



COMFORT INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Leslie Vann, Superintendent
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Comfort ISD Districts of Innovation Plan 2017 – 2022 Approved May 15, 2017

Background

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allows public school districts to declare exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code by becoming a designated District of Innovation. The District Wide Committee met January 4, 2017 and discussed the several sample innovation plans. Items were selected to be addressed in an innovation plan for Comfort ISD. On Monday, January 9, 2017, during the regularly scheduled board meeting, a public hearing was conducted to consider whether Comfort ISD should develop a plan for designation as a District of Innovation. The Comfort ISD Board of Trustees unanimously passed a motion to consider developing a Local Innovation Plan. The board of trustees appointed a Local Innovation Committee to research, discuss and develop the Local Innovation Plan in January of 2017. The Board appointed the District Wide Committee in April of 2017 to revised the District of Innovation Plan.

A District of Innovation Committee appointed by the Comfort ISD Board of Trustees met on January 23, 2017 to review, discuss, and develop an innovation plan. The final version of the plan was approved by the Local Innovation Plan committee February 6, 2017. The plan was posted online for public viewing and feedback on February 7, 2017 and remained online until March 22, 2017. The Board of Trustees reviewed and approved the plan with a 7-0 vote March 22, 2017. On April 10, 2017, The Board appointed the District Wide Committee (DWC) to serve as the District of Innovation Committee. The DWC met April 13, 2017 and developed a new District of Innovation Plan. The DOI Plan was posted on the Comfort ISD website April 14, 2017. The DWC hosted two public hearings: April 26, 2017 and May 15, 2017. The District of Innovation Committee (Comfort ISD District Wide Committee) met May 15, 2017 and approved the District of Innovation Plan with a majority vote (10-0). The Comfort ISD Board of Trustees approved the District of Innovation Plan May 15, 2017 with 6-0 vote.



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Local Innovation Committee-District Wide Committee (Site Base Team)

Leslie Vann, Superintendent	Katherine Kuentler, High School Principal
Randy Hector, Operations Director	Michael Michalec, Teacher
Lori Hohmann, Teacher	Rawlyn Richter, Teacher
Karla Dietz, Teacher	Barbara Pankratz, Teacher
Jean Smith, Teacher	Emile Kelley, Paraprofessional
Shelly Pankratz, Paraprofessional	Kari Evans, Paraprofessional
Veronica Barraza, Parent	Amy Gestweidt, Parent
Allison Hudson, Parent	Alfredo Avalos, Business
Dinah Zike, Business	Paula Bohnert, Business
Saide Heitzman, Community	Rosemary Collins, Community
Dr. Lance Moore, Community	Aspen Smith, Student
Bailey Dulas, Student	

Comfort ISD Board of Trustees

Brad Spenrath, President	Ron Haffner, Vice-President
Lilly Edwards, Secretary	Charlotte Kneupper
Zach Sweeney	Todd Wright
Joe Paolilli	

Comfort ISD

Districts of Innovation and Exemptions from Provisions of the Texas Education Code under House Bill 1842

This plan is specific to the exemptions as outlined. The district intends to follow the Texas Education Code in all other areas. If at some point it is decided that changes or additional exemptions should be considered, as per the Districts of Innovation process, the district will reconvene the District of Innovation Planning committee to explore the request.

House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of their unique student populations, in order to prepare them for success and lifelong learning. As a District of Innovation, Comfort ISD will be able to implement our Strategic Plan with the increased flexibility and freedom necessary to personalize learning experiences. An essential tenet of



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personalization is that every child experiences school differently. In a way, personalization provides a unique “school” for every child. Thus, we must have the ability to make important educational decisions for our students at the local level.

We must also be able to maximize our responsiveness to our district’s vision for the future. As we developed our Strategic Plan and this Innovation Plan, our community has been involved throughout the process, giving ongoing feedback on what they want for their children in order to prepare them to be positive contributors to the world, a world which is constantly changing. As we begin to transform our community’s dreams for their children into reality, we must be positioned to maximize the opportunities and minimize the barriers that could otherwise preclude us from doing our best work on their behalf.

Our Strategic Plan requires Comfort ISD to evolve and think radically differently about such critical systemic components as how we are organized, how we deliver instruction, how we recruit and retain top talent, how we engage and support our families, what experiences we provide, and how we grow continually as a learning organization. To think differently, we must be able to respond differently. Leveraging the limited freedom and flexibility afforded by the Districts of Innovation designation will assure we are empowered to do so.

Under HB 1842, districts may identify certain requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) “that inhibit the goals of the plan and from which the district should be exempted on adoption of the plan. . .” Because CISD’s Strategic Plan and its local Innovation Plan are comprehensive and touch numerous areas in the TEC, and because CISD seeks to maximize local control of educational decisions for students, CISD seeks exemption from the following permissible provisions of the TEC as allowed in the statute:

Term

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning May 16, 2017 and ending May 16, 2022, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Comfort ISD 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 Texas Education Code, Subchapter 12A, the Comfort ISD Board of Trustees will nominate a new committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment. Any amendment adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan. The District will not implement two separate plans at any one time. Amendments may be reviewed and considered annually at the regularly scheduled May Board meeting.



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District of Innovation Timeline:

Timeframe	Activity/Task	Date Executed
December 2016	Information provided to Administrative Staff and DWC	December 15, 2016
January 2017	DWC Meeting: Discuss Districts of Innovation and set preliminary items of innovation –Approval	January 4, 2017
February 2017	District of Innovation Meeting – Draft	February 6, 2017
April 2017	CISD Board –Resolution, Public Hearing, Committee Appointment	April 10, 2017
April 2017	Post Plan of CISD Website	April 13, 2017
April 2017	Notify Commissioner	April 13, 2017
April 2017	District Wide Committee -District Input Meeting	April 26, 2017 4:30 pm
May 2017	District Wide Committee- Host Public Meeting Approved 10-0	May 15, 2017 4:30 pm
May 2017	Board Action — Approved 6-0	May 15, 2017
May 2017 – May 2022	Implementation of Plan	May 15, 2017

Comfort ISD -District of Innovation 2017-2022



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Texas Education Code Exemptions

District staff in conjunction with the Local Innovation Committee reviewed the subchapters of the Texas Education Code to determine which permissible exemptions currently inhibit the district from maximizing the educational opportunities of the students who attend Comfort ISD.

I. 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 and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.

Rationale for Exemption

Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Comfort the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum number for the school year.

Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling (above and beyond the 6-day maximum as needed) 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. This would allow the district the flexibility to schedule non-instructional days into the schedule to allow for teachers to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development.

Comfort ISD does not have any intentions to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days would be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar, which is approved by the Board of Trustees and published and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year and continuously published using school media.



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II. 90 Percent Attendance Rule (TEC §25.092)

State law mandates a student may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered. In addition, if a student is in attendance greater than 75 percent and less than 90 percent may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the campus administrator and meets the instructional requirements for the class.

Rationale for Exemption

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage. Districts should have the option to set their own requirement. Local districts need the flexibility to set attendance requirements which reflect their specific situations and expectations.

Abstaining from the requirement means the district won't have to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. The flexibility can allow for local boards to set higher expectations for attendance while promoting student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in extracurricular activities.

III. Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.053 and §21.057)

State law states that a person may not be employed as a teacher 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 of Educator Certification.

Rationale for Exemption

The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high demand, dual credit, as well as career and technical courses. Comfort ISD is located in a rural area which limits course offerings and creates a need to utilize creative instructional methods district wide. Allowing the local district control over certification requirements in order to better enable



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students to obtain the educational benefits of such course offering, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law.

Guidelines

1. The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to instruct and supervise students out of their certified field. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses in which would qualify this individual to teach this subject.
2. An Individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit a request to the superintendent with all the individual's credentials. The superintendent may approve the request. If approved, the superintendent will report the action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual beginning employment. Local teacher certificates will be issued for one year. The employee will be at-will.

IV. Uniform Start Date (TEC §25.0811)

State law currently prohibits school districts from starting class before the fourth Monday in August, unless they are year-round districts.

Rationale for Exemption

The flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the need of the students, the school, and the community. Additionally, the ability to change the school start date can also help to better balance the amount of days in each semester and to better align with dual-credit college courses in the Fall, Spring and Summer semesters.

Comfort ISD will start school no earlier than the third Monday in August, end the first semester prior to the December break, and will end the second semester prior the first Friday in June.



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V. **Teacher/Administrator Appraisals (DNA, DNA-Local) (TEC 21.203, 21.352)**

The state of Texas has used the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) teacher appraisal system since 1997. The new teacher appraisal system called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) is now in place. The domains within these systems are developed by the State to meet the needs of the entire State of Texas. These systems require that state standardized test scores be used as one of the evaluation measures for teachers and administrators.

Rationale for Exemption

The current T-TESS evaluation tool is a very effective assessment for teachers who teach in a normal classroom setting. However, the model does not fit all teaching assignments. The exemption would allow the Comfort ISD Administrative team to develop an alternate evaluation tool for teachers assigned to identified courses. (Examples include but are not limited to: Content Mastery, Life Skills, Gifted and Talented, ELL, and Inclusion.

Summary:

The direction provided by this District of Innovation Plan is an important step forward to ensure Comfort ISD develops and supports our students, employees and families in a more personalized, more effective and strategically aligned way. Moving our system toward the more personalized environment our students deserve will enable us to better prepare them according to their individualized needs and their unique passions, gifts, and talents. Through HB 1842, Comfort ISD will be positioned to leverage increased flexibility to make the best decisions for our children because we will be able to make them locally.

In most cases, activation of exemptions from the TEC will require the revision of Comfort ISD policies. CISD will implement an enhanced local policy development process that is rigorous, transparent, and inclusive of stakeholder input through the District Wide Committee. The district has developed and communicated a detailed implementation plan for the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan. This District of Innovation Plan will be seamlessly implemented as part of the Strategic Plan.