

# Innovation During COVID-19



## Framing the Issue

The 2020–21 school year is unlike any other school year in recent memory. The transition in spring 2020 to virtual instruction presented education systems with critical challenges. One of the most significant challenges has been how to ensure continuity of learning for *all* students, especially for students experiencing disproportionate impacts from school closures—students from low-income families, students with disabilities, English learners, and students in rural communities. In addition to education leaders addressing the immediate needs related to coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), they faced the daunting challenge of developing plans to reopen schools for the 2020–21 school year. This time with COVID-19 is difficult, but it can also be an innovative time. The COVID-19 disruption presented an opportunity for education systems to restructure their education models in ways that have potential to address historic academic and opportunity gaps, especially for the aforementioned historically underserved student populations. The Innovation Framework, adapted from William G. Tierney and Michael Lanford’s *Cultivating Strategic Innovation in Higher Education* (2016) provides a model for fundamentally transforming the ways education systems operate.



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## Key Takeaways

- Disruptive change requires creativity. This is the time for new solutions.
- Implementation, actually putting change into practice, is essential.
- Trust is another major factor in innovation, alongside time and efficiency. If team members don’t trust each other, they will be more hesitant to implement change.
- Other dimensions of innovation include autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Each person must be able to act and want to act.
- Diversity is also critical. The more points of view and backgrounds at the table, the richer and more complete the innovations will become.



## Exemplar

**Illinois Competency-Based Learning.** The Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act was signed into law July 2016. Section 20 of the act created the Competency-Based High School Graduation Requirements Pilot Program. Currently, 45 Illinois districts are participating in the pilot.

The competency-based model removes the constraints of seat time and allows for student-driven learning both inside and outside the classroom. The model allows for earning credit toward graduation requirements in ways other than traditional coursework. The innovative approach to seat time makes this model a promising avenue for education during COVID-19.

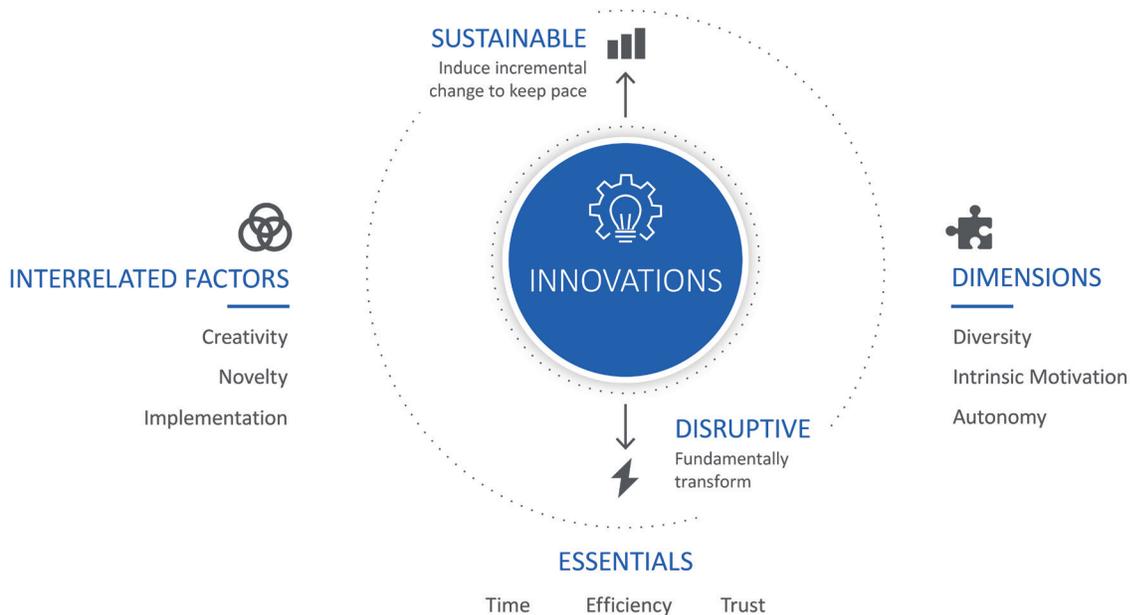
Although all but one state have at least some flexibility for competency-based education, only 17 states have comprehensive policy alignment or an active state role to build educator capacity in local school systems for competency-based education.



## Resources

- **AIR Innovation Hub** (<https://innovationhub.air.org/>) This website hosts communities and resources for addressing the latest educational challenges, including COVID-19. Education leaders can find innovative ideas to share with their colleagues.
- **CCSSO Innovation in Action: State Pathways for Advancing Student-Centered Learning** (<https://ccsso.org/resource-library/innovation-action-state-pathways-advancing-student-centered-learning>) This paper shares how states have implemented the Innovation Lab Network Policy & Implementation Logic Model to promote learning.
- Tierney, W. G., & Lanford, M. (2016). *Cultivating strategic innovation in higher education*. TIAA Institute. ([https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2017-02/cultivating\\_strategic\\_innovation\\_in\\_higher\\_ed.pdf](https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2017-02/cultivating_strategic_innovation_in_higher_ed.pdf)) This critical paper discusses the elements that lead to effective innovation. AIR has organized the provided framework in the below graphic.

## The Innovation Framework



Citation for Framework: Tierney, W. G., & Lanford, M. (2016). *Cultivating strategic innovation in higher education*. TIAA Institute. [https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2017-02/cultivating\\_strategic\\_innovation\\_in\\_higher\\_ed.pdf](https://www.tiaainstitute.org/sites/default/files/presentations/2017-02/cultivating_strategic_innovation_in_higher_ed.pdf)

Graphic of Framework: Created by the American Institutes for Research

<https://www.air.org/resource/air-s-covid-19-response-and-resources>



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