



Exploring educational innovations from other countries enriches our own practices by introducing diverse perspectives and cutting-edge strategies that can drive meaningful improvements and foster global collaboration.



BEACONS OF INNOVATION

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Learning From Other Countries About What Schools Can Be

A scheduled ride home from the airport. An impromptu video-chat with a relative living thousands of miles away. Life-saving vaccines developed at warp speed, relying on decades of intensive research.

Each of these things represents incredible human achievements, and significant transformation in transportation, banking, telecommunications, and health care. Yet, the system responsible for educating the leaders of these industries has remained largely stagnant for decades.

Desks in rows, a teacher at the front of the room, and a one-size-fits-all curriculum are too often the norm in schools across the globe.

It's an unsettling contrast when you realize that the young people who attend schools today are likely to hold future jobs that don't yet exist. While generative artificial intelligence (AI) will eventually automate hundreds of millions of today's jobs, people who are able to effectively use AI tools to complement skills like leadership, imagination, and creativity will certainly have an advantage in the future workforce.¹

But for many countries, especially the United States, the education system simply has not caught up to prepare today's young people for such futures. The U.S. system continues to largely operate in a time-based, one-size-fits-all fashion – culling and sorting students based on age and arbitrary cut scores.

We know how intractable the status quo is, and how challenging it can be to move innovation forward. Yet, we also know that many, many folks are pushing back against the traditional system.

We see examples of schools, districts, states, and learning communities in our networks that are pushing innovation forward. A decade ago, only about 10 U.S. states had active policies in support of advancing competency-based education, where students progress upon mastery of learning instead of seat time. Today, we see supportive policies in all 50 states.² The policy structure to advance this sort of work is in place – we see innovative work happening in the U.S. to advance work-based learning,³ pilot innovation zones,⁴ and rethink graduation requirements,⁵ as a few examples. Yet, we don't yet see these advances happening at scale.



But change is possible — we can create more nimble, future-focused, and personalized education systems. We know this to be true because schools, learning communities, systems, and countries across the globe are paving the way and breaking the mold. These communities are firmly incorporating innovation as a

guiding principle in the design and operation of their education systems, in turn making them more relevant and meaningful for a new generation of learners and leaders.

Taking a moment to step outside of our own personal experiences and learn from the wisdom of others — even in vastly different contexts — can help move us

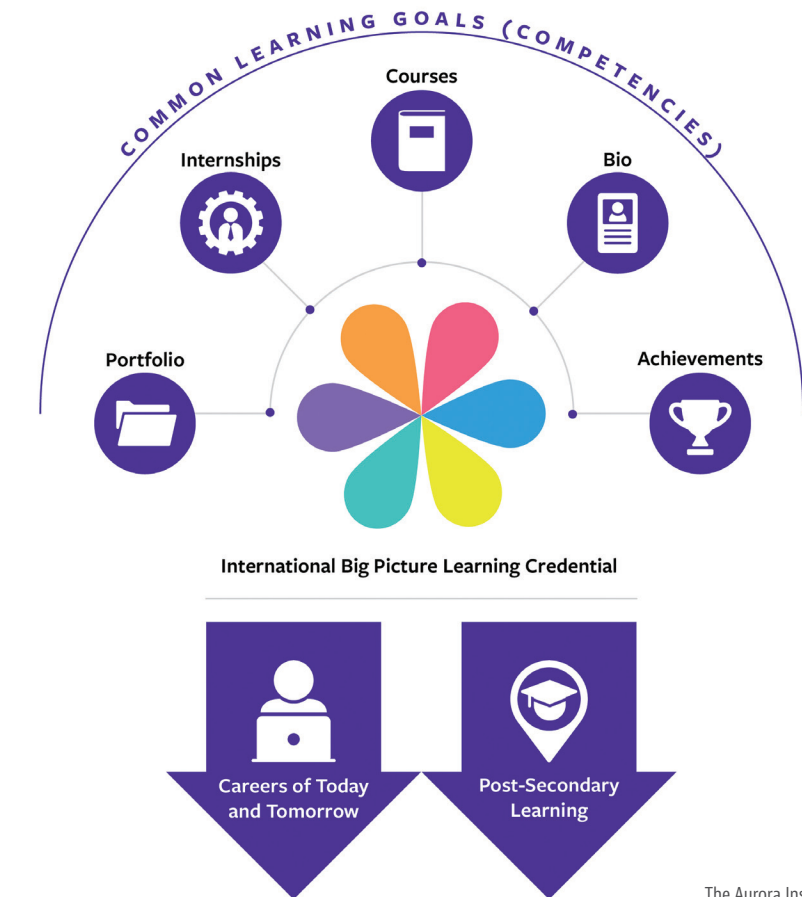
beyond the status quo. Every education system needs to figure out how to align all of the component subsystems. Each of the examples below offers an innovative approach to one of these elements.

Singapore: A Culture of Continuous Improvement and Educators as Experts

Singapore embraces a culture of continuous improvement throughout its system. Lately, the system has moved away from focusing solely on learners' content mastery to focusing more on social-emotional learning and 21st century skills.⁶ Placing a high value on the teaching profession, Singapore is one of only a few systems with established career tracks for their educator workforce, a nod to the many different aspirations and goals that educators may have.⁷ A teaching track supports educators in working toward a Master Teacher designation. A senior specialist track supports educators looking to develop expertise in a particular area, such as curriculum design or educational research, culminating in a Chief Specialist position. And a leadership track supports educators who are interested in pursuing school leadership or working in the Ministry of Education headquarters.

New Zealand: A Model in Innovative Accountability Structures

The New Zealand case study illustrates what reciprocal accountability structures can look like when systems balance national benchmarks and structures with local autonomy. The small island nation centers its accountability system on a transparent, results-based outcomes framework that is shared with communities, families,



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students, and stakeholders. Using the systems available to them within their local school contexts, many New Zealand schools use learner records; each student has a learner record, or “record of achievement,” that communicates mastery of competency development. Assessment of and for learning is common practice in New Zealand schools — students know what they need to learn, where they are in that learning, and what their next learning steps are.^{8,9}

Australia: Reinventing the Traditional High School Diploma With IBPLC

The new world of work demands more than academic knowledge and skills. Today's learners must be able to demonstrate such

transferable skills as communications, creativity, and collaboration. This means tapping into next-generation credentials that look a lot different than the standard high school diploma. The International Big Picture Learning Credential (IBPLC)¹⁰ began as an alternative to the traditional Australian diploma, recording knowledge, skills, competencies, and achievements across multiple learning environments and opportunities. The IBPLC was developed in partnership with researchers at the University of Melbourne, who validated the competency framework and assessment processes to support quality assurance. Today, the IBPLC is used widely throughout Australia, with almost 20 universities in Australia recognizing the

credential for entry to university.¹¹ Additionally, the IBPLC is being used in schools throughout the United States, Kenya, and Barbados.

Uganda: Work-Based Learning to Prepare Young People for Promising Futures

Every year, about 10-12 million young people enter the workforce in Africa, yet only 3 million formal jobs are available.¹² Often, secondary students leave without practical skills to earn one of those coveted positions or start their own businesses. Educate!, a youth-serving nonprofit, has been working with government and communities in Uganda, as well as other African countries, to offer student-centered pedagogy that immerses learners in real-world learning. The

program helps learners develop skills such as business planning, budgeting, and market research. Graduates of the program earn nearly double the income of peers outside of the program, and are 64% more likely to start a business by the end of their secondary education experience.

Global: An Early Embrace of AI

Many countries are already ahead of the United States in terms of embracing generative AI as a tool to personalize learning. Singapore's Smart Nation strategy¹³ includes an AI-enabled companion that motivates students with tailored feedback. South Korea aims to have AI coursework in its national curriculum by 2025. In Finland, roughly half of the schools use an AI



platform that gives learners and teachers immediate feedback on their work.¹⁴

Embracing Innovation to Build a Brighter Future for All of Us

Moving education systems beyond the status quo means developing a mindset for what it takes to really transform. By making continuous improvement a regular practice in all aspects of systems, ensuring clear and measurable learning outcomes for learners, engaging community in the learning process, and embracing new technology as a tool to enhance the learning process, leaders at the school, district, and system levels can begin to push the boundaries of what's possible.



When it comes to supporting the growth of our next generation of globally minded leaders, it is imperative that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected world. These global innovators show us this future is possible.

Notes:

¹ DevSkiller. (2023, December 7). *Forbes: The 8 biggest future of work trends in 2024 everyone needs to be ready for now*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/forbes-8-biggest-future-work-trends-2024-everyone-needs-ready-pgvwf/>

² Aurora Institute. (2024, April 25). *Center for Policy - Aurora Institute*. <https://aurora-institute.org/our-work/center-for-policy/>

³ <https://aurora-institute.org/resource/work-based-learning/>

⁴ <https://aurora-institute.org/resource/innovation-zones-policy-flexibility-to-reimagine-and-modernize-k-12-education-post-covid-19/>

⁵ <https://aurora-institute.org/blog/how-to-make-senior-capstones-truly-anti-racist-alternative-assessments-are-not-inherently-equitable-without-concerted-effort/>

⁶ Bryant et al. (2024). *Spark & sustain: How all of the world's school systems can improve learning at scale*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/spark-and-sustain-how-school-systems-can-improve-learning-at-scale>

⁷ Jensen, B., Downing, P., & Clark, A. (2017). *Preparing to lead: Lessons in principal development from high-performing education systems*.

⁸ New Zealand Government Ministry of Education. *Principles of assessment for learning*. <https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/principles-of-assessment-for-learning/5637160331.p>

⁹ <https://aurora-institute.org/blog/innovating-towards-next-generation-accountability/>

¹⁰ https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/reinventing-the-traditional-hs-diploma-international-big-picture-learning-credential/

¹¹ Aurora Institute. (2024, May 28). *Reinventing the traditional HS diploma: International Big Picture Learning Credential - Aurora Institute*. https://aurora-institute.org/cw_post/reinventing-the-traditional-hs-diploma-international-big-picture-learning-credential/

¹² Kenyi, S. (2023, December 15). *From education to occupation: Thriving in today's economy with skills lab – educate! | Preparing youth in Africa with the skills to succeed in today's economy*. Educate! | Preparing Youth in Africa With the Skills to Succeed in Today's Economy. <https://www.experienceeducate.org/all-blog/from-education-to-occupation-thriving-in-todays-economy-with-skills-lab>

¹³ <https://www.smartnation.gov.sg/nais/>

¹⁴ Lake, R. (2023, December 11). *Shockwaves and innovations: How nations worldwide are dealing with AI in education*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. <https://crpe.org/shockwaves-and-innovations-how-nations-worldwide-are-dealing-with-ai-in-education/#:~:text=Roughly%20half%20of%20schools%20use,and%20analytics%20on%20student%20assignments.>

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