

Aurora Public Schools  
ACTION Zone FAQ  
August 21, 2015

**What is an ACTION Zone?**

In alignment with the APS strategic plan, APS 2020: Shaping the Future, and the ACTION Zone Design Plan, APS proposes developing one ACTION Zone this year, and up to three ACTION Zones in the coming years. Each ACTION Zone will have a thematic link among schools, and all schools within a zone will share some key characteristics. Each school in a zone will have the opportunity to develop its own school-specific plan. These plans will be part of an application for Colorado Innovation School Status. The applications and each new school design will need to clearly and concretely show how the school will use autonomy over the use of staff, time, money, and program that come with innovation status to drive gains in student achievement.

**What does the acronym ACTION in ACTION Zones mean?**

The ACTION acronym in ACTION Zones stands for **A**urora **C**ommunity-Based **T**ransformation, **I**nnovation and **O**pportunity **N**etwork.

**Was the creation of the ACTION Zone mandated by the State?**

The ACTION Zone was not mandated by the State. Many districts across the country have implemented similar structures as a way to be innovative and redesign schools in collaboration with the community; to remove real or perceived barriers; and to dramatically and quickly improve learning opportunities and student achievement.

**Why are schools seeking Innovation status as part of the ACTION Zone?**

Schools and the district have faced challenges in accelerating student achievement. Innovation status would enable ACTION Zone schools to think differently and redesign their school models to raise achievement for all students, so our students are able to shape successful futures.

**What does it mean to have Innovation Status?**

State innovation status allows a school to remain in the district while giving the community added flexibilities to redesign itself. Innovation status allows a school to develop a customized and unique plan of structures, programs and governance models that will best serve the students at the school. It requires the entire school community to work together to implement innovative approaches to promote student achievement that could affect people, time, programs or money. In return, the school may be exempt from certain state laws or school district policies to implement the innovation plan. State-approved innovation schools are made possible by the 2008 Innovation Schools Act.

**How are ACTION Zones different from other innovative schools in APS like Pilot Schools, Expeditionary Learning Schools and Charter Schools?**

ACTION Zones build upon our current foundation of developing charter, pilot and district-innovation schools. The ACTION Zone model combines community needs, goals and priorities of the schools in the zone with the goals and core beliefs of the school

district's strategic plan, APS 2020: Shaping the Future. An ACTION Zone would be designed to respond to specific community needs using targeted innovations and resources. It provides a flexible and customized foundation that addresses the unique abilities and circumstances of the students in the schools within the zone.

### **How do schools take part in the ACTION Zone?**

- The first Aurora Public Schools ACTION Zone will include schools that meet two key criteria:
  - Schools must be in the Aurora Central High School feeder pattern.
  - The school must fit the theme for the ACTION Zone.
- Until the theme is chosen by the Zone Advisory Committee, all schools in the Aurora Central High School feeder pattern will receive information about the opportunity to participate in the ACTION Zone.

### **Who are the key players or who will be involved in the process?**

- Mass Insight Education
- Zone Advisory Committee
- Zone Design Team
- School Design Team

### **Who is Mass Insight Education?**

Mass Insight Education is an education reform nonprofit that works with individual schools, school districts and states to redesign their lowest- performing schools and strengthen districts to serve students in need.

### **Will Mass Insight operate our schools?**

Mass Insight is not a charter organization and does not operate schools independently. Mass Insight believes there is a strong role for districts to play and strives to help districts improve the way they support students and families.

### **What is the Zone Advisory Committee?**

- The Zone Advisory Committee (ZAC), which is appointed by the APS Superintendent, is a group of diverse, local leaders with strong connections to Original Aurora and who are knowledgeable about the economic and postsecondary opportunities available to APS graduates. The first responsibility of the ZAC is to evaluate and choose the theme for the ACTION Zone.
- Once the theme is chosen, the Zone Advisory Committee will serve two roles:
  - Make a recommendation to the Superintendent as to whether or not a zone application meets quality criteria before it is an application goes forward from a school design team to the APS Board of Education
  - Assist the Superintendent in presenting innovation applications to the Colorado State Board of Education

### **What is the Zone Design Team?**

- The Zone Design Team, which is appointed by the Superintendent and school leaders, is comprised of stakeholders from three categories:
  - School staff
  - District staff
  - Key partners
- The Zone Design Team will:
  - Develop the process for innovation applications and school design work
  - Provide schools support during the process
  - Ensure the school designs and innovation applications are of sufficient quality to recommend to the APS Board of Education and the Colorado State Board of Education

### **What is a School Design Team?**

- School Design Teams will be convened after schools express interest to join the zone and complete school readiness assessments, which are reviews of a school's system to support staff and students and quality of instruction.
- School Design Teams will be representative of the school community as a whole, and will include:
  - School staff
  - Parents
  - Students (where appropriate)
  - Key partners
- The School Design Teams will:
  - Analyze the School Readiness Assessment and other relevant documents
  - Decide on school design options that match the Action Zone criteria
  - Author the application for state innovation status
  - Complete the school design and present it to the Zone Design Team

### **What is a School Readiness Assessment?**

School readiness assessments, conducted by Mass Insight, are reviews of a school's ability to support staff and students and to lead and manage change. The readiness assessments will be used by principals and P-20 directors to help schools organize their design teams.

### **What is the timeline for school redesign?**

The school readiness assessments will take place in late August and early September. School communities that wish to explore the possibility of innovation will begin the redesign process in late September and continue through the fall. The goal is to have school redesigns and draft innovation applications drafted and supported by school communities in January 2016. Ideally, the Aurora Public Schools Board of Education will have the opportunity to review new designs and applications in winter of 2016, and we will present materials to the Colorado State Board of Education thereafter.

**Will changes happen immediately to our school model?**

Every year, schools make improvements to the way they support their students and families. However, the redesign that may be proposed in an innovation application will not be seen immediately, and the goal is to start the 2016-17 school year with the new school models.

**Who makes the final decision on State Innovation status?**

School innovation status would have to be approved by the APS Board of Education and the State Board of Education.

**How can parents participate?**

APS values parental input and support of every child's learning. Parents play a key part in the school redesign and the way APS supports the ACTION Zone in general. A parent representative will take part in the Zone Advisory Committee, and parents will also serve on the School Design Teams. Feedback from parents is always welcome and important as schools rethink how they serve students. APS schools and district staff will seek parent input throughout the process. Community meetings will be scheduled to give parents regular updates and provide opportunities for comments and questions to school and district leaders.

**What role do teachers and school staff at the proposed ACTION Zone schools play in approving the school redesigns?**

Under Colorado law, the teachers and school staff must consent to the innovation application. If the innovation application suggests changes to their jobs, those provisions of the application must be put to a vote.

**What is the timeline for innovation approval?**

It is likely that innovation applications will be submitted to the APS and State boards of education in winter or spring of 2016. The boards will review the applications and approve or deny status to the ACTION Zone schools thereafter.