



## Dawson ISD INNOVATION PLAN

### Local Innovation Plan 2017-2022

#### INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates including the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On March 20, 2017 the Dawson Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") passed a Resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. On March 20, 2017, the Board appointed a 13-member District of Innovation Committee ("Committee") comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District's stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators. The Committee met on March 29, 2017 to discuss and draft the Local Innovation Plan ("Plan").

## **TERM**

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning July 1, 2017 and ending June 30, 2022, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board will appoint a new committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

### ***Timeline of Events:***

**March 10-** DEIC briefing on possibilities and benefits of DOI

**March 20-** Board holds public hearing to discuss possibility of pursuing DOI/board takes action to pursue DOI/board approves DOI committee members

### **District of Innovation Committee Members**

Stacy Henderson	Superintendent
Robert Bray	Secondary Principal
Andrea Farish	Elementary Principal
Kelly Miller	Business Member
Sheryl Bragg	Counselor
Jennifer Miller	DISD Parent
Brandi Williams	Elementary Teacher
Tana Wade	Elementary Teacher
Elisha Barnett	Elementary Teacher
Tiffany Robinson	DISD Community Member
Susan Henderson	Secondary Teacher
Tracy Woodall	Secondary Teacher
Lisa Murray	Special Education Teacher

**March 20-April 5-** DOI committee develops plan

**April 6-May 8-** Plan posted for public view/Board notifies commissioner of intent to vote on plan

**May 8-May 12-** DOI Committee holds public hearing and votes on DOI plan

**May 18-** Board votes on DOI plan

## **AREAS OF INNOVATION**

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

### **1. School Start and End Date**

*Exemption from: TEC §25.0811;*

*Related Board Policies: EB LEGAL*

#### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

*TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. The current process allows little flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.*

*Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. Several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.*

#### **Innovation Strategies**

- a. Relief from the statute will allow DISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.
- b. Alignment of the district calendar with local universities, local districts with shared services arrangements, ect. will be possible.
- c. Provide for increased local control of the instructional calendar in order to be responsive to community needs.

### **2. Kindergarten – Grade 4 Class Size Reporting Requirement**

*Exemption from: TEC 25.112; TEC 25.113*

*Related Board Policies: EEB LEGAL/LOCAL*

#### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

*TEC 25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.*

*TEC 25.113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this notice.*

**Innovation Strategies:**

a. DISD believes in a low student to teacher ratio in all of its classrooms, and will strive to begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student to teacher ratio of at least 22:1 or less in each K-4 homeroom class, with a goal of starting school at a maximum 20:1 ratio. In the event that any class size exceeds the 24:1 ratio during the school year for longer than 30 days, the superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees, and the campus administration will notify the parents of students in that particular class. Decisions regarding appropriate student to teacher ratios will be made at the local level, taking into consideration the age and grade level of the students, the subject matter of the class, the needs of individual teachers and student groups, and the availability of additional instructional staff members.

b. A TEA waiver request will not be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

**3. Teacher Certification**

*Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.057*

*Relevant Board Policies: DBA LEGAL/LOCAL; DK LEGAL/LOCAL*

***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

*TEC 21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency.*

*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 for Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.*

*TEC 21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the District from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.*

*TEC 21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.*

### **Innovation Strategies**

a. The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

b. The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.

c. An individual with experience in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.

d. Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, and may be subject to increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.

e. Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

f. The superintendent will notify the board annually of the districts exercise of this flexibility.

#### **4. Probationary Contracts**

*Exemption from: TEC 21.102(b)*

*Relevant Board Policies: DCA LEGAL*

##### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

*For experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years. A one year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior to District receipt of state assessment results.*

##### **Innovation Strategies**

For experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years. All other teachers hired in the District may remain on probationary status for three years, and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC 21.102(c).

#### **5. Professional Development / Mentor Teachers**

*Exemption from: TEC 21.451; TEC 21.458*

*Relevant Board Policies: DEAA LEGAL*

##### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

*TEC 21.451 prescribes staff development requirements for educators. These requirements impede the District's ability to provide timely professional development to employees based on newly emerging issues, data, and student needs.*

*TEC 21.458 sets eligibility requirements for teacher mentors and mentees. This provision states that the district may only assign a mentor to a teacher with less than two years of teaching experience, despite the fact that a teacher at any level of experience may benefit from a mentor-mentee relationship. The District needs the flexibility to assign mentors to more experienced teachers in need of assistance. The statute also sets eligibility requirements for mentor teachers, which limits the available pool of mentor teachers.*

### **Innovation Strategies**

- a. The District will exercise local discretion in determining the areas of need, content, duration, and frequency for professional development for its instructional and non-instructional staff.
  
- b. The District will exercise local discretion in assigning teachers to serve as mentors based on a variety of factors, including experience, knowledge, and areas of instruction targeted for improvement or innovation.

## **6. 90 Percent Attendance Rule**

*Exemption from: Texas Education Code 25.092*

*Relevant Board Policies: FEC Local*

### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

Texas Education Code 25.092 requires students to attend class for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered in order to earn class credit or be given a final grade for the class. The 90 Percent Rule is an arbitrary standard, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery.

### ***Innovation Strategies:***

- a. DISD will no longer be required to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This exemption will allow the district to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities.
- b. DISD administrators will be able to award credit to students because they can show they understand the concepts and have mastered the required content, rather than because they have attended a certain number of school days. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum.
- c. Flexibility from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the district by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates.
- d. DISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate content mastery, given this exemption. This exemption supports the districts overarching goals and provides the flexibility needed to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers.

- e. Exempting the District from the 90 Percent Rule does not, in any way, impact or alters existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with a District grading policy adopted pursuant to Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.



## 7. Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator

*Exemption from: Texas Education Code 37.0012*

*Relevant Board Policies: FO Legal and Local*

### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

Senate Bill 107 amended the Texas Education Code by adding Section 37.0012, which requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A. Placing all discipline decisions on one person is counterproductive to building capacity for self-motivated behavior changes, and places a staffing burden on small school districts.

### ***Innovation Strategies:***

- a. DISD seeks exemption from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. DISD's approach to discipline is becoming more collaborative, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration in regard to student discipline, as outlined in the DISD Student Code of Conduct, and will provide campus administrators with flexibility when implementing the standards of conduct expected by the DISD board of trustees and community at large.

## **8. Teacher Contract Days**

*Exemption from: Texas Education Code 21.401*

*Relevant Board Policies: DCB Legal and Local*

### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

Texas Education Code § 21.401 currently requires a contract between the District and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. This inhibits the local districts ability to build a calendar that provides the greatest flexibility to meet the LEA's staff development and planning needs.

### ***Innovation Strategies:***

- a. DISD teacher contract days will be based on the yearly needs of the student calendar, professional development goals and needs, and learning objectives of DISD students.
- b. Flexibility provided by this plan will allow teacher contract days to be a range from, no less than 182 days, and no more than 187 days, in any given staff calendar year. This stems from an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days.
- c. The district wide improvement committee will be provided with calendar options annually that indicate the required number of staff days to provide input and feedback.
- d. The Board of Trustees will be notified annually of the number of staff days in the calendar before taking action on the school calendar.
- e. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days less than 187 days.
- f. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days up to 187, but in a previous year the expectation was for less days. For example, year one of this plan a teacher works 186 days and in year three the calendar changes to 187 days.

## **9. LOCAL SCHOOL HEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL AND HEALTH EDUCATION INSTRUCTION**

*Exemption from: Texas Education Code 28.004*

*Relevant Board Policies:*

### ***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan***

Sec. 28.004 (d) 1 of this code requires the SHAC to meet four times annually. In a small district, the same staff members are required to sit on several different committees thus limiting their ability to effectively serve on those that meet at the same time, or require several meetings throughout the year. Additionally, the members of the SHAC will have a much more intimate relationship with the needs and goals of this committee due to the small number of students it serves, thus not requiring four meetings throughout the year to update its plan and vision.

***Innovation Strategies:***

- a. The District takes exemption from the requirement to hold a minimum of 4 meetings per year under Sec. 28.004(d-1) The DISD committee shall meet at least once each year. Rationale: As a small district committee members are intimately aware of the needs of the District's students and are often able to review and revise the District's plan in a single meeting. This should be a matter for the local board of trustees and the committee members to determine how often they need to meet to meet the district's needs.

**10. Teacher and Administrator Appraisals**

*Exemption from:* Texas Education Code Sections 21.351, 21.352, 21.354, 21.3541 and 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 150

*Relevant Board Policies:*

***Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:***

The DISD's goal of developing exceptional staff requires building capacity towards personalize learning for students through an engaging, innovative learning environment including project-based, blended learning and competency based learning. This goal along with the implementation of the new state T-TESS and T-PESS evaluations require additional time allocated towards a support model surrounded by goal setting, observation and feedback through coaching and professional development. A comprehensive professional development plan that is personalized for staff requires flexibility in the evaluation process mandated by the TEC in the elements and timeline of the evaluation process. These goals have been bound by the laws governing educator appraisals set forth in Texas Education Code Sections 21.351, 21.352, 21.354, 21.3541 and 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 150 to the extent these laws require that state standardized test scores be used as one of the evaluation measures for teachers and administrators.

***Innovation Strategies:***

- a. In order to promote professional development that focuses on individual growth, the District needs to maintain local flexibility to build a system of

evaluating its employees that includes goal setting, observations, and collaborative practices, which may encompass a variety of measurements and strategies available such as T-TESS, T-PESS, PDAS, or a locally developed instrument.

- b. The board of trustees will approve annually the teacher and administrator appraisal method and calendar.