

Friendswood ISD
District of Innovation Plan
As Renewed and Amended 2021-2026

Friendswood Independent School District DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

Background: Fisd as a District of Innovation

The district of innovation concept was passed into law in 2015 when the 84th Texas Legislature created Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 12A, Districts of Innovation. The law allows traditional independent school districts to access most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open enrollment charter schools. To access the flexibilities, a school district's most recent academic performance rating must be at least acceptable and it must adopt an innovation plan, in accordance with the process set forth in Chapter 12A and Texas Education Agency rules. An innovation plan allows a school district to gain exemption from many Texas Education Code requirements, authorizing the district to pursue specific innovations in curriculum, instruction, governance, parent or community involvement, school calendar, budgeting or other areas. Ultimately, innovation plans are about local control. Community members should note that each innovation plan will be unique to the local school district and no two plans may look the same.

Friendswood ISD became a District of Innovation with its approved Innovation Plan on 2/13/2017. Based on the requirements in TEC, Chapter 12A and its implementing regulations, Texas public school districts are required to renew their District of Innovation status every five years. Friendswood ISD is taking this opportunity to not only renew their plan, but also amend it.

This document serves as Friendswood ISD's Local Innovation Plan, as Renewed and Amended.

The original plan provided exemptions from the following legal requirements that we seek to renew:

- District-Level Planning and Decision-Making - TEC 11.252
- Teacher Certification - TEC 21.003
- Teacher Appraisal System - TEC 21.352
- First Day of Instruction - TEC 25.0811
- Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade - TEC 25.092
- Student/Teacher Ratios and Class Size - TEC 25.111, TEC 25.112, TEC 25.113
- Student Discipline - Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator - TEC 37.0012

In addition to these existing exemptions, Fisd seeks exemption from:

- Planning and Decision-Making Process - TEC 11.251, TEC 11.253 to better align with the intent of the original innovation plan, and
- Group Health Benefits For School Employees - TEC 22.004 to allow employees choice when making healthcare decisions.

Due to change in the law or lack of necessity, the district no longer seeks exemption from TEC 21.353, TEC 25.081(e), TEC 25.082(a), and TEC 25.083(b).

Timeline:

Activities to Renew DOI Plan	Date
Process for renewal begins with a majority vote of the DAC and $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote of the BOT.	BOT 2/8/21 DAC 3/4/21
FISD administration submits Proposed Renewal Plan draft to DAC to review	3/4/21
LEA notifies commissioner of an action taken to begin the renewal process	3/5/21
Information item on Board Agenda	3/8/21
Proposed final plan posted on district website for 30 days	3/8/21-4/8/21
DAC holds a virtual public meeting to consider approval of the posted version of the plan with a majority vote	4/8/21
BOT votes on the plan with $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote need to pass	4/12/21
If approved, notify the commissioner within 15 days via email or US Mail (include link to plan and exemptions checklist)	No later than 4/27/21

Innovation Plan

District and Campus-Level Planning and Decision-Making - TEC 11.251, TEC 11.252, TEC 11.253 (BQA LEGAL, BQA LOCAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

Currently, the prescribed makeup of committees removes flexibility in determining who is able to serve in this capacity. The components that must be addressed by the improvement plan often make the plans cumbersome compliance documents rather than workable guides for actionable goals.

Innovation for local control

Return Site-Based Decision-Making back to the local district by allowing the local district to determine the makeup of the committee and which decisions will be referred to the committee, except those otherwise prescribed by law.

The leadership in Friendswood ISD, both at campuses and at the district level, has a history of collaboratively involving multiple stakeholders in the processes of annually assessing campus and district needs when establishing and monitoring short and long term goals. Our leadership has and continues to strive to provide sufficient and appropriate representation of teacher, paraprofessional, parents and community members on each of the required site-based committees, but will not be required to adhere to representative percentages imposed by the Education Code.

With additional teacher and paraprofessional representation available, FISD will continue to move forward with our collaborative improvement plans that are reflective of action-oriented tasks and measurable goals. Further, the committees will no longer be restricted and overburdened by compliance-focused content, freeing them up to focus on relevant actions aimed at progress toward established goals. Portions of the improvement plans required by federal obligations will not be affected by this exemption.

Teacher Certification - TEC 21.003 (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT, DBA LEGAL, DBA LOCAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

The Texas Education Code requires a public school employee to have the appropriate certification for his or her current assignment unless the appropriate permit has been issued. The credentials appropriate to each assignment are set forth in the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) rules at 19 Administrative Code Chapter 231. In the event an appropriately certified teacher cannot be found, the District must request an emergency certification from TEA and SBEC. These rules are burdensome and do not take into account the unique needs and circumstances of the district. Certain subject areas, in particular, are often very difficult to find properly-certified teachers.

Innovation for local control

Friendswood ISD is in close proximity to the Johnson Space Center and is in a geographical area populated by a highly educated workforce including, for example, many scientists. The District has been fortunate to have several scientists mentor students who have achieved national recognition for their projects. Several retired scientists also substitute teach in the schools. Various medical professionals and other highly qualified engineers and mathematicians reside in close proximity to the District. The Houston area has a very rich arts and performance community that could provide experienced people interested in working with students in a school setting. It would be advantageous to tap into this pool of experts who have shown the ability to work with students effectively and have expertise in certain subject areas. Under certain circumstances, it may be that one of these highly qualified individuals with a wide range of experience would be an excellent teacher for FISD students.

In order to best serve students, certain decisions will be handled locally. Section 21.003 restricts flexibility in hiring teachers needed for certain courses, including Career & Technical Education (CTE) and Dual Credit courses. Campus administrators are also limited in their ability to consider out-of-state educator certifications and professional qualifications or credentials of candidates, as well as to review the strengths and qualifications of campus staff to make local recommendations for teaching outside of certain certification areas in hard to fill positions. Although we have not locally certified any teacher to date, Friendswood ISD seeks to maintain this option for consideration by campus administrators. The Superintendent will approve all local certifications per administrative procedures and will report to the Board of Trustees.

Teacher Appraisal System - TEC 21.352 (DNA LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

The state issued a new teacher appraisal system in 2016-2017, called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The domains within this appraisal system were developed by the State to meet the needs of the entire State of Texas. In accordance with TEC 21.352(a), FISD locally developed an appraisal plan called M-TESS.

Innovation for local control

In subsequent years, a new appraisal system may be developed. It would be a transparent, collaborative process that would include a working committee of teachers, campus leaders and district administrators. This group would convene to determine a best fit instrument to support the work of our Strategic Plan efforts. This instrument will include multiple observations, goal setting and tracking, and student growth progress toward learning objectives. This new instrument would be recommended by the Superintendent and approved by the Board of Trustees.

Group Health Benefits For School Employees - TEC 22.004(CRD LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

TEC 22.004(i) states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees pursuant to TEC 22.004(b) after the date a district implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The Texas Education Code prohibits offering comparable group healthcare to employees through a self-funded plan once a district has elected to enter TRS-ActiveCare. A TRS rule prohibits discontinuation of TRS-ActiveCare unless a district is authorized by TRS.

The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all Friendswood ISD employees. This provision also prohibits the district from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees at a lower cost. This provision does not give the district the flexibility needed to acquire benefits packages that would potentially be more attractive to current and prospective employees.

Districts of Innovation (DOI) may seek an exemption from Texas Education Code section 22.004. Districts may not, however, use a DOI plan to seek an exemption from provisions in the Insurance Code. Even if a district is exempt from Section 22.004, Texas Insurance Code Chapter 1579 continues to apply. Consequently, even for a DOI, the Insurance Code does not permit a district to opt out of TRS-ActiveCare. However, for a DOI, the Insurance Code does not explicitly indicate a district is prohibited from offering an alternative health care plan. The statutory prohibition on offering an alternative health care plan is located in the Education Code.

Innovation for local control

Increased local control of the group health benefits will allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs. The ability to design and offer better and more uniquely tailored group health benefits will allow the District greater latitude in recruitment and retention of high-quality employees. If feasible, FISD will offer an alternative health plan option to District employees in addition to TRS-Active Care. The additional options will allow employees choice over the health care option that best meets their individual needs.

First Day of Instruction - TEC 25.0811 (EB Legal)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

Current law does not allow students to begin school before the 4th Monday of August. In the past, districts could apply for a waiver to start the school calendar earlier to meet the needs of the local community. The waiver process was eliminated several years ago, mandating that all schools begin school no earlier than the fourth Monday of August, with no exceptions. This requirement inhibits the District's flexibility to develop a calendar that best meets students', staff, and community needs.

Innovation for local control

Having the flexibility to set the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and our community. Flexibility to start earlier in August also provides the opportunity to embed professional learning during the school year, better balance the number of instructional days in each semester, maintain traditional holidays and a mid-week start.

Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade - TEC 25.092 (EI LEGAL and FEC LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

State law currently requires students attend class 90% of the school days the class is offered in order to earn credit. The law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on demonstrated mastery of the learning.

Innovation for local control

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Flexibility in abstaining from the requirement will allow the District to not penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities and/or family issues that may prevent students from meeting the 90% class attendance rule, as long as mastery of content can be documented. Finally, this will limit issues related to seat time and allow further pursuit of dual credit opportunities.

This exemption allows FISD to explore the option of providing students credit for courses based on content mastery, not the amount of time the student spends in the classroom. The District could provide innovative options to promote student engagement in course material in flexible ways, ultimately allowing learning to happen anytime, anyplace, apart from the traditional way of delivering instruction.

Flexibility in this area does not alter a teacher's right to assign a student's final grade or exempt a student from any UIL rules.

Student/Teacher Ratios and Class Size - TEC 25.111, TEC 25.112, TEC 25.113 (BF LEGAL, EEB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

Kindergarten through 4th Grade class sizes are to remain at or below a 22 student to 1 teacher ratio according to state law. When a class exceeds this limit, the District must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are completed at the start of a school year as well as anytime a child enrolls in an elementary school at a grade level where the ratio is already maintained according to staffing projections from the previous year. Current statute also requires a district to employ a sufficient number of teachers certified under the Chapter 21 Education Code to maintain a ratio of 20:1 for total student enrollment.

Innovation for local control

Although Friendswood is a stable, low growth district, occasionally late registrants have necessitated a request for class size waivers. The District has and will make every effort to have a class size ratio within the state guidelines while best meeting the needs of our students. In the event a classroom does exceed the 22:1 ratio, we will follow local administrative procedures for reporting to the Board of Trustees and parents of the affected classroom(s).

Local control of class sizes also provides the District with the ability to pursue different delivery models in the future that may afford students with innovative and transformative learning experiences. In the event that this model exceeds the 22:1 class size ratio in K-4 classrooms, the Superintendent would follow established administrative procedures.

In the event FISD utilizes local certifications as provided by the DOI Plan, an exemption from 25.111 would allow the district to count these teachers towards the average ratio. The exemption from this requirement would assure local certifications could be considered in determining class ratios.

Student Discipline - Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator - TEC 37.0012 (FO Legal)

Manner in which the statute inhibits local control

This statute came out of the 84th Legislative Session and places this duty on one administrator, rather than allowing administrators to be responsible for this duty with the students assigned to him/her as has been done previously in Friendswood ISD.

Requiring the designation of one Campus Behavior Coordinator creates inefficiencies and limits the effectiveness of our administrators. The burden of placing this on one person is not sustainable, and the additional stress it creates to staff, students and families should be avoided. The assistant principals build relationships with the students and families assigned to them and are best equipped to handle discipline concerns and the management of behavior issues and consequences.

Innovation for local control

FISD charges each principal with being responsible for discipline on his/her respective campus. All campuses have at least one Assistant Principal, counselor, and School Psychologist. Discipline will be handled by principals as well as any assistant principal. The District believes that a collaborative approach with those responsible for a smaller group of students is more advantageous for students and provides more support for the students and their families.

CLOSING

The renewal of the Friendswood District of Innovation status for an additional five years enables us to better prepare our students according to their individualized needs for their unique pathway. Through this Renewal Plan, FISD leverages increased flexibility to make the best decisions for our children because we are able to make them locally. Through this Renewal Plan, the District will continue to have the flexibility to design and continually refine the educational environment to support the vision set forth by our Call To Action and Strategic Plan.