Arizona Policy Primer

A Tool for Navigating Policy to Support Student Success

CENTER
FOR THE **FUTURE** OF
ARIZONA

**ARIZONA INSTITUTE
FOR EDUCATION &
THE ECONOMY**
NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

Permission Granted

A Letter from Center for the Future of Arizona and the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy

Permission Granted, brought to you by Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA) and the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy (AIEE) at Northern Arizona University, is designed to help unlock the creative potential already present - and possible - in Arizona's schools. For decades, Arizona has led the nation in adopting forward-thinking policies that create the conditions for innovation across the P–20 learning continuum. From seat-time flexibility to mastery-based graduation pathways like the Grand Canyon Diploma, Arizona's school systems have a unique opportunity to disrupt traditional models of school, reimagine what's possible in education, and transform learning experiences to ensure the success of *every* student. This work reflects what Arizonans consistently express as a shared priority: an education system focused on opportunity, student success, and strengthening Arizona's future.

Consisting of the *Arizona Policy Primer* and the *Arizona Innovation Guide*, *Permission Granted* is not simply a resource - it is a practical guide for action. While many school systems have taken advantage of Arizona's flexible policy environment, others may not realize the latitude they already have to personalize learning, rethink time, or design new models of success. Developed with support from KnowledgeWorks and Arizona leaders across the state, the Primer clarifies what state policy allows, while the Guide illustrates how those flexibilities can be used.

At its core, *Permission Granted* is a tool for Arizona educators committed to producing uncommon outcomes for every child in every community. Outcomes that reflect not only academic achievement, but readiness for post-secondary education, meaningful employment, civic participation, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. Traditional models of schooling were never designed to meet the unique needs of every learner nor to adapt to the pace of change facing today's students and Arizona's workforce. *Permission Granted* equips educators to use policy as a lever to design learning experiences that legacy models were never built to enable.

Finally, *Permission Granted* is not just a permission granter - it is a push. An invitation to create dramatically different learning experiences. Toward personalization. Toward redesigning school around a graduate profile - whether locally developed or the State 48 Graduate Profile. And toward a future of school where every child realizes their full potential and graduates ready for the future of their choosing.

**In short: permission has already been granted.
Let's get to work. Together.**

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Introduction

The Arizona Policy Primer serves as a planning and informational resource for educational leaders, local agency planning teams, and community partners who want to leverage state education policy to support the success of every student.

About the Policy Primer

The Arizona Policy Primer is intended to increase knowledge and awareness of state policy flexibilities that can inform and inspire local strategic planning efforts to create innovative learning experiences that ensure the success of Arizona students. By integrating the concepts in the primer, school systems can use state policy to inform their school-day structure, teacher professional development systems, assessment systems, Instructional Time Models and more. The primer is also designed as a companion to the Arizona Innovation Guide, which includes examples of what is possible for districts using the flexibilities outlined in the primer.

How to Use the Primer

Organized into five different topics, this primer highlights key policies that provide the flexibility needed to promote innovation and ensure education prepares students for their futures. Each topic distills policy details into accessible summaries, interpretations, and strategic implementation considerations. School systems can explore any topic in any order, depending on their needs and priorities. The primer functions as a "policy-at-a-glance" document that prioritizes practical usability but does not cover every potential question that a system might have.

Readers that have additional questions after they review the topics are encouraged to reach out to staff at the Center for the Future of Arizona and the Arizona Institute for Education and the Economy for additional guidance.

Topics include:

1. Assessment and Grading Flexibility
2. Transforming the Instructional Day
3. Instructional Time Model
4. Post-High School Readiness
5. Building Educator Capacity

The Arizona Policy Primer is a roadmap to realizing a vision of education innovation that drives student success in Arizona. Use it to begin reimagining education and lay the foundation for transformative learning experiences in your school system.

Assessment and Grading Flexibility

Arizona administers a statewide assessment and accountability system but gives school systems meaningful flexibility in how they design local assessments, recognize student learning, and award credit. While state tests remain a requirement, school systems can shape local grading and assessment practices to align with their vision for learning, whether they seek to emphasize college readiness, career pathways, and/or demonstrations of mastery.

This topic might be right for you if...

- You want to align local grading and assessment systems with your school system's graduate profile

- You are exploring competency- or mastery-based credit options

- You are looking to balance required state testing with student-centered demonstrations of learning

What is it?

In compliance with federal law, Arizona requires statewide assessments in English Language Arts, mathematics and science as part of the state accountability system:

» **Statewide assessments***: Students in grades three to eight take the Arizona Academic Standards Assessment (AASA) in ELA and Math and the Arizona Science Test (AzSCI) in grades five and eight (and once in high school). At the high-school level, Arizona uses ACT Aspire for grade nine students and the ACT for grade 11 students as part of the state's Menu of Assessments.

» **High school flexibility**: School systems may either administer the state's designated high school assessment (AASA High School/Arizona's Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching) or select an alternative from the State Board's Menu of Assessments (e.g., ACT, SAT), provided it meets State Board approval and accountability criteria. While the Menu of Assessments is provided for in policy, it is not currently available to schools as no other assessments have been approved by the Board.

» **Credit through competency**: Arizona policy allows students to earn academic credit through demonstration of competency rather than seat time. If they so choose, local governing boards determine how credit is awarded, enabling students to show mastery through exams, performance tasks, work-based learning, or other demonstrations of learning.

Together, these policies create a space where state accountability requirements coexist with local discretion in how learning is measured and recognized.

* Note that contracts for AASA, AzSCI and ACT all expire in June 2027 and that the state is in the process of procuring new assessments to be administered for the first time in the spring of 2028

What does it mean?

School systems must continue to administer required state assessments in the specified grades, but they have flexibility in:

» Designing local grading policies that emphasize mastery, progress, or performance rather than time-based metrics

» Awarding credit through competency, allowing students to demonstrate proficiency without completing traditional seat-time requirements

School systems also play a key role in ensuring that local assessment systems reflect community priorities. For example, a school system may use the ACT for accountability while incorporating project-based assessments or portfolios to measure applied skills.

While opting out of state testing is not permitted, local leaders have wide discretion to supplement those assessments with locally relevant measures that better capture student growth and learning.

How can it be used?

To leverage Arizona's assessment and grading flexibilities, school systems can take the following actions:

Align local assessment strategies to the district vision

» **Revisit your graduate profile or portrait:** Identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions your community values most. Use these as anchors for local assessment and grading design.

» **Map current assessments to the profile:** List all major local and classroom assessments. Note where they measure the desired competencies and where there are gaps (e.g., collaboration, critical thinking, applied problem-solving).

» **Define what mastery looks like:** Collaborate with teachers to develop clear statements or rubrics connected to your portrait competencies. Ensure grading and reporting systems reflect progress toward mastery rather than seat time or task completion.

Adopt a balanced assessment system

» **Inventory current assessment practices:** Determine the balance between required state tests (AASA, AzSCI, Menu of Assessments) and local measures (formative, benchmark and performance assessments).

» **Design for purpose:** Clarify the purpose of each assessment, whether it's for accountability, progress monitoring, or demonstration of learning. Eliminate redundant or low-value assessments to reduce testing burden.

» **Integrate performance and portfolio measures:** Work with teachers to create performance tasks, capstones, or student portfolios that complement state testing by capturing applied skills and interdisciplinary learning.

» **Build data literacy:** Train educators and teams to interpret data from both state and local assessments to inform instruction and intervention.

Develop clear grading policies

» **Review current grading practices:** Analyze how current grading policies align or conflict with your goals for mastery and competency.

» **Establish shared grading principles:** Facilitate staff conversations to agree on what grades should represent (e.g., standards-based grading, mastery of competencies, or evidence of growth over time).

» **Redesign policies and communication tools:** Revise report cards, progress reports and family communications to clarify learning expectations and mastery-based criteria. Provide examples and answers to frequently asked questions for teachers, students, and parents.

» **Pilot and reflect:** Test revised grading practices in one grade level or subject area. Collect feedback from students, families, and teachers, then refine before scaling systemwide.

Expand opportunities for competency-based credit

» **Develop competencies in your local context:** Collaboratively determine what it means for a student to demonstrate mastery in each content area. Use state standards and locally-developed rubrics as guides.

» **Identify credit options:** Develop local policies that allow students to earn credit through exams, portfolios, performance tasks, or work-based learning experiences.

» **Pilot a pathway:** Select one course or subject area in which to pilot competency-based credit (e.g., Algebra I, English 9, or career and technical education courses). Ensure students and teachers understand how credit is earned and verified.

» **Build capacity and scale:** Provide training and exemplars for teachers who design and score performance assessments. Gather data on student outcomes to refine and expand.

Key Next Steps

» Form a local assessment task force to map required assessments against local goals.

» Identify opportunities to recognize learning through multiple formats.

» Update board policies to support competency-based credit.

You might need to consult other topics if...

• You want to shift your daily schedule or school calendar to provide more time for authentic assessment experiences and performance tasks (consult Transforming the Instructional Day)

• You want to build staff capacity to calibrate around mastery-based grading and performance assessment practices (consult Building Educator Capacity)

• You want to integrate dual enrollment, work-based learning, or career and technical education experiences into your assessment system (consult Post-High School Readiness)
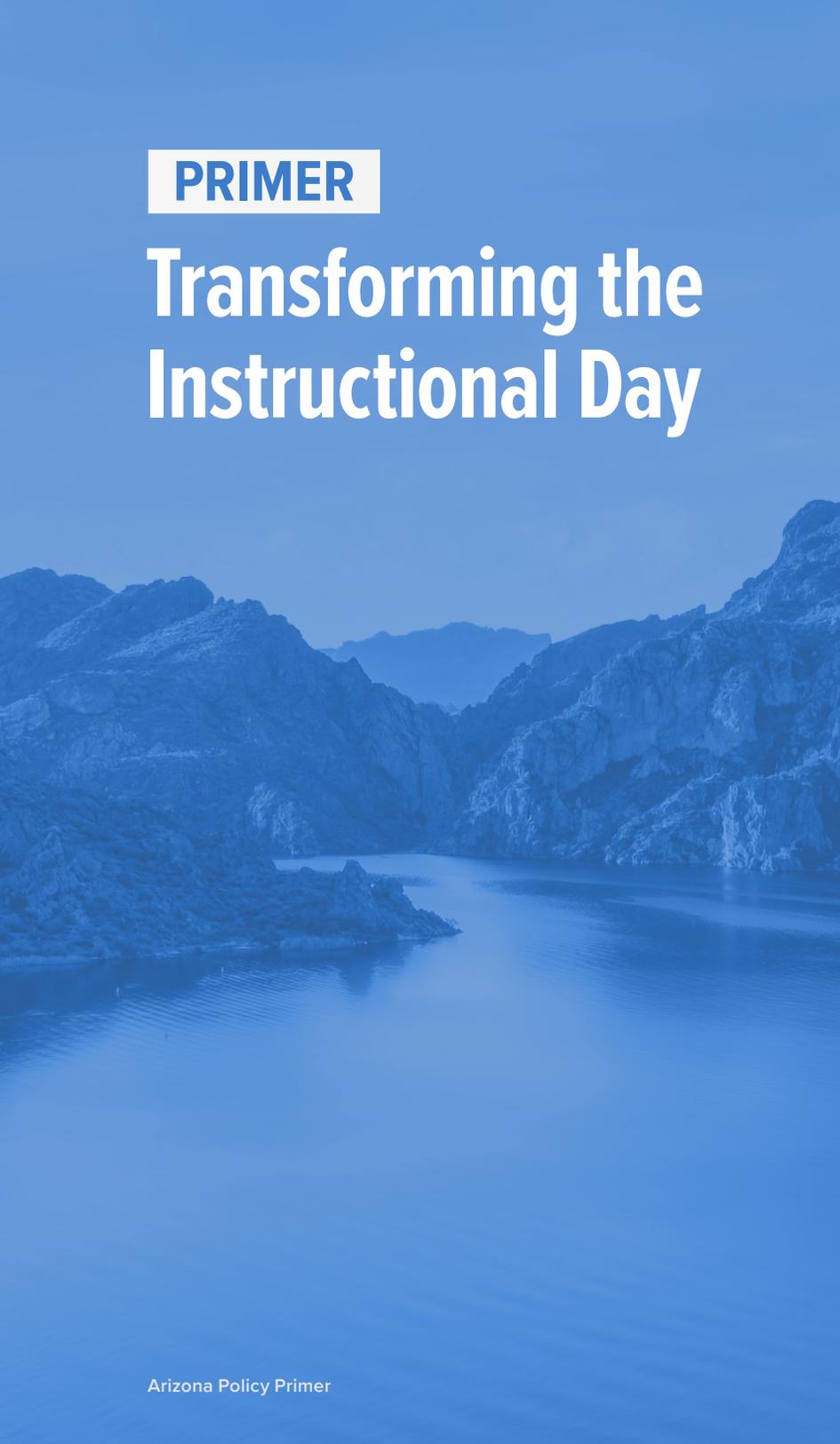
Additional Resources

» Transforming the Instructional Day

» Instructional Time Model

» Post-High School Readiness

» Building Educator Capacity

Policy References

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-741

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-741.02

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-701.01

» AZ Board Menu of Assessment Policy

Transforming the Instructional Day

Arizona policy provides school systems with significant flexibility to design instructional time that reflects their vision for learning. While the state establishes baseline requirements for instructional hours, school systems have broad authority to determine how, when, and where learning occurs. These flexibilities allow school systems to reimagine the traditional school day, creating schedules and structures that promote mastery, interdisciplinary learning, and equitable access to real-world experiences.

This topic might be right for you if...

- You want to rethink the structure of your school day, week, or year

- You are interested in using project-based or mastery-based models that go beyond traditional seat time

- You want to shift your instructional schedule to more effectively meet student needs

What is it?

Arizona defines the minimum required instructional time but gives school systems local control over how those hours are delivered and measured.

» Instructional Time Requirements:
  • Grades One to Three: 712 hours annually
  • Grades Four to Eight: 890 hours annually
  • High School: 720 hours annually

» Flexible Definitions of Instruction: Instructional time can include a wide range of learning experiences (e.g., direct instruction, project-based learning, independent study, and mastery-based learning) delivered across grade levels or modalities.

» Instructional Time Models: District or charter governing boards may adopt an Instructional Time Model (ITM). These models allow schools to reallocate instructional hours among courses, offer evening or weekend classes, and count blended or remote learning toward required time. To take full advantage of ITM flexibility, school systems must develop a plan for course time expectations and how they will track attendance, to be approved by the local governing board. School systems are not required to seek state approval for those procedures, but must maintain all records and documentation related to attendance tracking per their ITM.

» Local governing boards approve the competency requirements and methods students may use to demonstrate learning for credit. Once established, teachers determine when students have demonstrated competency for credit. This enables school systems to align instructional time with learning outcomes rather than seat time alone.

» The state requires school years to include 180 school days, and for additional funding, local systems can opt in to extending the year to 200 or more days. While school year days have state requirements, a regular school day is defined locally and can consist of an equivalent number of minutes spread across varied schedules, under an approved ITM. School systems can even operate a four-day school week (for example, 144 days), provided the governing board approves and each day's minutes are increased so that total annual instructional time still meets statutory requirements.

What does it mean?

School systems must meet annual instructional time minimums but have substantial flexibility in how those hours are structured. Districts can:

» Adopt Instructional Time Models that allow flexible scheduling options, such as varied day lengths, alternative calendars, or blended learning approaches, while still meeting annual instructional time requirements.

» Integrate nontraditional learning (e.g., project-based, independent, or mastery-based learning, etc.) into time counted toward instructional hours.

» Redistribute instructional hours to support extended time in certain subjects or enrichment opportunities for students who need acceleration or support.

» Blend in-person and virtual learning to increase access and flexibility for students. A school can provide remote virtual instruction up to 40% of the time before funding is impacted.

School systems can use these options to create more responsive calendars, integrate community-based learning, and allow students to learn at their own pace while ensuring all statutory requirements are met.

How can it be used?

To transform the instructional day, school systems can take the following actions:

Redesign daily schedules

» **Form a scheduling design team:** Identify a cross-functional team of teachers, school leaders, counselors, families, and students to review current schedules and priorities such as project-based learning, advisory systems, or flexible intervention blocks.

» **Map your current time use:** Analyze how time is currently allocated across subjects, transitions, electives, collaboration, and support blocks. Identify inefficiencies or time gaps that limit mastery-based learning or interdisciplinary work.

» **Establish priorities for learning time:** Ground the redesign in district goals such as longer project blocks, interdisciplinary teaching, advisory periods for reflection, or work-based learning time.

» **Design and pilot new schedule models:** Create sample schedules that expand beyond traditional structures and use the flexibility available under Instructional Time Models. Examples might include:

- Extended project-based or interdisciplinary learning blocks during the school day
- Learning opportunities that take place outside the school building, such as work-based or community-based learning
- Courses or learning sessions offered during nontraditional hours (e.g., evenings, weekends, or intersessions)
- Built-in collaboration time for teachers to design and assess personalized or competency-based learning experiences

» **Include measurement mechanisms:** Clearly define how instructional time will be measured and documented in innovative models, such as personalized, competency-based or project-based systems. Align these measures with the district's Instructional Time Model and ensure compliance with reporting requirements.

» **Consider alternative weekly structures:** Evaluate models such as a four-day school week with equivalent instructional minutes and the fifth day dedicated to teacher planning, community learning, enrichment or intervention.

» **Communicate clearly and gather feedback:** Engage families, staff, and students early. Provide visuals of the new schedules and hold listening sessions to gather input before full implementation.

Embed community-based learning

» **Inventory community partners and learning assets:** Identify local employers, higher education partners, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and cultural institutions that could host student learning or projects.

» **Determine which experiences can count as instructional time:** Use flexible instructional time rules to count supervised work-based learning, dual enrollment, internships, service learning, and field study toward required hours.

» **Build logistics and support systems:** Develop transportation plans, supervision protocols, and communication systems between schools and partners. Assign a coordinator or counselor to oversee placements and track progress.

» **Integrate reflection and assessment:** Embed student reflection routines, mentor check-ins, and performance rubrics to show learning growth. Connect experiences to Portrait of a Graduate competencies where possible.

» **Schedule recurring community learning time:** Design periodic (e.g. weekly, monthly, or semesterly) structures that allow regular release time for internships or community experiences instead of one-time field trips.

Develop flexible pacing systems that treat time as a variable

» **Clarify what mastery looks like:** Collaborate with teachers to define proficiency criteria using standards and Portrait of a Graduate competencies. Create rubrics and student-friendly learning progressions.

» **Establish multiple ways students can demonstrate learning:** Offer pathways for students to show mastery through performance tasks, projects, assessments, digital portfolios, or real-world applications.

» **Restructure learning blocks using flexible pacing to support student success through varied pacing**: Build flexible time into the schedule for accelerated learning, additional practice, small-group instruction, or enrichment based on student progress.

» **Create systems to monitor mastery:** Use teacher teams or professional learning communities to regularly analyze student assessments, review student work, and plan student supports. Ensure gradebook practices align with mastery rather than seat time.

Key Next Steps

» Convene a local instructional design team that includes teachers, administrators, and community partners to review your district's instructional time allocations and identify opportunities to align them with your learner-centered vision

» Review the Arizona Innovation Guide to learn more about how others have transformed the instructional day

You might need to consult other topics if...

• You want to ensure instructional staff have the skills and support needed to design learning experiences that fit new schedules or flexible learning models (consult Building Educator Capacity).

• You want to incorporate performance-based learning or flexible pacing structures into the redesigned instructional day (consult Assessment and Grading Flexibility).

• You are rethinking the school day to better support career pathways, college credit, internships or community-based learning opportunities (consult Post-High School Readiness).

Additional Resources

» Assessment and Grading Flexibility

» Instructional Time Model

» Post-High School Readiness

» Building Educator Capacity

Policy References

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-901

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-901.07

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-901.08

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-341.01

» Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-302

» Arizona Department of Education H.B. 2826 Guidance

Instructional Time Model

School districts and charter schools have the ability to adopt an Instructional Time Model (ITM), which allows them to determine how they'll meet annual instructional time requirements. School districts and charter schools can use the ITM for innovative instructional methods that include off-campus learning experiences such as internships, project-based learning, remote instruction, and more. The ITM flexibility gives school districts and charter schools the opportunity to provide unique learning experiences while meeting annual instructional time requirements and maintaining average daily membership.

This topic might be right for you if...

- You want to learn more about how the ITM works

- You want to adopt an ITM for the first time

- You want to update your ITM to create more flexibility and promote unique and innovative learning experiences

- You want to implement a learning model that is not hindered by limitations of traditional periods of time in school

What is it?

» In Arizona, school districts and charter schools can adopt an ITM to define how they will meet the minimum annual instructional time requirements, including how they'll determine average daily membership, daily attendance, and student count.

» To start the process, the school district governing board must hold two public hearings about the proposed ITM. After at least two hearings, the governing board may adopt the policy. Once passed, governing boards are not required to hold additional hearings or re-pass the ITM. Charter school governing bodies can adopt an ITM without holding a public hearing.

» In the ITM, a district or charter school has the flexibility to determine how instruction will be delivered, but it must define how this will occur if it includes educational experiences outside of an in-person classroom. The policy must also include how attendance will be tracked and course expectations for students engaged in project-based learning, independent learning, or mastery-based learning experiences.

» A school can provide remote instruction up to 40% of the time before funding is impacted.

» The governing board then submits the ITM to the Arizona Department of Education, so they have a record of the policy. The Department does not approve or deny ITMs.

What does it mean?

The ITM gives school districts and charter schools the ability to define what learning looks like and determine the most appropriate way to calculate it for the purposes of instructional time, daily membership, and attendance. This means that districts and charter schools can define learning in a way that meets the learning goals and needs of their community.

Districts and charter schools can pass ITM policies that allow students to:

» Engage in project-based learning experiences with a timeframe that doesn't align with the school year

» Access off-campus learning experiences (e.g., courses on college campuses, remote learning, etc.)

» Design courses that meet their learning interests through independent study or work-based learning

Districts must identify attendance measures that fit their learning models and student needs. Daily check-ins work for some approaches, but others may rely on different indicators such as assignment completion, project milestones, teacher contact, parent attestation, or submission of student work. The key is choosing a method that accurately reflects student engagement and progress in your local context.

How can it be used?

Expand work-based learning experiences

» Adopt an ITM that allows internships or other work experiences to count toward instructional time. This experience may be especially valuable for students in their junior and senior years as they start to narrow down their plans following high school graduation.

» Include career exploration experiences, such as job shadowing, workplace visits, guest speakers, or community projects, in their ITM. Career exploration experiences allow students throughout K-12 to begin learning and thinking about the types of jobs that interest them and what skills and credentials they'll need to pursue that career or interest.

» Utilize ITM flexibilities so students can complete two-year CTE programs while taking other courses at their local school. This flexibility allows students to fulfill instructional time requirements through the CTE program and not have to choose between CTE, arts, and elective credits.

» Leverage progress and attendance check-ins required as part of the ITM to help connect internship and job experiences with educational plans by including reflection about the experience as it relates to their post-high school goals and aspirations.

Expand access to courses

» Adopt an ITM that allows students to access learning through off-campus experiences at institutions of higher education or online courses that count toward instructional time. This flexibility helps students expand their learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom.

» Leverage remote learning. With the exception of approved Arizona Online Schools, school districts and charter schools must have an ITM in place that includes remote learning in order to provide this option to students. Ensuring that the district or charter school's ITM or Arizona Online Instruction program enables remote learning allows students to access online courses or pivot to a remote learning day in the case of a temporary school closure.

» Create a bank of courses available to students through both online and in-person methods. If the district doesn't currently have an agreement with an online learning provider, consider exploring the available options that might complement the courses your district offers and be of interest to your students.

Promote personalized learning experiences

» Adopt an ITM that includes independent study, mastery-based learning, and project-based learning. Having an ITM policy with these components will give students and educators the flexibility to design courses that meet every student's needs and interests.

» Allow for flexibility through the ITM. When determining how to calculate attendance for these courses, consider allowing enough flexibility in the policy so that students and educators can decide what's most appropriate for the learning experience. For example, assignment-based check-ins may be most appropriate for mastery-based or project-based learning experiences, as students may complete assignments at various paces. Alternatively, independent study courses may rely more heavily on check-ins with educators.

» Encourage students to pursue their interests. Having an ITM that promotes flexibility is just the start. Build out structures so students are receiving guidance and support to access or create courses that meet their educational goals and help ensure they're college and career-ready.

Design an innovative ITM policy

» Identify what is and is not working for students. In instances where students have struggled with non-traditional courses permitted through the ITM, meet with students and educators overseeing the course to unpack what happened. Can you build support structures to help students in similar situations moving forward? Do you need to make adjustments to your ITM to better serve all students? And for things that are working, how might you expand or amplify them?

» Hold creative brainstorming sessions. Bring together members of your learning community to think innovatively about what learning in your district could look like. Solicit feedback from students, educators, parents and community members about the types of learning experiences that are missing. Would they be permitted in your current ITM? If not, consider making revisions to your policy.

Key Next Steps

» If you do not have an ITM policy in place, start talking to educators and district leaders about the benefits of the ITM. Identify what the needs are in your learning community and what learning flexibilities need to be included in your ITM. Start working with your governing board, hold public hearings and get an ITM policy in place.

» If you have an ITM policy, solicit feedback about its effectiveness. Are there learning experiences that students would like to access but can't count toward their instructional time requirements? Is the method of calculating attendance and progress working for students and educators, or do adjustments need to be made? Consider building in a feedback cycle to regularly identify if any changes to your policy are needed.

You might need to consult other topics if...

- You want to do more thinking on how to creatively structure your school day, week or year (consult Transforming the Instructional Day)

- You want to develop a grading policy that better serves blended and non-traditional approaches to learning (consult Assessment and Grading Flexibilities)
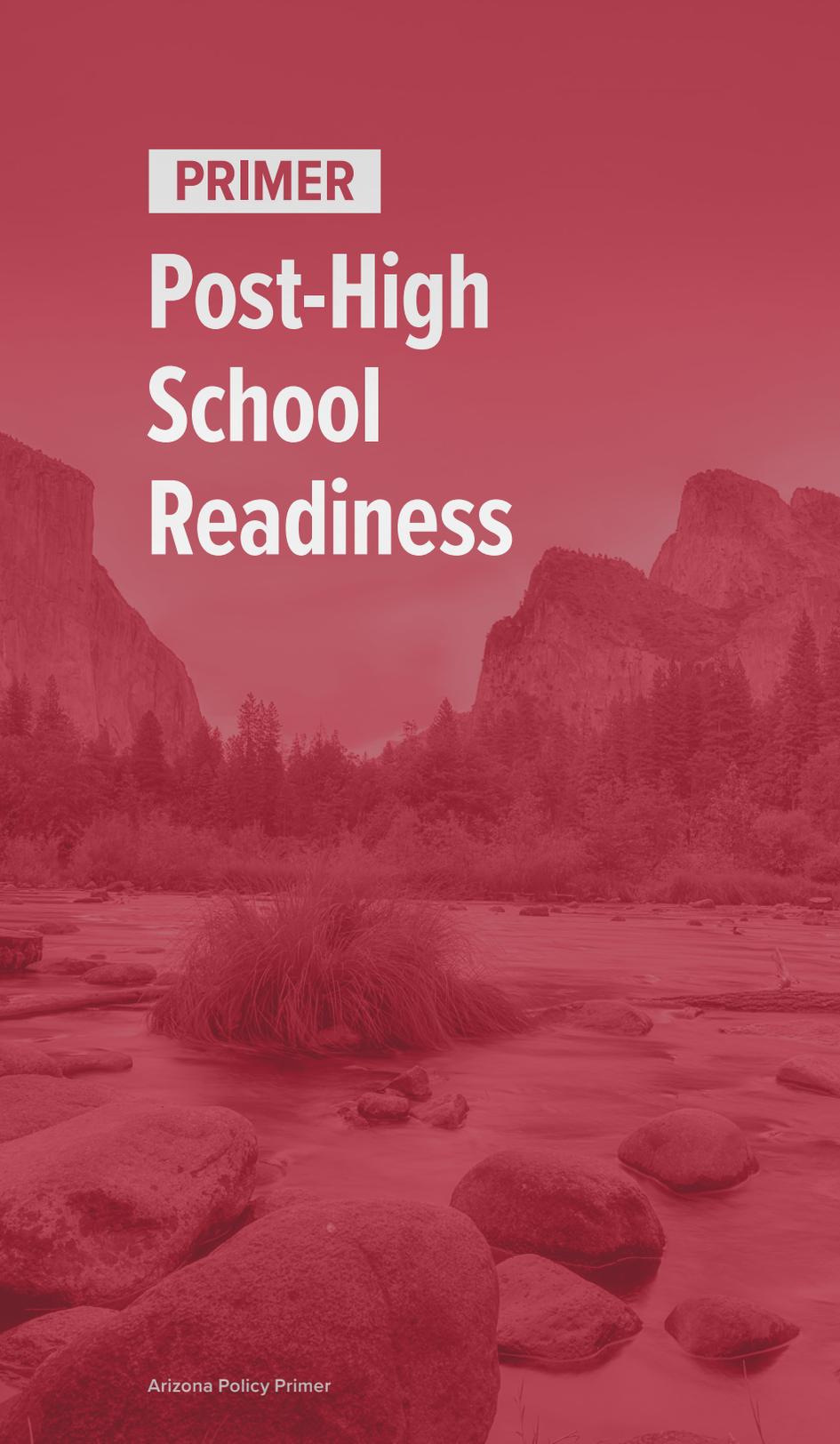
Additional Resources

» Assessment and Grading Flexibility

» Transforming the Instructional Day

» Post-High School Readiness

» Building Educator Capacity

Policy References

» Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-901.08

Post-High School Readiness

Arizona has different avenues for school systems to provide students with access to early college experiences and various career exploration opportunities. For example, students in grades K-8 can explore college and career options, develop post secondary skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. In addition, all school systems serving 9-12 graders can offer Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, concurrent or dual enrollment opportunities, competency-based credits, and apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities. Career Technical Education Districts (CTEDs) can offer associate degrees.

This topic might be right for you if...

- You want to develop a K-12 continuum of learning aligned to post secondary success

- You want to ensure your local graduation requirements aptly prepare your students for life after graduation, meet public university enrollment requirements, and ensure career readiness

- You would like to increase access to early college programming and maximize funding opportunities

- You are interested in expanding CTE and apprenticeship opportunities

- You are a CTED and are considering offering associate degrees

What is it?

» State [regulation](#) allows credit toward high school graduation requirements to be awarded based on the successful completion of subject area course requirements or competency requirements, which are academic standards adopted by the Arizona State Board of Education. Determination of student accomplishment and performance is delegated to the subject area teacher.

» The Arizona Board of Regents [sets undergraduate admission](#) requirements for Arizona's public universities. While the state minimum graduation requirements and university requirements are mostly aligned, Arizona public colleges have additional specificity around courses, including in lab sciences and advanced math. Public universities require one less year of social studies and two years of the same foreign language.

» The [Grand Canyon Diploma](#) allows students who demonstrate mastery of high school standards to graduate early. Districts will still receive some [average daily membership](#) (ADM) for students who graduate early through competency-based methods. Community colleges [must accept](#) students who obtain a Grand Canyon Diploma. Universities offer direct admission options for students who have earned the Grand Canyon High School Diploma. For example, the [University of Arizona includes](#) the Grand Canyon Diploma as a method for demonstrating admissions requirements.

» In Arizona, dual enrollment courses are college-level courses that take place on high school campuses, while concurrent enrollment courses take place on college campuses. Offering dual and concurrent course opportunities allows students to obtain high school and college credit simultaneously.

Districts can work with local institutions of higher education to negotiate the costs of credits for concurrent enrollment courses. Districts that pay for concurrent enrollment courses [receive funding](#) for the student's average daily membership.

» CTEDs and courses through district satellite CTE courses can offer [embedded credits](#) to students, allowing them to use second-year CTE courses to meet academic credit requirements. These districts also have several unique flexibilities they can leverage to support students. CTEDs can offer associate degrees to high school students. In order to offer degrees, CTEDs must meet [several requirements](#).

» Students who receive a qualifying score on Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams [may be awarded](#) post-secondary credit at all three public universities in Arizona.

What does it mean?

» Districts can set graduation requirements beyond the state's minimum graduation requirements so that every student meets the minimum requirements for enrollment in the state's public universities. Districts may also choose to maintain the state's minimum graduation requirements while clearly communicating what additional courses students who wish to enroll in a four-year Arizona college will need to take.

» Students can opt to accelerate their high school learning in order to begin post-high school college and CTE courses earlier. Arizona allows students who graduate early to still access high school opportunities and extra-curricular activities. When students graduate early, Arizona continues to pay for their education and continues to provide some funding to their high school district.

» Dual and concurrent enrollment courses allow students who are ready for college-level courses to meet graduation requirements while earning college credit. Districts that choose to offer more dual enrollment courses can leverage teachers with the appropriate certifications and recruit new teachers. Districts may also find it beneficial to establish strong concurrent enrollment programs that their students can access. Concurrent enrollment programs allow high school students to gain experiences on higher education campuses prior to enrolling full-time.

» Embedded credits within CTE courses can create opportunities for interdisciplinary units of study and apply academic concepts to real-world applications.

» Allowing students to obtain associate degrees in high school means that students can immediately enter career fields with degree requirements following graduation.

» All three public universities in Arizona accept competency-based transcripts for admission and enrollment.

How can it be used?

Align local graduation requirements with public university requirements

» **Leverage the State 48 Graduate Profile** or your local profile to build pathways in your district to support student success. Districts may also choose to update local graduation requirements themselves. Districts can set students up for success by ensuring a variety of pathways exist for students to graduate and that all have knowledge about the type of courses and experiences they'll need to be successful in their post-high school goals.

» **Update local graduation requirements** to align directly with Arizona public universities' admissions requirements.

Arizona Minimum Graduation Requirements

- Four credits of English or English as a second language, which shall include but not be limited to the following: reading American and other world literature, reading informational text, writing, research methods, speaking and listening skills, grammar and vocabulary

- Three credits in social studies to minimally include the following: one credit of American history, including Arizona history; one credit of world history/geography; one-half credit of American government, including civics and Arizona government; and one-half credit in economics

- Three credits of science

- One credit of the arts or career and technical education and vocational education

- Seven credits of additional courses prescribed by the local school district governing board or charter school

- Four credits of mathematics that include content covered on the statewide assessment and aligned to the Arizona Mathematics Standards for Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II (Note: the credit covering Algebra II may be achieved through a math course comparable to Algebra II course content; computer science, career and technical education and vocational education, economics, science and arts courses as determined by the local school district governing board or charter school) and a fourth credit that includes significant mathematics content as determined by the local school district governing board or charter school

Public Universities Admissions Requirements not included in the state's minimum graduation requirements

- Three lab sciences (biology, earth science, or physics with integrated science or advance sciences as a viable alternative for one year)

- Two years of the same foreign language

- Note: Algebra II in the state graduation requirements is the same course as Algebra 3-4 in the Arizona Board of Regents admission requirements for public universities.

Offer students competency-based approaches to graduation and access to college early

» Award students [credit through demonstration of competency](#) based on the academic standards adopted by the state board and the local school district governing board or charter school. Awarding credit based on competency allows students to move through course standards at a pace that's appropriate for them.

» Establish a competency-based pathway for students, including a [Grand Canyon Diploma](#). The Grand Canyon Diploma offers an opportunity for students to graduate from high school early and pursue post-secondary education, career-technical training, or join the workforce when they're ready. By establishing a clear avenue for students to access the Grand Canyon Diploma, schools and districts can help students gain flexibility in what would have been their final years of high school. Additionally, these students can still participate in high school activities and courses if they choose, allowing them to transition to post-high school courses and training while not missing out on quintessential high school experiences.

» [Maintain ADM](#) for students even if they graduate early with the Grand Canyon Diploma. For students who enroll in community college programs their school district or charter school will continue to receive the per-pupil funding for the student until that student would have typically graduated at the end of grade 12, except for the funds owed to the community college (or 20% for Grand Canyon diploma recipients who are full-time students at the community college). Fifty percent of the remaining funds are to be used to support customized programs of assistance for students who do not demonstrate mastery and incentives for teachers and pupils to offset the costs of competency-based pathway programs. A similar funding mechanism exists for students who enroll in a university program.

Maximize opportunities and funding for dual and concurrent enrollment courses

» Audit qualifications of teaching staff to determine which educators are eligible to teach dual enrollment courses.

» [Maintain full ADM](#) for students enrolled in concurrent coursework as long as: the district receives approval from the state board of education or the charter sponsor to offer concurrent courses, the student earns at least three credits per semester, the student receives credit towards graduation, the coursework is at a higher level than what is taught at the district, the student attends at least one course at the high school, the concurrent coursework is applicable to an established community college academic degree or certificate program, and the school district or charter school pays for the cost of the concurrent enrollment credit.

» Establish relationships with local institutions of higher education and broker deals that allow high school students to enroll in courses for a discounted rate.

Offer associate degrees and leverage embedded credits

» Apply for the ability to offer embedded credits. The [process for establishing embedded credits](#) includes submitting the program academic crosswalk to the State Board of Education for approval, forming a teacher committee to create a crosswalk between academic standards and CTE standards, and publishing the crosswalk online.

» Apply for the ability to offer associate degrees (if they are a CTED). The [processes for establishing an associate degree](#) at a CTED include getting accredited, the proposed degree must be in a high-demand field, the CTED can offer the degree program sustainably, the degree is not duplicative of degrees offered by local organizations and, the CTED has adequate facilities and resources to provide training for the degree. The career technical education board has the authority to determine if a CTED has met these requirements. The CTED must notify any colleges or universities in the county that offer the same degree. The district must also submit a report to the career technical education board with various pieces of information about the program, including learning outcomes and assessment plans, credit requirements, and other general information. The district will also have annual reporting requirements to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee.

Key Next Steps

» Establish what type of post-high school readiness experiences your community and students need and want most. Identify local resources and partnerships to help develop and offer new learning experiences.

» Make steps toward leveraging flexibilities in state policy that would move you toward the goals of your students. This might be expanding dual or concurrent enrollment courses or establishing a program so students can obtain degrees or credentials.

» Review the Early College Access and Career Exploration and Learning Sections of the Arizona Innovation Guide for stories about how to think innovatively about preparing your students for post-high school goals.

You might need to consult other topics if...

• You want to ensure you have educators who are prepared to support and teach these courses (consult [Building Educator Capacity](#))

• You want to create a school schedule that gives students the flexibility to access these various types of learning experiences more easily (consult [Transforming the Instructional Day](#))

• You want to leverage assessment flexibilities to align with your post-high school readiness goals (consult [Assessment and Grading Flexibilities](#))

Additional Resources

» [Assessment and Grading Flexibility](#)

» [Transforming the Instructional Day](#)

» [Instructional Time Model](#)

» [Building Educator Capacity](#)

Policy References

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-398](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-792.03](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-795.01](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-901.07](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-1626](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-302](#)

» [Arizona Admissions Requirements](#)

» [CTE Programs with Embedded Academic Credit](#)
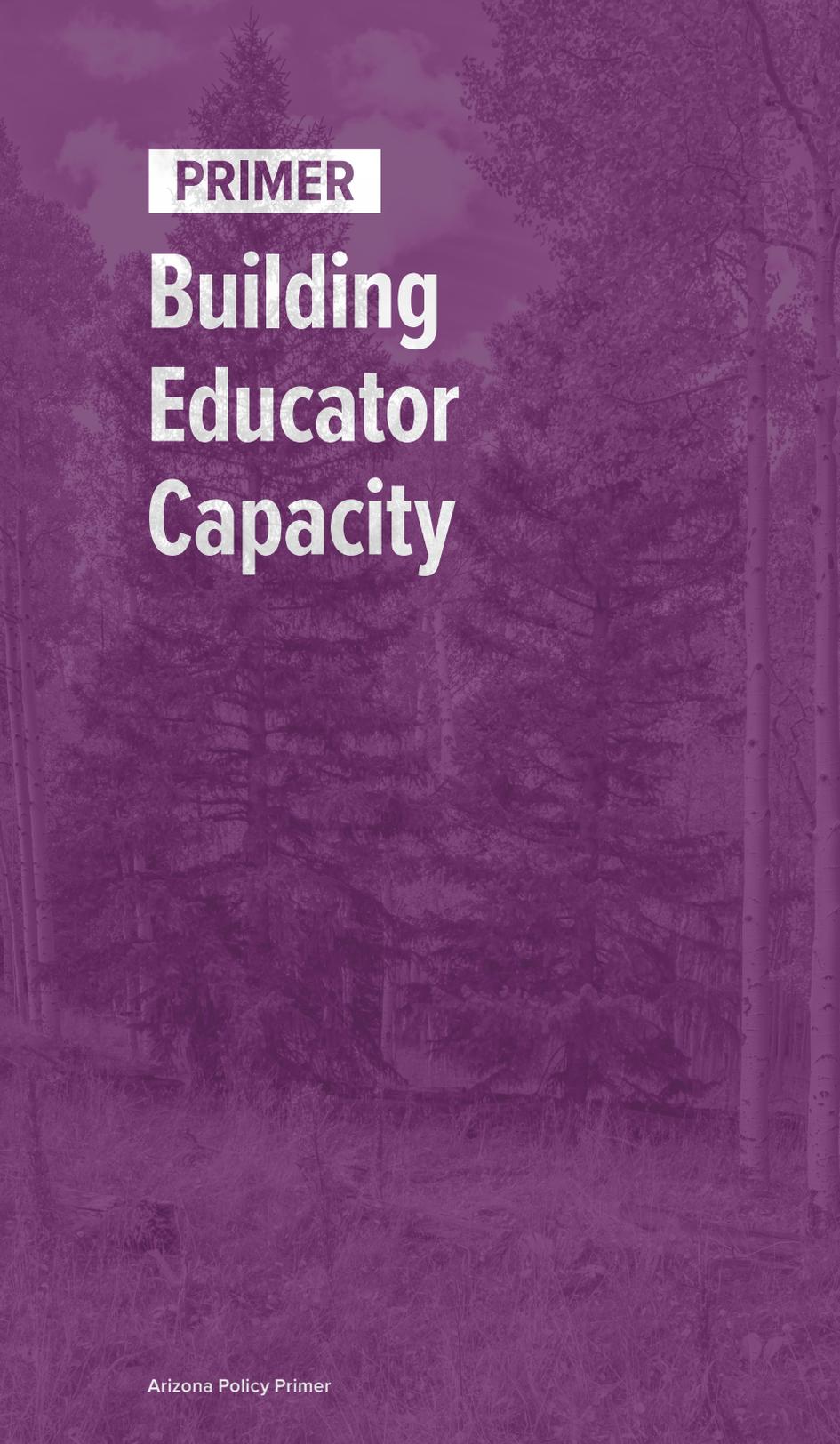
Building Educator Capacity

Arizona policy provides school systems with flexibility to design professional learning and staffing systems that meet local needs. While the state defines basic requirements for certification and renewal, school systems hold the authority to shape how teachers grow, collaborate, and design innovative learning experiences.

This topic might be right for you if...

- You want to strengthen teacher collaboration across disciplines and programs

- You are designing pathways that connect core academics to career or community-based learning

- You want to align educator professional learning with local innovation goals

- You want to develop strategic staffing models that strengthen personalized learning

What is it?

Arizona offers a range of pathways for becoming a teacher, multiple certification types, flexible renewal options, and recognition of industry expertise that together create a foundation for local innovation.

» **Certification Pathways:** Teachers may hold certificates such as the Standard Professional Teaching Certificate, Subject Matter Expert Standard Certificate, or Career and Technical Education (CTE) Certificate. In addition, school systems may offer in-district certification programs. These options allow school systems to hire professionals from various backgrounds, including industry experts, to support applied or interdisciplinary learning.

» **Alternative Teaching Certificate:** Arizona offers alternative opportunities for individuals entering the profession while in the process of completing the requirements for a Standard Professional Teaching Certificate. The certificate is valid for two years and may be extended annually for up to two additional years. Candidates must be enrolled in a State Board–approved teacher preparation program or alternative certification pathway.

» **Professional Development Requirements:** Teachers must complete 180 hours of professional development during a 12-year certification cycle. Districts can define what qualifies, including workshops, coursework, or locally-designed professional development aligned to district goals. The state does not require a set number of professional development days, so districts can integrate learning into teacher collaboration time, coaching cycles or interdisciplinary project planning.

» **Dual Enrollment Requirements:** Dual enrollment teachers must hold appropriate Arizona educator certification and also meet the credentialing requirements of the partnering college or university. Recent changes by the Higher Learning Commission give local community colleges greater flexibility to define the credentialing requirements for educators teaching dual enrollment, allowing institutions to create educator qualification pathways that better reflect local needs while still ensuring rigorous assessment of student learning.

These policies create space for districts to recruit a diverse educator workforce and build the professional capacity needed for innovative interdisciplinary systems that meet the learning needs of students.

What does it mean?

School systems are required to ensure all educators meet certification and renewal requirements, but how educators learn, collaborate, and innovate is determined locally. School systems have flexibility to:

» Design professional learning that builds teachers' capacity to co-design and co-teach interdisciplinary courses (e.g., science and CTE instructors collaborating on engineering projects).

» Leverage alternative certification pathways to bring in professionals with relevant expertise for applied or project-based learning experiences. This allows school systems to hire and support aspiring educators as they complete training. Additionally, it expands the pool of potential teachers and can help develop talent locally while maintaining progress toward full certification.

» Use recertification hours strategically for district priorities, such as developing performance assessments, calibrating grading practices, or designing integrated curriculum units.

» Support teachers in earning additional endorsements that expand interdisciplinary programming, such as STEM, career technical education, or reading endorsements.

» School systems must ensure that staff teaching dual enrollment meet both K-12 certification and college faculty requirements. This may involve supporting existing teachers to meet higher-ed credential expectations or partnering with postsecondary institutions and industry experts to expand qualified instructor pipelines.

» Local colleges may now set their own dual enrollment instructor qualifications, so requirements may differ by institution. School systems should work closely with their higher-education partners to understand the specific credentials needed, identify teachers who can meet them, and plan professional learning or degree pathways that align with each partner's expectations.

Essentially, the state provides the guardrails for certification and renewal, while school systems determine how to invest in educator growth to advance their innovation agenda.

How can it be used?

Build professional learning communities

» **Define a focus:** Identify a shared inquiry area aligned to district priorities or the portrait of a graduate (e.g., integrating CTE and core academics, designing performance tasks, or building culturally responsive classrooms).

» **Organize interdisciplinary teams:** Form professional learning communities (PLCs) that include teachers from multiple subjects to plan integrated units and share instructional strategies. Include instructional coaches or administrators as facilitators.

» **Schedule and protect collaboration time:** Embed PLC meetings into the master schedule or early-release days. Ensure the time counts toward required professional development hours under Arizona Code (Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-619).

» **Use structured protocols:** Equip teams with collaboration tools such as project design templates, tuning protocols, and student work analysis rubrics. Focus sessions on applying learning to real classroom challenges.

» **Share and reflect:** Create end-of-semester showcases where PLCs present interdisciplinary projects, reflect on impact and identify next steps for continued learning.

Develop local professional development frameworks

» **Establish guiding principles:** Develop a district vision for professional learning that emphasizes continuous improvement, collaboration and alignment to student-centered outcomes.

» **Map professional learning to certification requirements:** Clarify which locally-led activities (e.g., coaching, curriculum design, PLC participation, etc.) count toward the 180-hour renewal requirement.

» **Align professional development to innovation goals:** Design learning modules around district priorities like project-based learning, competency-based assessment or culturally responsive instruction. Connect each module to evidence of student learning or practice change.

» **Evaluate and refine:** Survey participants and analyze student outcome data to determine which professional learning formats and topics have the greatest impact. Adjust annually to meet emerging needs.

Recruit and mentor teachers

» Identify local workforce needs: Analyze current and projected staffing patterns to determine areas where alternative certification routes (subject matter expert or CTE certificates) could expand opportunities for students.

» Partner with industry and higher education: Collaborate with local businesses, workforce councils, and community colleges to recruit professionals who can bring real-world expertise into classrooms.

» Design structured mentorship programs: Pair alternatively certified teachers with experienced mentors for at least the first two years. Provide coaching on pedagogy, classroom management, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

» Track and support retention: Collect data on mentor-mentee experiences, retention rates, and student outcomes to strengthen future recruitment and induction systems.

Create teacher leadership roles

» Design clear role descriptions: Outline responsibilities, time commitments, and compensation or stipends. Ensure these roles are recognized in district policies or salary schedules.

» Prepare leaders for success: Provide targeted leadership training in coaching, facilitation, and change management. Connect teacher leaders to regional or statewide leadership networks.

» Embed leadership in daily practice: Schedule time within the teacher leader's workload to observe peers, co-teach, and facilitate professional learning. Connect their work directly to the school system's professional development framework.

» Evaluate and scale: Gather feedback from participants on the effectiveness of teacher leaders in supporting classroom change. Refine the structure and expand the model to additional schools or grade levels.

Build a teacher pipeline, develop a "grow-your-own" program, or reimagine strategic staffing

» Identify potential candidates such as paraprofessionals, instructional assistants, community educators, or career-changers already connected to your schools.

» Develop and receive approval for an in-house certification program: utilize the guidelines provided by the Arizona Department of Education to create a scope and sequence for credentialing educator candidates with bachelor's degrees to fill teaching roles.

» Connect with state-approved alternative preparation or residency pathways (e.g., the Arizona Teacher Residency, administered by the Arizona K-12 Center at Northern Arizona University, or Arizona Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program) to provide structured routes toward full certification. School systems can host residents, serve as the "teaching apprenticeship" site, and commit to supporting them into full-time roles.

» Offer financial or scheduling supports such as tuition reimbursement, flexible work schedules, or release time to help candidates manage coursework while working. When establishing a program for special educators, many local agencies use federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act funding or state funding to underwrite these costs.

» Develop new staffing models: Determine how to embed education workforce initiatives, such as [Arizona State University's Next Education Workforce](#), at the local level to design flexible staffing models that create entry points, differentiated roles, and career pathways for educators, making the profession more attractive and sustainable.

» Establish mentoring and induction supports: pair candidates with experienced licensed teachers, create coaching cycles, and offer ongoing professional learning tailored to new teachers.

» Create a clear career ladder: define the pathway from support-staff or paraprofessional roles through certification and placement as a full-time teacher. Make the steps and support visible and accessible to staff.

» Monitor and refine: track recruitment, retention, and progression data of pipeline candidates, adjust mentoring/induction practices and ensure alignment between pipeline supports and your school system's innovation goals for interdisciplinary, mastery-based learning.

Key Next Steps

» Convene a school system committee or task force to map or audit current professional development structures, certification pathways, and staffing practices

» Identify opportunities to align them with your school system's learner-centered and interdisciplinary learning goals

You might need to consult other topics if...

• You want to design schedules that give educators time for interdisciplinary planning, coaching and collaboration (consult [Transforming the Instructional Day](#))

• You want to align teacher professional learning with new approaches to assessment or mastery-based grading (consult [Assessment and Grading Flexibility](#))

• You are planning to expand early college, CTE or work-based learning programs and need staffing or endorsement strategies to support them (consult [Post-High School Readiness](#))

Additional Resources

» [Assessment and Grading Flexibility](#)

» [Transforming the Instructional Day](#)

» [Instructional Time Model](#)

» [Post-High School Readiness](#)

Policy References

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-607](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-8 through Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-615](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-619](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-302](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-1821.01](#)

References and Resources

Assessment and Grading Flexibility

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-741](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-741.02](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-701.01](#)

» [AZ Board Menu of Assessment Policy](#)

Transforming the Instructional Day and Learning Environments

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-901](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-901.07](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-901.08](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-341.01](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-302](#)

Building Educator Capacity

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-607](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-8 through Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-615](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-619](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-302](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15-1821.01](#)

Post-High School Readiness

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-398](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-792.03](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-795.01](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-901.07](#)

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-1626](#)

» [Ariz. Admin. Code R7-2-302](#)

» [Arizona Admissions Requirements](#)

» [CTE Programs with Embedded Academic Credits](#)

Instructional Time Model

» [Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-901.08](#)

Additional Resources

» [A Shared Vision](#)

» [Aligning Competencies with Your Portrait of a Learner](#)

» [*Finding Your Path: A Navigation Tool for Scaling Personalized, Competency-Based Learning*](#)

Special Thanks

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