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South Texas Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

August 2017 through August 2022

With Amendment

Board Approved Unanimously on August 3, 2017

Board Amended Unanimously on May 26, 2020

District of Innovation Overview

In the spring of 2015, the 84th Legislative Session passed HB 1842 creating TEC Chapter 12A. This law was designed to promote the development and implementation of innovative practices by providing traditional independent school districts with increased flexibility through statute exemptions typically reserved for open enrollment charter schools. Districts who choose to capitalize on this opportunity must collaboratively develop a local innovation plan that articulates the statute from which the district is seeking an exemption and the identified innovative practice that will be implemented as a result. Although statutes pertaining to academic and financial accountability, graduation requirements and the teaching of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills are ineligible for exemption, local innovation plans provide districts with a variety of benefits including:

- Increased local control;
- Increased flexibility to meet the unique learning needs of the students being served including accelerated learning;
- Relief from unfunded state mandates that divert local tax payer dollars to practices that have minimal impact on student achievement; and
- Increased opportunities to be innovative and transformational in programming design to ensure that students are prepared for college, career and citizenship.

Term

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning from the point of final board adoption (August 3, 2017) and ending five years from the date of adoption (August 3, 2022), unless terminated or amended earlier by the STISD Board of Directors 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 select 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. STISD will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications to the Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

Implementation

This District of Innovation Plan is designed to create parameters within which the District will operate, in order to provide additional student opportunities and improve learning. Specific implementation will be part of the annual district and campus planning process. The Board continues to have final decision over the specific implementation of this Plan. Adjustments to Board Policy will be researched and adopted where appropriate. The District will continue to seek innovative instructional arrangements to meet the growing and changing needs of each individual student.

Timeline

Tuesday, October 25, 2016 - STISD Board Meeting

- Board of Directors approved resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of using HB 1842 to become a District of Innovation.

Wednesday, November 23 and Sunday, November 27, 2016 – Newspaper Publication

- Published public notification in the local newspapers that a public hearing on local District of Innovation Plan would be held; including date, time, and location.

Tuesday, November 29, 2016 – Public Hearing and STISD Board Meeting

- Public Hearing – Conducted a public hearing to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation.
- Board Meeting – Approved a motion to pursue local District of Innovation Plan. Board of Directors selected the District Educational Improvement Council members as the District of Innovation Committee.

Conduct District of Innovation Committee and Sub-Committee Meetings

- January 9, 2017 – First Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee
- February 13, 2017 – Second Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee and the First Meeting of the District of Innovation Sub-Committees.
- March 20, 2017 - Third Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee and the Second Meeting of the District of Innovation Sub-Committees.

- April 10, 2017 - Third Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee. Full District of Innovation Committee hears reports from sub-committees and reviews the draft of plan.

Communication of proposed District of Innovation Plan

- March 2017, April 2017, and May 2017 – Proposed District of Innovation Plan is posted on the district website.
- April 2017 – Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent hold faculty discussions on each STISD campus to review and hear feedback on the proposed District of Innovation Plan.

Monday, May 5, 2017 – District of Innovation Committee Meeting

- District of Innovation Committee met to review, discuss, and finalize the proposed District of Innovation Plan.
- The District of Innovation Committee votes to recommend the proposed District of Innovation Plan to the STISD Board of Directors for approval.

Tuesday, May 23, 2017 – STISD Board Meeting

- Board of Directors reviewed the first reading of the District of Innovation Plan.
- Board of Directors acted upon notification to the Commissioner of Education of the board's intention to vote on adoption of the District of Innovation Plan.

Tuesday, June 20, 2017 – STISD Board Meeting

- Public Hearing – Conducted public hearing on the proposed District of Innovation Plan.
- Board of Directors reviewed the second reading of the District of Innovation Plan.

Thursday August 3, 2017 – STISD Board Meeting

- Board of Directors acted unanimously to adopt the District of Innovation Plan.
- Board of Directors acted unanimously to notify the Commissioner of Education of the board's action upon the District of Innovation Plan.

Comprehensive Educational Program

The District of Innovation Plan is based upon the South Texas Independent School District Strategic Plan 2017-2022. The District's educational program is guided by the beliefs, call to action, learner outcomes, learner profile, goals, specific results, and student achievement outcomes found in the District Strategic Plan.

Our Beliefs

We Believe:

- Commitment from all stakeholders play a role in student success
- Student engagement and exposure to life experiences is vital to function in a real-world setting.
- Education is key to success in life
- Learning is continuous and lifelong
- That respect of community, culture and family values equip us to acknowledge diversity in a global society.
- Collaborative relationships are important for learning.
- Schools exist to create opportunities for critical thinking and that it is essential to make teaching individualized for all diverse learners.
- That adapting to changing technological, industrial and societal structures is crucial to expanded learning.

Our Call to Action

Each student thrives in real world challenges as a visionary in a global society.

Our Learner Outcomes

- Each learner will consistently demonstrate courtesy, compassion and ethical values within the learning environment.
- Each learner will graduate prepared for higher education.
- Each learner will communicate in a variety of ways.
- Each learner will demonstrate academic growth every year.
- Each learner will engage in authentic career ready experiences.
- Each learner will use multiple resources, including technology, that enhance their ability to learn.
- Each learner will set comprehensive goals and develop a holistic plan annually.
- Each learner will apply critical thinking and problem solving skills within

real world challenges in every course and extracurricular activity.

- Each learner will thrive in hands-on, diverse and relevant learning activities in all learning environments.
- Each learner will demonstrate the soft and hard skills to be successful in a global society.

Our Learner Profile

Resiliency:

- Flexible
- Optimistic
- Dedicated
- Self-motivated
- Persistent
- Tenacious
- Self-disciplined
- Inventive

Communicator

- Networkable
- Persuasive
- Topical (current events)
- Culturally inclusive
- Multilingual
- Collaborative
- A listener
- Confident

Problem Solving

- Imaginative
- Innovative
- Open-minded
- Inquisitive
- Imaginative
- Resourceful
- A critical thinker
- Logical
- Observant

Integrity

- Ethical
- Respectful
- Transparent
- Honest
- Understanding
- Accountable

Our Goals

- Goal 1: We will promote and market our district to create broad based community awareness attracting families to STISD.
- Goal 2: We will expand current programs and partnerships, as well as develop new ones, that support and enrich all of our students.
- Goal 3: We will design, implement and evaluate support systems that attract and retain students.
- Goal 4: We will implement and evaluate aligned curriculum, instruction and assessments that provides real world experiences and profound learning for all students.
- Goal 5: We will expand and create social and extracurricular opportunities that enrich all students' lives.

Our Specific Results

- 1.1 Create a branding campaign promoting STISD as a premiere educational institution.
- 1.2 Implement a system designed to maximize district enrollment.
- 1.3 Expand multiple platforms district wide to attract and engage future STISD families.
- 2.1 Expand networks of strategic external partnerships to enhance and enrich student experiences.
- 2.2 Develop a range of supplemental programs that diversify and expand current program offerings.
- 3.1 Create a mentoring system that will be utilized throughout the district.
- 3.2 Create a collaborative early intervention system consisting of students, staff and parents.
- 3.3 Develop a system for parental involvement that engages all parents.
- 3.4 Create a logistical support system that addresses the geographic diversity of the district.
- 4.1 Align curriculum, instruction and assessment vertically and horizontally throughout the district.
- 4.2 Utilize academic and real world data to evaluate and revise curricular content, instruction and assessment.
- 4.3 Implement a customized professional development plan that ensures profound learning across all classrooms.
- 4.4 Expand collaborative learning models that integrate real world experiences.
- 5.1 Create district coordination and communication systems pertaining to social and extracurricular activities for students and parents.
- 5.2 Create a variety of social and extracurricular activities that appeal to all students.
- 5.3 Create a district-wide intramural program to encourage student interaction across campuses.
- 5.4 Create a catalog of student enrichment opportunities that are accessible within the structure of the school day.

Our Student Achievement Outcomes

- 100 percent of STISD junior high students will earn 3 high school credits by the end of their 8th grade year.
- 90 percent of STISD incoming student cohort will graduate successfully from a STISD campus.
- Student engagement in school will be evidenced by a 98% or higher overall annual attendance rate for every STISD campus.
- 98 percent or higher of STISD students will successfully complete the foundation graduation requirements and obtain at least one endorsement.
- 85 percent or higher of STISD students reach “Meets” level and 50 percent or higher reach “Masters” level on state assessments.
- Each student achieves passing score on one or more Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or Concurrent/Dual credit course.
- Student participation rates on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate test will remain the same or increase annually.
- Qualifying Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate scores will increase annually.
- 98 percent of students will attain a qualifying score in one or more Advanced Placement test, International Baccalaureate exam, or attain a B or higher in a concurrent/dual credit course.
- Each student will take a college entrance exam before the end of the 1st semester of the year they plan to graduate.
- 50 percent of student will attain an SAT score of 110 or higher/ACT score of 24 or higher.
- 100 percent of student with IEP’s include measurable goals that are annually updated.
- State Performance Based Monitoring (PBM) indicators are met annually.

Innovations

To achieve the District Strategic Plan Call to Action, Goals, Results, and Outcomes, the District needs to have the flexibility to exert local control, at both the District and campus levels in the following areas of innovation:

First Day of Instruction for Students

(Education Code 25.0811) (Local Policy EB Legal)

Current Statute:

Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August. This law was supported by Texas tourism groups who lobbied to have a late August school start date because they believed it would promote the Texas tourism business. However, the impact of this law has been having fewer school holidays during the school year and/or a later ending date in June which also limits Texas tourism at other times during the year. This creates challenges, including significant disparities in the number of instructional days provided in each of the two school year semesters or the need to end the first school semester after the Christmas break.

Proposed Flexibility:

The flexibility of school start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students, parents, and faculty. Flexibility to start earlier in August would help our students with more balanced days of instructional time in the semesters that would support semester courses. Flexibility will further facilitate finishing the first school semester before the Christmas break. In addition, flexibility in the start and end of the school year allows students to enroll in college courses that begin in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Flexibility enhances the opportunity for increased student enrichment activities during the school year and allows for more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff.

Minimum Attendance for Class Credit for Final Grade

(Texas Education Code 25.092) (Local Policy FEC Local)

Current Statute:

State law currently requires students to be physically in attendance in class at least ninety percent of the school days on the district calendar to earn credit. The law requires districts to award class credit to students based on the time a student is present in a classroom for instruction, rather than mastery of the content and subject proficiency.

Proposed Flexibility:

The ninety percent rule is an arbitrary percentage based upon seat time rather than based on content mastery. The district would like the flexibility to utilize options such as “blended learning”, instructional conducted with both face to face class time and online instruction and resources. The district's intent is to award students credit for courses based on content mastery, not the amount of time the student spends in the classroom. This supports the district's goal of high quality academic performance while utilizing real world learning experiences.

Relief from TEC Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter the existing compulsory attendance requirements. In addition, 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 the TEC Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with TEC 28.0216.

Teacher and Principal Appraisal Systems

(Texas Education Code 21.352 and 21.3541) (Local Policies DNA Legal and DNA Local)

Current Statute:

The state issued a new teacher appraisal system in 2016-2017, called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PEES). The domains within these systems are developed by the State to meet the needs of the entire State of Texas. Both systems were designed to meet the needs of a vast and growing state and are therefore lengthy and cumbersome to conduct annually.

Proposed Flexibility:

The District believes that it is important for teachers and campus administrators to have flexibility in determining the focus of professional growth and appraisal for each individual. A committee of district and campus administrators and teachers will convene to determine simpler, best fit, appraisal systems to support the work of our professionals in helping our students reach the district profile of a learner outcomes. The growth indicators for students will be included in the appraisal systems as required by federal regulations. The teachers and campus administration will work together to annually set goals and ensure student growth progress toward learning objectives. These local systems will provide greater flexibility in tailoring professional growth, individualized staff development, and attaining progress toward the district goal of every student reaching high levels of academic performance.

Teacher Certification

(Texas Education Code 21.003) (Local Policy DBA Legal and DBA Local)

Current Statute:

TEC 21.003 states “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 or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B.”

Goal 1: South Texas ISD Board of Trustees and administration will make teacher certification and contract decisions based on district qualifications that meet the needs of our district’s students and community.

Goal 2: South Texas ISD Board of Trustees and administration will make governance decisions based on the unique needs of the district’s students and community.

Rationale for Exemption

The current certification system does not take into account our district’s unique instructional requirements and the need to hire instructors to fill these positions. Providing a variety of necessary course offerings is limited by the availability of instructors. In order to offer additional course offerings and flexible scheduling, which would benefit our students and community, the district must establish local qualification requirements. This exemption from the existing teacher certification requirements would allow the district to have the flexibility to hire community instructors or internal applicants outside of their certification areas. In addition, this exemption would allow the district to hire professionals in certain trades, vocations, electives, or foreign languages.

Innovation Strategies

1. The campus principals may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a locally certified teacher to teach a foreign language or elective course. The principals must provide reasoning for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which qualify this individual to teach this subject. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees for approval.
2. An individual with education, experience, and/or certification in a Career and Technology Education field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request

to the superintendent with the individual's applicable credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if he or she believes that the individual could be an asset to the students. The superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees for approval.

3. The South Texas ISD local teaching certification is restricted to elective, foreign language, and career and technology areas. The core areas of English, Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, as well as Special Education and English as a Second Language must continue to be State Board of Educator Certified.

Amendment

Tuesday, March 23, 2020 – STISD Board Meeting

- Board of Directors given report of possible amendment(addition) to the 2017-2022 STISD District of Innovation Plan. The District Educational Improvement Council (EIC) will review the possible amendment and make a recommendation.

Monday, April 27, 2020 – District Educational Improvement Council (EIC)

- The District Educational Improvement Council (EIC) met through online meeting (due to COVID-19 restrictions) and considered an amendment to the 2017-2022 STISD District of Innovation Plan. The Council voted unanimously to recommend an amendment to include exemption from Texas Education Code 22.004 Group Health Benefits for School Employees.

Tuesday, May 26, 2020 - STISD Board Meeting

- Board of Directors acted unanimously to adopt the amendment to the District of Innovation Plan.

Employee Health Insurance Options

(Texas Education Code 22.004) (Local Policy CRD Legal)

Current Statute:

“A district shall participate in the uniform group coverage program established under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code, as provided by Subchapter D of that chapter.” This statute requires a school district with 500 or fewer employees to

participate in group health insurance coverage program through the Teacher Retirement System (TRS-ActiveCare). This restriction allows only the health insurance options approved through the TRS-ActiveCare group plans with no other health insurance options available to employees through the District.

Proposed Flexibility:

The District believes it is important for employees to have additional flexibility in health insurance providers, plans, and cost. Increased options of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee needs. This amendment to the District of Innovation Plan will provide additional health insurance options for South Texas ISD employees. The district will continue to offer and participate in TRS-ActiveCare. The employees will have additional health insurance options which will also meet the minimum requirement of Chapter 1579 of the Insurance Code.