

Districts of Innovation

A Presentation to the Region One Financial
Advisory Council

By Lynn Moak



Overview

During the 84th Texas Legislature, HB 1842 included language that allowed school districts with **acceptable academic accountability ratings** to be designated as “districts of innovation.”

Benefits in Becoming a District of Innovation

- Allows districts to plan to improve students' educational outcomes with local input and less regulatory control from Austin.
- Can serve as a way to market district schools to parents and students that is competitive with private and charter schools.
- Could be a mechanism for districts to access some programmatic and administrative freedoms that charters currently have.
- May facilitate and support efforts to reform some of the lowest-performing campuses in school districts.

TEA Timeline

- Although HB 1842 is currently the law, the Texas Education Agency (Agency) has yet to publish any rules or guidance that would allow a school district to designate itself as a district of innovation.
- TEA staff expect draft rules to be issued Spring 2016.
- Some districts are beginning conversations with their school boards, staffs and communities on the possibility of becoming districts of innovation in the 2016-2017 academic year.

District of Innovation Plan Requirements

HB 1842 specifies that “a local innovation plan must provide for a comprehensive educational program for the district, which may include:

- innovative curriculum, instructional methods, and provisions regarding community participation, campus governance, and parental involvement;
- modifications to the school day or year;
- provisions regarding the district budget and sustainable program funding;
- accountability and assessment measures that exceed the requirements of state and federal law; and
- any other innovations prescribed by the board of trustees.”

District of Innovation Plan Requirements

- The plan also must identify the sections of the Texas Education Code from which the district exempts itself in its plan.
- HB 1842 prohibits exemptions from certain sections of the Texas Education Code:
 - a state or federal requirement applicable to an open-enrollment charter school operating under Subchapter D, Chapter 12 (examples include PEIMS reporting, special education, retention of student records, use of public funds, etc.);
 - Subchapters A, C, D, and E under Chapter 11 that pertain to accreditation, responsibilities of a school district and board of trustees
 - state curriculum and graduation requirements adopted under Chapter 28; and
 - academic and financial accountability and sanctions under Chapter 39.

District of Innovation Plan Requirements

- HB 1842 essentially gives districts the operational flexibility of a charter school.
- The following are noteworthy sections of the Texas Education Code not applicable to charter schools that should be examined as possible areas to include in a district's innovation plan:
 - Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code governs how districts hire and evaluate staff, and the types of contracts, job descriptions and salary requirements for staff.
 - School Admission and Attendance Policies, including school start date and 22:1 requirement
 - Chapter 37 of the Education Code, which deals with student discipline

Process to Become a District of Innovation

#1

A school district is eligible for designation as a district of innovation only if the district's most recent performance rating under the state's accountability system reflects at least acceptable performance.



#2

The process to be designated as a district of innovation must be initiated by: (1) a resolution adopted by the board of trustees of the district; or (2) a petition signed by a majority of the members of a district-level committee.

Process to Become a District of Innovation

#3

The board of trustees must then hold a public hearing to consider whether the district should develop a local innovation plan for the designation of the district as a "district of innovation" or decline to pursue this option.



#4

If the board decides to pursue the option, it must appoint a committee to develop a local innovation plan.

Process to Become a District of Innovation

#5

The final version of the proposed plan must be available on the district's Internet website for at least 30 days.



#6

The board of trustees must notify the commissioner of the board's intention to vote on adoption of the proposed plan.

Process to Become a District of Innovation

#7

The district-level committee must hold a public meeting to consider the final version of the proposed plan and has approved the plan by a majority vote of the committee members.



#8

A board of trustees may adopt a proposed local innovation plan by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of the board. The plan may be amended or revoked.

Process to Become a District of Innovation

#9

The district of innovation designation term may not exceed five years and may be terminated by the commissioner if the district fails to meet academic and/or financial standards for two years. The commissioner may allow the district to amend the plan. After three years of failing to meet academic and/or financial standards, the commissioner shall terminate the local innovation plan.

Potential Issues

- The state assumes that a district can develop innovative and out-of-the-box policies with no additional funding sources.
- If the Agency disallows waivers for critical areas within curriculum and assessment — two areas that have great impact on the educational environment of a school, including materials, technology, teacher training, etc. — the potential for truly innovative practices may be unduly limited.
- The complexity of receiving waivers and ensuring that all departments in the Agency are aware of specific changes for each district.
- Teacher associations throughout the state were opposed to the innovation district bill and administration must be sensitive to the strong beliefs surrounding current teacher contracts and benefits.



HB 4 - High-Quality Prekindergarten Grant

Timeline of HB 4 Implementation

- February 26 - Grants made available
- March 7 - Feedback due on Proposed Rules in Texas Register
- April 1 - Adopted Rules Published in Texas Register
- April 8 - Deadline for LEAs to submit grant applications to TEA
- Mid-April - Preliminary Funding Amount Notification
- June - Confirm participation in grant
- July - NOGA with FY 2016 funding amount
- Fall - NOGA with FY 2017 funding amount

Potential Issues with HB 4

- Funding is a maximum of \$1,500 based on ADA – there is no floor
- Districts do not know how much funding they will receive prior to due date of applications.
 - If funding amount is low, how will districts cover the costs to meet all the high-quality components in their grant application?

Potential Issues with HB 4

- A prekindergarten teacher must be certified and have an additional credential.
 - Some options for the additional credential may require funds (e.g., courses, materials, substitutes when teacher attends training)
 - Some credentials (like the CDA) are more focused on classroom management and social/emotional aspects of prekindergarten
- Rules are heavily focused on family engagement and not student-centered.
 - Family engagement plans must be evaluated, which can be difficult to do
 - No discussion of how family engagement plans in HB 4 will align with family engagement plans currently required in Title I schools and in Campus Improvement Plans so may be duplication of reporting



Lynn M. Moak

Daniel T. Casey
Partners

Curtis Culwell, Ed. D.
Terry Faucheux
Rebecca Flores
Chris Grammer
Kathy Mathias
Bob Popinski
Larry Throm
Maria Whitsett, Ph. D.
Joe Wisnoski
Associates

Thomas V. Alvis, Ph. D.
Larry Groppel, Ed. D.
Alicia Thomas, Ph. D.
Mary McKeown-Moak, Ph. D.
Consultants

Susan Moak
Kari Ruehman
Administrative Staff

400 West 15th Street, Suite 1410, Austin, Texas 78701-1648
Ph. (512) 485-7878 Fax (512) 485-7888
www.moakcasey.com