

**Commerce ISD
District of Innovation Plan**

Name	Appointment
Charlie Alderman	Superintendent
Patricia Tremmel, Ed.D.	Assistant Superintendent
Wanda Beane	Commerce Elementary Principal
Jeanie Putman	A.C. Williams Principal
Lisa Palazzetti, Ph.D.	Commerce Middle School Principal
Roger Brown	Commerce High School Principal
Tiffany Otken	Elementary Teacher
Margaret London	Intermediate Teacher
Amy Knusta	Middle School Teacher
Katie Ritchie	High School Teacher
Teena Ayres	Parent/Business Representative
Emily Shipman	Parent/Business Owner
Kathy Myers	Director of Health Services
Andrea Ellis, PhD	Director of CTE

INTRODUCTION

During the 84th Texas Legislative Session, HB 1842 was passed in order to provide more local control in certain areas which had previously been reserved for Texas’ open enrollment charter schools. In order for an independent school district to obtain these flexibilities, Districts must seek designation as a “District of Innovation.”

On Monday, March 28, 2022, Commerce ISD Board of Trustees initiated the process by adopting a resolution to pursue a “District of Innovation” to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan (and having a prior District of Innovation plan that expired on March 23, 2022) benefited Commerce ISD to increase the District’s flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of the students and the community. The Board of Trustees also appointed a 14-member District of Innovation District Advisory Committee (“Committee”) composed of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District’s stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and Administrators. The committee convened on Wednesday, April 6, 2022.

The District of Innovation is in alignment with the Board’s vision and goals.

TERM

As outlined by the Texas Education Agency, the term of the Innovation Plan is five years. The plan will commence at the May 16, 2022, Board of Trustees regular meeting and conclude on May 16, 2027, unless terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

INNOVATIONS

The District proposes flexibility in the following areas:

A. Teacher Certification (TEC 21.003) Presentation and Recording of Certificates (TEC 21.053) Parental Notification (TEC 21.057)

TEC 21.003 requires 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.

TEC Sec. 21.053 mandates a teacher must present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding and prohibits the District from paying an educator if he or she does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC Sec. 21.057 requires that a school district provide parental notification if the district assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year.

The above TEC requirements do not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of individual districts. These statutes limit the flexibility a district may have to recruit, employ, and retain persons who have appropriate expertise, experience, and/or industry certifications that make them qualified to fill various positions. It allows for the ability to employ part-time professionals to teach specialty courses.

Innovation Strategies:

To best serve students by allowing more flexibility in scheduling, more Career and Technology Education (CTE) course offerings, and more opportunities for students to earn Industry-Based Certifications (IBCs), decisions on teacher certifications will be handled locally. The district's first option will be to hire qualified applicants with appropriate teacher certification. However, when that is not reasonably possible, the district will have the flexibility to hire individuals or to reassign employees who are knowledgeable in the content area and are fully equipped to effectively perform the duties of the specific position based on local certification criteria without requesting a permit or waiver from the Texas Education Agency.

Just to clarify, Commerce ISD will continue to employ special education and bilingual/ESL teachers with SBEC certification.

For grades 6-12, in all subjects *except* Special Education which encompasses Dyslexia personnel, and ESL/Bilingual:

- a) The campus principal may submit a request to the superintendent that will allow a certified teacher to teach one or more courses for which they are not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the teacher possesses which would qualify this individual to teach this subject/course(s). The Superintendent will have final authority to approve such requests.
- b) An individual who does not hold a teaching certificate but obtained a Bachelor's Degree whom the District deems best to teach in a particular area, or has industry experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certificate. The campus principal may submit a request to the superintendent and make all credentials available that verify the individual is knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question. The superintendent would have the capability to hire this person and the employee would be considered at-will.
- c) Out- of- state certified teachers should be considered for positions upon a local review of experience, education and credentials. The principal must specify in writing the reason

for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses that would qualify the individual to teach the proposed subject or subject in the related area. The Superintendent will have the capability to approve all requests. Staff hired under a local teaching certificate will benefit from the same rights/responsibilities as certified teachers within the district.

To ensure quality instruction, the District will:

- Require lesson plans for the uncertified teacher will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field, whenever possible.
- Establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. The District does not wish to be exempted from any existing laws relating to teacher contracts or teacher benefits.
- Identify required professional development for persons with industry experience in the areas of providing a minimum of 20 hours of classroom management training, instructional strategies, curriculum, and parent engagement.

Under this exemption, teacher certification waivers, state permit applications or other applicable paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The district will not be required to provide parental notification as long as the teacher meets district standards for local certification approval. Local certifications do not transfer to other school districts.

B. Probationary Contracts (TEC 21.102) (DCA LEGAL)

For experienced teachers, new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years.

This time period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since the teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to state assessment dates.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, the district may renew a probationary contract for an additional one-year period, for a total of two years.

C. First Day of Instruction/Last Day of Instruction (TEC 25.0811and 25.0812) (EB LEGAL) (EB LOCAL)

Section 25.811 prohibits a district from starting before the fourth Monday in August and Section 25.0812 states the last day of school may not occur before May 15.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. Allows for a calendar that fits the local needs of our community.
- b. Allows for the ability to modify the start date to develop a more balanced calendar with more instructional days prior to mandatory testing.
- c. The goal is to improve the district attendance rate and student success through the flexibility in the calendar.
- d. The district will set the last day of school as necessary to ensure the total number of required minutes per school year are met.
- e. It will allow us to better align dual credit and college calendars.

D. Class Size: PreKindergarten – Grade 4 (TEC 25.112a-g) (TEC 25.113a-b) (EEB LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan TEC §25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for PreKindergarten – 4th Grade classes.

Along with the waiver, it is required that a letter be sent home to each parent in the section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. CISD will begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student to teacher ratio of 22:1 per PreK-4 homeroom class. In the event that any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees and to the parents of the affected students.
- b. If the student/teacher ratio averaged across the grade level needs to go over 24:1, it must have administrator and Superintendent approval. The School Board will be notified, along with the parents of students within the classroom. After that time, the campus will notify the parents of the students in the classroom and inform them of the situation to exceed the cap.
- c. The goal of the District is to keep the 22:1 ratio, with the flexibility to exceed the cap to adjust to growth and budget expenditures.
- d. A TEA waiver will not be filed when a PreK-4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

E. Transfer Students (TEC 25.036)

State law allows a student to transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in the state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, and the student's disciplinary history, academics and attendance records are also evaluated. Under Texas Education Code 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

Innovation Strategies:

The Superintendent is authorized to rescind an approved transfer of a student at any time during the school year if it is determined that submitted documentation was falsified and/or the student violates the signed transfer agreement, which includes maintaining expectations for attendance, discipline, and academic effort.

F. Teacher Appraisals (TEC 21.351) (TEC 21.352)

Texas Education Codes 21.351 and 21.352 requires student performance data to be included in a teacher's annual appraisal. Commerce ISD believes that student growth is a result of continued teacher's growth. The Teacher Professional Growth/Student Learning Objective structure connects teacher learning with student learning, and reinforces the ongoing growth expectations of teachers through the teacher appraisal process. We currently use the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS).

Innovation Strategies:

- a. CISD will have the option of a mutual consent of the teacher and the certified appraiser that the minutes of the observation can be conducted in shorter time segments. The time segments must aggregate to at least 45 minutes.
- b. CISD will develop a teacher evaluation system that would be a combination of T-TESS and other best practices to develop a local instrument that fits the needs and goals of CISD.
- c. CISD will have the option of local control to modify Appraise Less Frequently Than Annually.
- d. These locally developed plans should reflect the strengths, areas of concern, and goals for Commerce ISD.
- e. Allows teacher effectiveness to be accurately assessed on closing achievement gaps for students of diverse backgrounds and educational needs, keeping with the tenets of House Bill 22 of the 85th Texas Legislature and the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

IMPLEMENTATION

The Innovation Plan is designed to create parameters within which the District will operate in order to provide additional student opportunities. Specific implementation plans will be developed by the appropriate departments. Adjustments to Board Policy will be researched and adopted where appropriate.

TIMELINE

Please see timeline below for specifics on adoption and renewal process.

Monday, March 28, 2022

Board adopts a Resolution to pursue consideration of designation of a District of Innovation. (TEC 12A.001 (c)(1))

Public Hearing to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation (TEC12A.002(b)(2), 12A.003)

Board appoints a 14 member District of Innovation District Advisory Committee (“Committee”) comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District’s stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators to write a plan (TEC 12A.002(b)(2), 12A.003)

Wednesday, April 6, 2022- Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee to have an opportunity to write, review and discuss possible further amendments to the DOI plan.

Monday, April 11, 2022- Public Meeting with District Educational Improvement Committee. Approves the DOI plan with a majority vote.

Posting of the DOI plan is made available on the District website for 30 days (TEC 12A.005(a)(1))

Notify the Commissioner of intent to adopt plan (TEC 12A.005(a)(2))

Monday, May 16, 2022- The Commerce ISD Board of Trustees adopts the proposed plan by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of the Board.

Tuesday, May 17, 2022

- The district notifies the Commissioner of the date of plan approval, along with a list of approved TEC exemptions.
- The May 16, 2022 approved DOI plan is posted to the district website for the entirety of the term of the designation.
- The district provides a link to the innovation plan to the TEA.

<https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/district-initiatives/districts-of-innovation>