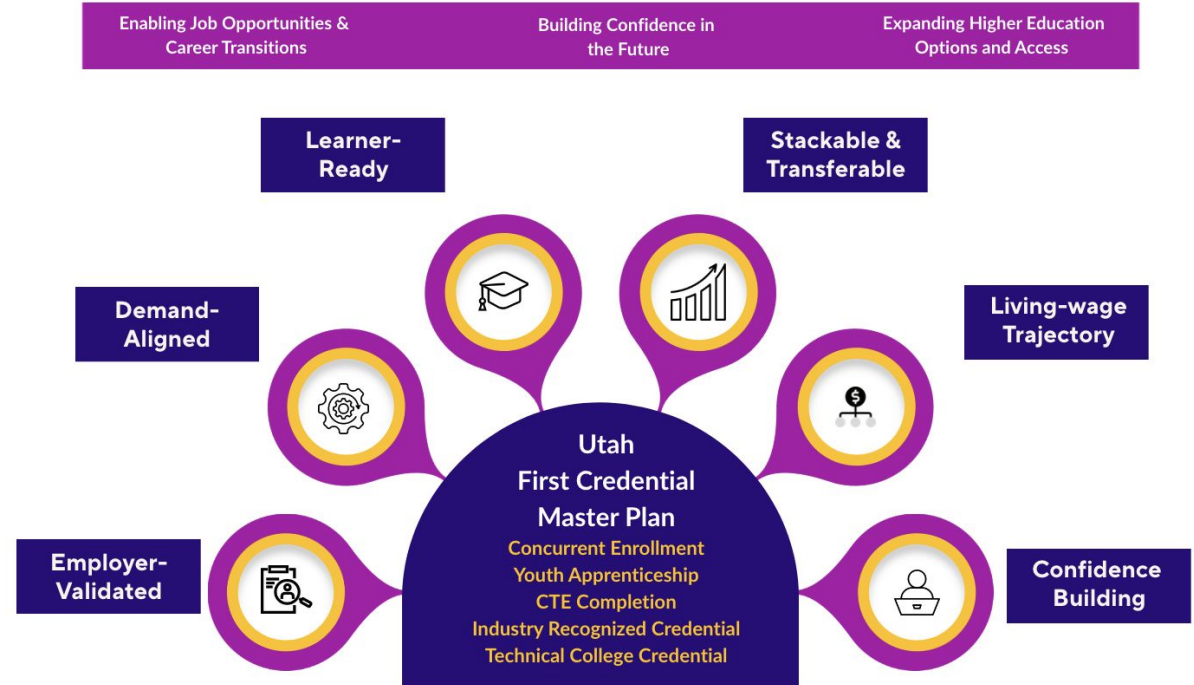
# Utah

Governance:  
First Credential  
Master Plan  
Implementation Work  
Group

Strategy:  
Use the  
Implementation Work  
Group to launch and  
manage purpose-built  
implementation teams



## First Credential Ecosystem





# Utah: Open Questions and Tradeoffs



What can UT learn from this redesign project that can be cross-applied to other change initiatives to positively impact its P20 landscape?



How can UT ensure that narrowly tailored implementation of specific goals coheres with related P20 ecosystem actors?



How can UT continue to leverage the impact of one initiative to **incentivize longer-term changes to the entire P20 system?**





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