

A DISTRICT PLAN FOR INNOVATION & LOCAL CONTROL

2017-2022



*Designed in
accordance with
Texas HB 1842*

***"Innovation is creativity
in action."***



SUMMARY POINTS: A DISTRICT PLAN FOR INNOVATION AND LOCAL CONTROL

“Innovation is creativity in action.”

- The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in Spring 2015, providing public school districts the opportunity to become Districts of Innovation. To qualify, an eligible school district must adopt a five-year innovation plan according to the Texas Education Code.

Districts of Innovation may be exempt from state statutes to:

- take greater local control in decision-making about the educational and instructional model for students;
- have increased autonomy from state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- be empowered to innovate and plan differently – to create and implement transformative processes.

Why is Hudson ISD seeking the state’s official designation as a District of Innovation?

- The Hudson ISD Board of Trustees resolved in October 2016 to seek designation as a District of Innovation.
- This plan supports exemplary practices and local decision-making processes to improve student learning.
- The board appointed a District of Innovation Committee, represented by a majority of classroom teachers. The plan was drafted, placed under 45-day public review, approved by the district committee, and approved by the board of trustees.

Under this plan, what might innovation look like at Hudson ISD?

- In this case, innovation does not necessarily mean ambitious new initiatives beyond the school district’s current 21st Century Plan. Instead, it would signify Hudson ISD has achieved the privilege and flexibility to exercise more creative local control over existing quality programs without some statutory constraints.

The approved plan will:

- Maintain reasonable class sizes in grades K-4. Except in unique and extenuating circumstances and only with the Board of Trustees’ consent, Hudson ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to preserve an important student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 per K-4 homeroom class.
- Determine a flexible school start date. Hudson ISD will determine on an annual basis its own local starting date for the first semester, not to precede the second Monday in August of any given year, instead of the Texas statute that requires districts to begin a new school year on the fourth Monday of August.
- Allow alternatives to educator certification for distinctive subjects. When a certified educator is not found for a unique circumstance or innovative class, the school district may allow a non-certified professional to teach OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field without the traditional state credentials.
- Adjust instructional minutes and school day length. Hudson ISD will make every effort to meet the goal of 75,600 instructional minutes per year, but may want to approach this total more creatively without being confined to either 420 minutes or seven hours of instruction every day.
 - Implement a local teacher and administrator appraisal system. Hudson ISD will develop a localized appraisal process for teachers and administrators that is better aligned to the Hudson ISD’s 21st Century Learning Plan and expectations of the district.
- Allow the board to make adjustments to teacher contract days for purposes of school closures, etc.
- Allow for additional flexibility regarding student attendance and course credit.

HUDSON ISD PLAN FOR INNOVATION & LOCAL CONTROL

INTRODUCTION



Hudson ISD is committed to providing high quality instruction in an environment conducive to learning. The district believes that the current state assessment alone is a poor measurement of student learning, and it only serves as a single data point among many more reliable indicators of academic measurement. Hudson ISD is one of the few districts that has truly embraced the value of a quality educational approach as envisioned by the Public Education Visioning Institute.

Hudson ISD continues to intentionally and strategically design a school system that: engages the digital generation; assesses student progress and growth using multiple, appropriate measures of assessment; embraces accountability to our community; transforms our school into a learning organization; and advocates local control to be restored to community schools.

House Bill 1842 passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in Spring 2015 provides Texas public school districts the opportunity to be designated as *Districts of Innovation*. To qualify and access allowable exemptions, an eligible school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Texas Education Code, Chapter 12A.

Districts of Innovation may be released from several statutes to have:

- greater local control in making decisions about the educational and instructional model for students;
- increased autonomy and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- empowerment to innovate and think differently.

**Districts are not exempt from statutes that address curriculum, assessment and graduation requirements as well as academic and financial accountability.*

THE PROCESS

On October 20, 2016, the Hudson Independent School District's Board of Trustees passed a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation. Immediately following the resolution adoption, the district held a public hearing to provide an overview of the process, concepts, and benefits of such a designation.

The board also appointed a District of Innovation Committee on October 20 with a charge to begin the process of drafting a local innovation plan. The committee consisted of a majority (60%) of classroom teachers with the remaining members being campus and district administrators and directors. The committee began work on November 2, 2016 to draft a plan of innovation.

The proposed plan was posted to the district website for public comment in December and remained posted for well over the 30-day requirement. A district collective of campus SBDM committees voted unanimously to approve the proposed plan.

On February 3rd, 2017, the district did notify the Commissioner of Education regarding the Board's intent to vote on the proposed plan. On February 16th, 2017, the Hudson ISD Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the DOI Plan as submitted.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Peavy Primary:

Nancy Ramsey-teacher
Robin Futch-teacher
Megan Murry-teacher
Suzanne Jones-principal

Bonner Elementary:

Glenda Merrell-teacher
Brandi Lankford-teacher
Daynette Strong-teacher
Scott Mackey-principal

Middle School:

Kim Ray-teacher
Amy Kendrick-teacher

Terri Reed-teacher

Richard Crenshaw-principal

High School:

Kathleen Hughes-teacher
Martha Robbins-teacher
Suzanne Ratcliff-teacher
John Courtney-principal

District:

Donny Webb-admin
Lisa Jeffrey-admin
Josh Smith-technology
P.T. Walters-admin/CTE

***60% Classroom Teachers/ 40% Administration**

****Classroom teachers selected staff or approved volunteers for the committee.**

Approved Actions of the Plan of Innovation

As a result of this plan, Hudson ISD will apply the following innovative governance guidelines to the unique, local and instructional needs of its students and community.

1. MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES IN GRADES K-4

(TEC 25.111) (TEC 25.112a-g) (TEC 25.113a-b) (EEB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Code requires districts to maintain 22 students or less in kindergarten through 4th-grade classes. A school district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for each class that exceeds this limit. These waivers are rarely rejected by TEA, making the process primarily for awareness purposes and to preserve a more personal instructional environment.

State law also requires districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. Sometimes during the course of a school year, due to shifting enrollments, a class may return to a smaller student-to-teacher ratio before or after the waiver is formally granted, thus negating the notice or causing parents and staff unnecessary concern.

Hudson ISD certainly recognizes reasonable class size plays a positive role in the classroom, and acknowledges the intent of the state requirements. However, class size must be balanced with the logistics and timing of adding staff, available campus resources or space, and the optimal teacher-to-student ratio given the total number, age and needs of students. Often, it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which create a more personal instructional environment. Most importantly, research shows the teacher in the classroom has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. This exemption does not disregard the intent of class size ratio requirements, but rather, allows Hudson ISD the local control to determine class size.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. In accordance with TEC §25.112, Hudson ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 per K-4 homeroom class. Also consistent with TEC §25.113, if, after consideration of the factors outlined below, any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will inform and obtain consent from the Board of Trustees and will notify parents of affected students.
- B. If, during the school year, a K-4 homeroom exceeds 22:1, the administration will have 30 school days to consider:
 1. The subject/age to be taught, the teaching methodology to be used and any need for individual instruction in the class;
 2. Available space and resources;
 3. Whether another teacher should be hired (thus creating a new classroom);

4. Whether a teaching assistant could be added to the homeroom class; or
 5. Whether keeping the class intact is more advantageous than separating students, in which case the class size may slightly exceed 22:1.
- C. Consistent with TEC §25.112, TEC §25.114 and TEA guidance, the 22:1 ratio does not apply to physical education or fine arts classes. In such subjects, Hudson ISD will consider student/teacher ratios appropriate to implement the curriculum and ensure student and staff safety.
 - D. Additionally, consistent with TEC §25.112, Hudson ISD will not be required to seek consent from the Board of Trustees for a homeroom classroom that may exceed 22:1 during the last 12 weeks of the school year.
 - E. A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio, although the Hudson ISD Board of Trustees must still consent and parents must still be notified.
 - F. The district will not allow the average class size per grade level (K-4) to exceed 23:1.

2. DETERMINE A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL START DATE

(TEC §25.0811a) (EB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Code states a school district may not begin student instruction before the fourth Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to begin earlier, even as early as the second Monday in August.

The start-date waiver was eventually removed when the legislature determined school districts should begin the first semester no earlier than the fourth Monday of August, with no exceptions. The current process allows no flexibility in the design and balancing of instructional semesters to meet the needs of students or the wishes of the local board of trustees, who represent community interests in this matter.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Hudson ISD will determine on an annual basis the local starting date of the first semester, not to precede the second Monday in August of any given year.
- B. The annual calendar will be submitted by the District Calendar Committee and approved by the board of trustees.

3. ALLOW ALTERNATIVES TO EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION FOR DISTINCTIVE SUBJECTS

(TEC §21.003a) (TEC §21.057a-e) (DK LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Codes state a person may not be employed as an educator by a school district unless the individual holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. In the

event a school district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position, or a teacher is teaching a subject outside her or his certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or the State Board of Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district, especially for innovative classes where certification may not exist or educators with those credentials may not be readily available.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. In exceptional circumstances, when a certified educator is not found for a unique or innovative class, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow a non-certified yet highly qualified professional to teach OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field for which she or he is not credentialed by the state.
- B. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what qualifications the individual possesses to teach the proposed subject. Emergency or financial situations creating the need for this assignment should also be noted.
- C. Whenever possible, lesson plans or curriculum guides to support the uncertified yet highly qualified educator will be developed or provided in partnership with certified teachers in the same field.
- D. In the event an uncertified yet highly qualified educator or professional is assigned to a course, the superintendent will inform and obtain consent from the board of trustees and will notify parents of students who benefit from this decision.
- E. A teacher certification waiver, state permit applications or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency.

4. ADJUST INSTRUCTIONAL MINUTES AND SCHOOL DAY LENGTH

(TEC §25.081(e)) (TEC §25.082(a)) (EB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Codes define the length of the instructional day as “420 minutes of instruction” or “seven hours each day including intermissions and recesses.” The intent of this code is to standardize across all districts the amount of time students are engaged in classroom learning. The school code also allows school districts and charter schools to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disaster, flood, extreme weather conditions, fuel curtailment or another calamity.

Hudson ISD believes flexibility in use of minutes as well as the length of the school day will support teachers and staff who participate in relevant professional development, perfecting their craft, deepening their content knowledge and analyzing student data. In addition – particularly at the

elementary level – flexibility in both instructional minutes and the length of the school day will protect all-important parent-teacher conferences especially in the event of inclement weather days, which may impact cumulative instructional minutes allocated over the course of a school year.

Hudson ISD also serves students through a very unique, multi-district dropout recovery program. The alternative campus, Stubblefield Learning Center, has been in operation since 1996 and has graduated over 1500 students that would have most likely been high school dropouts. This program does require very flexible scheduling due to the personalized nature of the students' instructional plan. Release from this statute will help maximize the effectiveness of the program.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Hudson ISD will make an effort to maintain the total of 75,600 minutes of instruction per year, but seeks an exemption from these statutes as necessary so it may approach the 75,600-minute goal in a more creative manner without being confined to either 420 minutes or seven hours of instruction every day. This will offer campuses greater flexibility in creating daily/weekly instructional schedules that better meet the needs of the students we serve.
- B. This exemption will allow for local control regarding the early dismissal of students for various purposes. Early release days may be used for additional professional development, unique instructional arrangements, teacher collaboration, teacher/parent conferences, releasing prior to a holiday and other special occasions, or other school related activities.

5. IMPLEMENT A LOCAL TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR APPRAISAL SYSTEM

(TEC §21.351)(TEC §21.352) (TEC 25.354) (DNA LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

New state-wide teacher appraisal systems, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), are being introduced for the first time since 1997. While these systems are designed to meet the needs of the entire state, they do not adequately align with the standards and expectations in Hudson ISD. These systems also require state standardized test scores be used as the primary evaluation measure for both teachers and administrators. The district seeks exemption from current requirements of the appraisal system.

Local Innovation Strategy:

- A. Hudson ISD will develop a new localized appraisal system which will better align with the Hudson ISD 21st Century Plan and local expectations. This exemption would allow local flexibility to evaluate various performance measures, including classroom observations, goal setting and tracking, and collective (not individual) student growth progress toward identified learning objectives.

6. ADJUSTMENT OF TEACHER CONTRACT DAYS (*for emergency purposes only*)

(TEC §21.401) (DC LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Code states that a contract between the district and an educator must be for a minimum of ten months of service. An educator employed under a ten-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. The Commissioner may reduce the number of days of service, but such a reduction does not reduce an educator's salary.

District calendars are designed to maintain the minimum total of 75,600 minutes of instruction per year. However, due to individual campus schedules, excess minutes of instruction may be 'banked' and used as required make-up time in the event of bad weather or emergencies requiring the closing of a campus or district. Although this flexibility has been allowed for required student attendance, there was no flexibility that impacted teacher contract days. Districts should have the option to reduce the number of contract days for educators when bad weather or emergencies arise.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Hudson ISD will continue its very conservative practice regarding the implementation of bad weather/emergency closures. In the event that inclement weather or emergencies arise requiring the closure of a campus or entire district, the Board of Trustees shall have the option to reduce the number of contract days by an amount less than or equal to the number of attendance days adjusted for student instruction.
- B. If the Board of Trustees makes any change to reduce the number of contracted days, such a reduction may not reduce an educator's salary.

**Clarification: The adjustment of teacher contract days is ONLY for emergencies/special circumstances that would allow the local school board to approve, as opposed to approval by the Texas Commissioner of Education. Example: If school were to close for an extended period of time (but within the 75,600 minute instructional requirement), the board would have authority to reduce teacher contract days. This effort would be to minimize the need to 'find work or training' just to fulfill the days required for teacher contract days. This will only be used for very special and rare circumstances.*

7. Student Attendance and Course Credit

(TEC 25.092) (FEC (legal and local))

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Code restricts a student from receiving credit or a final grade in a course of study in which the student was not in attendance for at least 90% of the days the course was offered. If the student attends the course at least 75% of the time, the student may be awarded credit if he/she successfully completes a plan of action determined by the principal. An established attendance committee must hear petitions for credit from students that failed to meet the plan of action. The committee may approve the award of credit based on extenuating circumstances.

Hudson ISD does have rigorous course options with high expectations. Students are highly encouraged to stretch their academic capability by taking advanced level courses. If a student attempts to take a course, but it is later determined that a different course of study is most appropriate, we feel the principal should be allowed to approve a schedule change without regard to developing an individual plan of action. The student will be required to meet the instructional requirements of the new course in order to obtain an expected level of mastery of the curriculum. Additionally, this would apply for a student that transfers to the district during the school year with a course of study that may not be offered at the campus.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Regardless of the percentage of days a student is in attendance, the principal may approve a schedule change and award course credit if it is determined that the student sufficiently meets the instructional requirements of the course of study.

If the principal does not award course credit for a student due to poor attendance (less than 90%), the student may petition for a review and decision by the Attendance Committee. If the committee denies the credit or final grade, then the student may appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees. The decision of the Board is final.