

Highland Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

District of Innovation Plan Committee Members

Shahala Hoelscher - Counselor
Tammy Carper - Elementary Teacher
Leigh Petty - Secondary Teacher
Debbie Martin - Elementary Teacher
Phyllis Wilburn - Special Education Teacher
Cyree Hyde - Reading Interventionist
Ashley Barns - Parent
Abigail Bowen - Teacher Aide
Jennifer Bankhead - Parent
Rebecca Gratehouse - Parent
Karry Owens - Secondary Principal
David Acevedo - Elementary Principal

Timeline

April 5th, 2017

District Advisory Committee met to sign a petition to be considered a District of Innovation

April 10th, 2017

School Board met and voted to pursue a District of Innovation Plan

April 18th, 2017

School Board appointed the District of Innovation Committee

April 20th, 2017

District of Innovation Committee met to develop the District of Innovation Plan

April 21st, 2017

District of Innovation Plan is posted on the school website for public review

Introduction

House Bill 1842, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature during Regular Session 2015, permits eligible Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

Term and Implementation

The term for this plan begins on August 1, 2017 and will remain in effect for five school years unless terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas law. In the event Highland ISD feels other exemptions would benefit the district, the Board of Trustees will nominate a new committee and follow all procedures for amending this plan.

This innovation plan and specific implementation of the plan will be developed by the appropriate campuses and principals. Adjustments to Highland ISD Board Policy and other district policies will be researched, reviewed, and adopted by the Board of Trustees.

Innovations

The district proposes flexibility in the following areas:

Teacher Certification

(TEC §21.003)

Texas Education Code Section §21.003 (a) states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate of permit issued as provided by Subchapter B. In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of their certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification.

Rationale for Exemption

HISD will maintain its current expectations for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certifications for each position. When that is not reasonably possible, however, the exemption from the current state teacher certification requirements will allow the district the flexibility to hire applicants with desired skill sets but no traditional state certification. This will enrich applicant pools in specific content areas if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses. Additionally, this exemption will afford HISD the opportunity to hire professionals in certain trades or vocations such as welding, fine arts, or health sciences to teach the crafts of their trade or vocation.

Contract Service Days

(TEC §21.401)

State law currently requires educators employed on a 10-month contract to provide a minimum of 187 days of service. The passage of §25.081 changed the required days of instruction to minutes of instruction, but the law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees.

Rationale for Exemption

This proposal would reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. This would be an attempt to better align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students. This will enhance teacher recruitment and improve teacher morale.

Uniform Start Date

(TEC §25.0811) (TEC §25.0812)

Texas Education Code §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. Texas Education Code §25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15th. House Bill 2610 signed into law during the Regular Session of the 84th Legislature in 2015 permits school districts to operate a full school year as defined by 75,600 minutes. Section §25.081 (e) of the bill defines a full instructional day as 420 total minutes.

Rationale for Exemption

These laws restrict flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the school district and community. The flexibility to begin instruction earlier in August will enable the district to develop a calendar that best meets the needs of the students in HISD. An earlier start date allows a better balance between semesters, more instructional days prior to mandatory testing, and a school end date prior to June. By starting earlier, Highland ISD can support students who need remediation, as well as students who are entering college or trade school. By ending earlier, students will be able to register for summer courses that begin in early June.

Length of School Day

(TEC §25.081)

State law currently requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day in order to count for ADA calculations, funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.

Rationale for Exemption

Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement will provide HISD the flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction as necessary or beneficial to the students, district, and its stakeholders. Local control over the length of a school day will allow our district to alter the schedule as necessary to allow a late start/early release time to accommodate professional development opportunities or in response to inclement weather without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements.

Exemption from Health Insurance Requirements

T.E.C. § 22.004 is not included in any of the prohibited exemptions that can be included in a District's local innovation plan pursuant to T.E.C. § 12A.004 or the list of the Commissioner's prohibited exemptions in the Texas Administrative Code Title 19, Chapter 102, subchapter JJ, Section 102.1309. Therefore, in order to have the option to offer additional benefits options to employees and to increase local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs, **the district hereby amends the District of Innovation Plan to exempt the district from the health insurance requirements in T.E.C. § 22.004(i)**