

WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18-5B-11

§18-5B-11. Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zone Act.

(a) Legislative findings, intent and purpose.

The Legislature finds that:

- (1) High school graduation is an essential milestone for all West Virginia students and impacts the future success of the individual, community and state;
 - (2) There are significant correlations between educational attainment and labor market outcomes, greater labor force participation rate, increased employment rates, improved health, and decreased levels of poverty and crime. The negative impact on these linkages is most evident in the absence of high school completion;
 - (3) Dropping out of school is a process, not an event, with factors building and compounding over time;
 - (4) Students at risk of not completing high school can be identified as early as sixth grade using the indicators of attendance, behavior and course failures. Therefore, a comprehensive graduation plan must include a comprehensive systemic approach that emphasizes early interventions;
 - (5) Research identifies a number of effective strategies for engaging students that have the most positive impact on improving high school graduation rates. Some of these strategies are school-community collaboration, safe learning environments, family engagement, early literacy development, mentoring and tutoring services, service learning opportunities, alternative and nontraditional schooling, offering multiple pathways and settings for attaining high school diplomas, after-school opportunities, individualized instruction and career and technical education;
 - (6) Schools cannot solve the dropout problem alone. Research shows when educators, parents, elected officials, business leaders, faith-based leaders, human service personnel, judicial personnel and civic leaders collectively work together they are often able to find innovative solutions to address school and community problems; and
 - (7) Increasing high school graduation rates is an important factor in preparing a college and career-ready citizenry. Higher education institutions, including community and technical colleges, are essential partners in creating local and statewide solutions.
- (b) Therefore, the intent of the Legislature is to provide a separate category of innovation zones designated "Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zones" intended to achieve the following purposes:

(1) Provide for the establishment of Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zones to increase graduation rates and reduce the number of dropouts from West Virginia schools;

(2) Provide schools and communities with opportunities for greater collaboration to plan and implement systemic approaches that include evidence-based solutions for increasing graduation rates and reducing the number of dropouts;

(3) Provide a testing ground for innovative graduation programs, incentives and approaches to reducing the number of dropouts;

(4) Provide information regarding the effects of specific innovations, collaborations and policies on graduation rates and dropout prevention and recovery; and

(5) Document educational strategies that increase graduation rates, prevent dropouts and enhance student success.

(c) Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zones.

A school, a group of schools or a school district may be designated as a Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zone in accordance with the provisions of this article, subject to the provisions of this section. The state board shall propose rules for legislative promulgation, including an emergency rule if necessary, in accordance with article three-b chapter twenty-nine of this code to implement the provisions of this section. All provisions of this article apply to Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zones, including, but not limited to, the designation, application, approval, waiver of statutes, policies, rule and interpretations, employee approval, employee transfers, progress reviews, reports and revocations, and job postings, subject to the following:

(1) For purposes of this section, a "school, a group of schools or a school district" means a high school, a group of schools comprised of a high school and any of the elementary and middle schools whose students will attend the high school, or a school district whose graduation rate in the year in which an application is made is less than ninety percent based on the latest available school year data published by the Department of Education;

(2) The contents of the application for designation as a Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zone must include a description of the dropout prevention and recovery strategies and that the school, group of schools or school district plans to implement if designated as a Local Solution Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zone, and any other information the state board requires. The application also shall include a list of all county and state board rules, policies and interpretations, and all statutes, if any, identified as prohibiting or constraining the implementation of the plan, including an explanation of the specific exceptions to the rules, policies and interpretations and statutes required for plan implementation. A school, a group of schools, or school district may not request an exception nor may an exception be granted from any of the following:

(i) An assessment program administered by the West Virginia Department of Education;

(ii) Any provision of law or policy required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law No. 107-110 or other federal law; and

(iii) Section seven, article two and sections seven-a, seven-b, eight and eight-b, article four, chapter eighteen-a of this code, except as provided in section eight of this article;

(3) The factors to be considered by the state board when evaluating an application shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

(A) Evidence that other individuals or entities and community organizations are involved as partners to collectively work with the applicant to achieve the purposes as outlined in the dropout prevention and recovery plan. These individuals or entities and community organizations may include, but are not limited to, individuals or entities and community organizations such as parents, local elected officials, business leaders, faith-based leaders, human service personnel, judicial personnel, civic leaders community and technical colleges Higher education institutions;

(B) The level of commitment and support of staff, parents, students, the county board of education, the local school improvement council and the school's business partners as determined in accordance with this article apply to become a Local Solutions Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zone;

(C) The potential for an applicant to be successful in building community awareness of the high school dropout problem and developing and implementing its dropout prevention and recovery plan; and

(D) Implementation of the statewide system of easily identifiable early warning indicators of students at risk of not completing high school developed by the state board in accordance with section six, article eight of this chapter, known as The High School Graduation Improvement Act, along with a plan of interventions to increase the number of students earning a high school diploma;

(4) The rule shall provide standards for the state board to review applications for designation as a Local Solutions Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zones;

(5) The application for designation as a Local Solutions Dropout Prevention and Recovery Innovation Zone under this section is subject to approval in accordance with sections five and six of this article. In addition to those approval stages, the application, if approved by the school employees, shall be presented to the local school improvement council for approval prior to submission to county superintendent and board. Approval by the local school improvement council is obtain when at least eighty percent of the local school improvement council members present and voting after a quorum is established vote in favor of the application; and

(6) Upon approval by the state board and state superintendent of the application, all exceptions to county and state board rules, policies and interpretations listed within the plan are granted. The applicant school, group of schools or school district shall proceed to implement the plan as set forth in the approved application and no further plan submissions or approval are required, except that if an innovation zone plan, or a part thereof, may not be implemented unless an exception to a statute is granted by Act of the Legislature, the state board and state superintendent may approve the plan, or the part thereof, only upon the condition that the Legislature acts to grant the exception as provided in this article.

(d) Local solutions dropout prevention and recovery fund.

There is hereby created in the State Treasury a special revenue fund to be known as the "Local Solutions Dropout Prevention and Recovery Fund." The fund shall consist of all moneys received from whatever source to further the purpose of this article. The fund shall be administered by the state board solely for the purposes of this section. Any moneys remaining in the fund at the close of a fiscal year shall be carried forward for use in the next fiscal year. Fund balances shall be invested with the state's consolidated investment fund and any and all interest earnings on these investments shall be used solely for the purposes that moneys deposited in the fund may be used pursuant to this section.