

**Brooks County
Independent School
District**

**District of Innovation
Plan 2023-2028
Renewal**

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Introduction

What is a “District of Innovation”?

During the 84th Legislative Session, House Bill 1842 was passed by the Legislature, giving traditional independent school districts flexibility through a concept known as “Districts of Innovation” (DOI). An innovation plan allows Brooks County Independent School District (BCISD) the ability to exempt themselves from certain requirements of the Texas Education Code, thus gaining greater local control.

Brooks County Independent School District has been a “District of Innovation” since July, 2018. As a “District of Innovation” (DOI), BCISD gained flexibility in the areas of uniform school start date, class size ratio, teacher certification, probationary contracts, long range energy plan to reduce energy consumption, and group health benefits for school employees. The District’s innovation plan has been critical in addressing the values, needs, and goals that are essential for the success of the students at Brooks County independent School District.

A DOI designation is granted for five years provided all requirements are met and may be renewed at any time during the term of the plan. In doing so, the renewed plan (19 TAC §102.1311) takes effect only after the term of the district’s current innovation plan expires. Since the district intends for the term of a renewed plan to begin prior to the expiration of its current plan (July, 2023), the renewed plan supersedes the district’s current plan at that time and the current plan is considered void.

This is an exciting opportunity! A District of Innovation (DOI) is a concept passed by the above referenced 84th Texas Legislature that gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to open-enrollment charter schools, including exemption from many requirements mandated in the Texas Education Code to create a DOI.

Why choose a District of Innovation?

The freedom to make decisions about Brooks County ISD at the local level. A local school district may want to pursue specific innovations in curriculum, instruction, governance, and parent or community involvement. Essentially, innovation plans are about local control. Brooks County ISD’s innovation plan will be unique to the school district and the community.

What impact could designation as a District of Innovation have on district policy?

Policy changes will correlate with innovation plan changes. As a DOI, revisions to local policies may be required, as well as adjustments to legal policies to reflect that some legal provisions may be affected by the District’s innovation plan. As the committee sculpts the innovation plan, the District will evaluate necessary changes to Brooks County ISD policies.

How long does an innovation plan stay in effect?

Under current law, the plan may have a term of up to five years, which may be amended, rescinded, or renewed during that period.

Exemption from Laws?

A District of Innovation may adopt a plan that includes exemptions from most of the same state laws that do not apply to open-enrollment charter schools. These laws could include the following:

- Uniform school start date
- Class size ratio
- Minimum minutes of instruction
- The 90 percent attendance rule (but compulsory attendance still applies)
- Student discipline provisions (with some key exceptions, like the requirement to have a code of conduct and restrictions on restraint and seclusion)
- Teacher appraisal system
- Teacher certification (except as required by federal law)
- Teacher contracts
- Teacher benefits
- Site-based decision-making processes (to the extent required by state law)
- Long-Range Energy Plan to Reduce Consumption
- Health benefits

Term

Per TEC §12A.006, this Comprehensive Local Innovation Plan shall remain in effect for five years (2018 through 2023 school years) unless terminated by the commissioner pursuant to TEC §12.A.008. Following adoption by the Board of Trustees, the Brooks County ISD Comprehensive Local Innovation Plan for District of Innovation designation will be reported to the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Exemptions

The District of Innovation concept, passed by the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools.

Brooks County ISD will be free to make local decisions within the parameters outlined in HB 1842. A local school district may want to pursue specific innovations in curriculum, instruction, governance, parent or community involvement, school calendar, budgeting, or other ideas.

Innovation plans are about local control that best fits the needs of the school district and community. Brooks County ISD's innovation plan will focus on effective strategies that will positively impact student achievement and strengthen the connection and involvement of the community and school district.

District of Innovation Potential Benefits Include:

- Local control: Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- Customization: Districts can create an innovation plan for a school level (e.g., only high schools), grade level, or a single campus.
- Autonomy: Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.
- Flexibility: Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from mandates such as:
 - o School start date
 - o Class-size ratios
 - o Minimum Minutes of Instruction and School Day Length
 - o Site-based decision-making processes
 - o Use of planning and preparation periods
 - o Teacher Certification
 - o Health benefits
 - o Energy

This plan is specific to the exemptions as outlined. The district intends to follow the Texas Education Code in all areas. Suppose the district is decided that changes or additional exemptions should be considered. In that case, the district will reconvene the District Innovation Planning committee to explore the request.

House Bill 1842 and BCISD Strategic Plan

House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, allows Texas public school districts to modify state requirements at the local level to meet the needs of their unique student populations and prepare them for success and lifelong learning. As a District of Innovation, Brooks County ISD will be able to implement our Strategic Plan with the increased flexibility and freedom necessary to personalize learning experiences. An essential tenet of personalization is that every child experiences school differently. In a way, personalization provides a unique “school” for every child. Thus, we must be able to make important educational decisions for our students at the local level.

We must also maximize our responsiveness to our district’s vision for the future. As we developed our Strategic Plan, our community has been involved throughout the process, giving ongoing feedback on what they want for their children in order to prepare them to be positive contributors to the world, a world that is constantly changing. The exact process will be followed as we prepare to be a District of Innovation. As we transform our community’s dreams for their children into reality, we must be positioned to maximize the opportunities and minimize the barriers that could otherwise preclude us from doing our best work on their behalf.

Our Strategic Plan requires BCISD to evolve and think radically differently about such critical systemic components as how we are organized, how we deliver instruction, how we recruit and retain top talent, how we engage and support our families, what experiences we provide, and how we grow continually as a learning organization. To think differently, we must be able to respond differently. Leveraging the limited freedom and flexibility afforded by the Districts of Innovation designation will ensure we are

empowered to do so.

BCISD's Strategic Plan and its local Innovation Plan are comprehensive and touch numerous areas in the TEC seeking to maximize local control of student educational decisions. Consequently, BCISD seeks exemption from the following permissible provisions of the TEC as allowed in the statute:

- Uniform School Start Date
- Class Size Ratio
- Teacher Certification
- Probationary Contracts
- Long-Range Energy Plan to Reduce Energy Consumption
- Health benefits

District of Innovation Committee

1. Dr. Maria Rodriguez Casas	DEIC Chairperson & Strategic Planning
2. Cristina Rivera	FHS Principal
3. Louella Garcia-Cortez	Administrator/Strategic Planning
4. Isabel Marichalar-Solis	Falfurrias Elementary Principal
5. Arnulfo Guerra	Lasater Principal
6. Ricardo Garcia	Special Programs Director
7. Dr. Cathy Hernandez	Administrator
8. Connie C. Herrera	Teaching and Learning, Innovation
9. Alissa Sanchez	Administrator/Strategic Planning Member
10. Oscar Galindo	FHS CTE
11. Felix DeLeon	H.S. Teacher/DEIC
12. Rita Ramos	H.S. Teacher/DEIC
13. Robert Garza	Non Teaching Professional/DEIC
14. Crystal Rodriguez-Garza	Jr. High Teacher/DEIC
15. Jena Trevino	Jr. High Teacher/DEIC
16. Bianca Cabrera	Non-Teaching Professional/DEIC
17. Julie Garza	Elementary Teacher/DEIC
18. Dominika Trevino	Elementary Teacher/DEIC
19. Melinda Arevalo	Non-Teaching Professional/DEIC
20. Clarissa Garza	Lasater Teacher/DEIC
21. Nadia Mata	Lasater Teacher/DEIC
22. Angela Garcia	Parent Member/DEIC
23. Domi Guerra	Parent/DEIC
24. Shari Mohair	Community Member/DEIC
25. Lourdes Cantu	Community Member/DEIC
26. Armando Olivarez	Business Member/DEIC
27. Maricelda Molina	RN
28. Sandra Alanis	Paraprofessional
29. Martin Fonseca	Teacher
30. Kimberlyn Crisp	Teacher
31. Robert Garza	College Advisor
32. Gilbert Perez	Sp. Ed Teacher
33. Melissa Guerrero	Paraprofessional
34. Arturo Garcia	Administrator
35. Vincent Montgomery	Teacher
36. Cesar Cantu	Technology



BROOKS COUNTY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
200 W. Adams Street - Falfurrias, TX 78355 - (361) 325-8001

Maria Rodriguez Casas, Ph.D
Superintendent of Schools

February 17, 2023

Appointment of a Committee

The Superintendent appointed the District Site-Based Committee to serve as the District of Innovation Committee.

February 28, 2023,

Review and Develop the Innovation Plan

The District of Innovation Committee met to review and develop the proposed 2023-2028 District of Innovation Plan.

March 7, 2023,

Have a Public Hearing

The District of Innovation Committee held a public hearing for public comment on the District of Innovation Plan and voted to approve the Plan.

March 24, 2023,

Commissioner of Education

The board notified the Commissioner of their intent to renew the proposed District of Innovation Plan. Send a link to the proposed DOI Plan on BCISD's website.

<https://www.bcisd.us/quicklinks/required-postings>

March 24, 2023

Post Proposed District of Innovation Plan 2023-2028 on BCISD website (30 days)

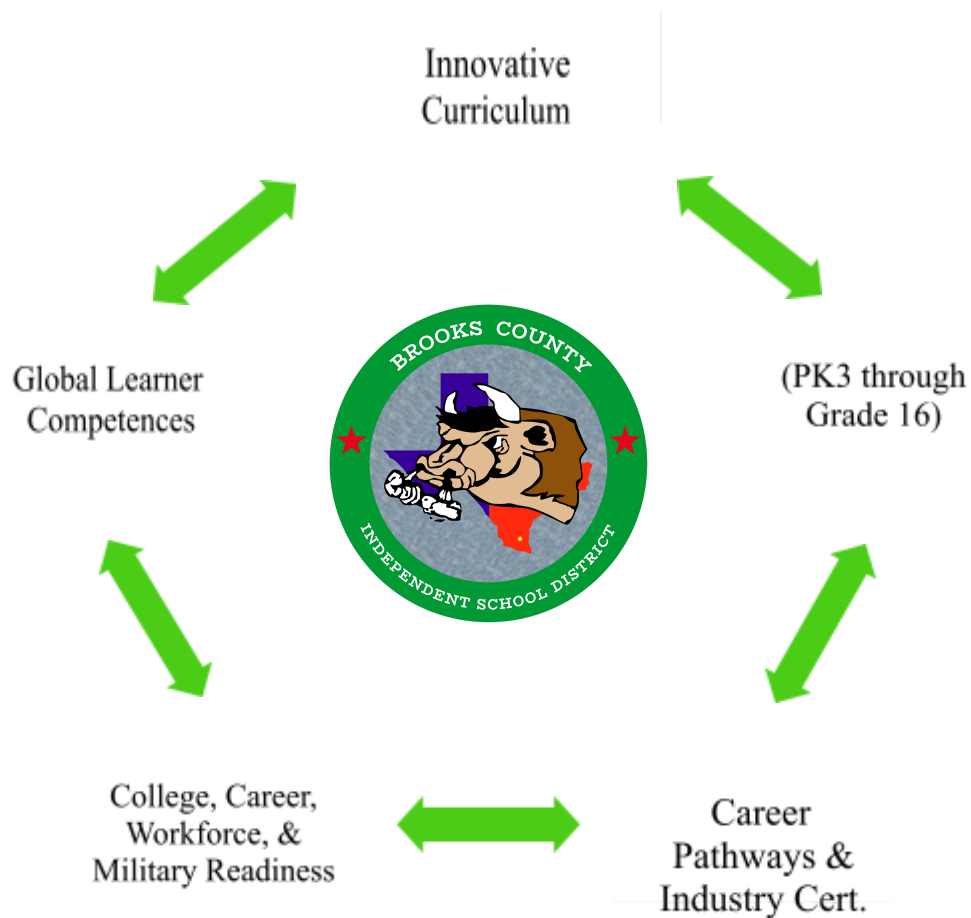
April 26, 2023,

Board of Trustees to vote on Proposed District of Innovation Plan

April 27, 2023,
renewed

Notify the Commissioner of Education that the Board adopted the DOI Plan 2023-2028. Send link to adopted/renewed plan on BCISD's website. <https://www.bcisd.us/quicklinks/required-postings>

Innovation District Components



Innovative Curriculum

Project Based Learning (PBL), STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineer, Arts, & Mathematics) & Engaged Learning.

Preschool (PK3) through Grade 16 Initiatives

Integrated system from preschool through a four-year college degree, dual credit, early college high school designation, TSI ready, and college readiness.

Career Pathways & Industry-Based Certifications

Integration of rigorous academics and career-focused learning, college and career information and advising, links to secondary and postsecondary education.

- School Design
- Work-based Learning
- Student Support
- Pathways Technical Early College High School (P-TECH) designation

College, Career, Workforce & Military Readiness

Work-based learning experiences, attain appropriate skills and learning to ensure preparedness for success in entering the workforce, military, or postsecondary education.

An extension of the Early College High School (ECHS) model, the Industry Cluster Innovative Academies (ICIA) initiative leverages partnerships among ECHS campuses, regional industries, and higher learning institutions to help students earn credentials, degrees, and certificates in high-demand workforce pathways specific to their regions.

Career Pathways seeks to ensure that more youth complete high school and attain college degrees or credentials for high-demand occupations throughout the state of Texas by creating rigorous, relevant, and engaging career pathways for grades 9-14, including middle school, high school, and postsecondary pathways towards associate degrees, certifications, and bachelor degrees. The approach relies on key factors:

- Rigorous academic and career 9-14 pathways
- Early, sustained career information and advising
- Engaged learners

Global Learner Competence:

- Investigate the world
- Recognize perspectives, others, and their own
- Communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences
- Take action to improve conditions
- International Studies School Network

Exemptions Requested

Uniform School Start Date

Texas Education Code §25.0811

Current Status:

A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Proposed:

Having the flexibility to establish an earlier start date will enable the District to balance the amount of instructional time available in each semester, providing classroom teachers the opportunity to deliver more equitable learning experiences for students in the fall and spring semesters. Opportunity for continuous effective horizontal/vertical planning and professional development among the campuses. It allows the opportunity to attend college classes during the summer and prevents summer student regression. It allows for more instructional days prior to the state assessment. It provides students with additional days for accelerated learning closing academic gaps.

Class Size Ratio

Texas Education Code §25.111, §25.112, and §25.113

Current Status:

According to state law, kindergarten – 4th Grade classes are to be kept at a 22-student-to-1-teacher ratio. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose. Along with the waiver, it is required that a letter is sent home to each parent in the section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted. Many times soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of the district, and we are below the 22:1 ratio.

Proposed

While small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff and the best teacher-to-student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. In the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio for Kindergarten – 4th-grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary.. This exemption only allows BCISD the local control over class size not to exceed 24:1 ratios for those grade levels, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements. Furthermore, a stipend will be paid from budgeted funds to the grade level teacher with a class ratio of 24:1. This stipend may be prorated upon the duration of a class size ratio of 24:1. The intent is to maintain a maximum of 24:1 for K-4. The exemption will also help by eliminating the “notice of class size: paperwork.

Teacher Certification

Texas Education Code §21.003, §21.051, §21.053, and §21.057

Current Status:

These provisions of the Texas Education Code Section dictate that all district teachers be certified in accordance with rules adopted by the State Board of Education Certification (SBEC). Within the focus area of providing engaging and challenging learning, the BCISD Strategic Plan sets forth specific goals under the initiative to improve college and career readiness options. The goals for developing post-high school plans, enhancing workforce skills, and expanding dual credit programs are inhibited by the Texas Education Codes shown above. These laws limit the District’s ability to hire teachers to fill hard-to-fill, high-demand dual credit and career and technical/STEAM (Applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts & Mathematics) courses when high-quality certified teachers are not available.

Proposed

BCISD is committed to placing the right teacher in every classroom. Certification decisions will be handled locally to serve BCISD students' needs best. To enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of an instructor/teacher with a college degree in a core subject area and such dual credit and career and technical/STEAM course offerings, the District seeks to establish its local qualification requirements for core subjects and such courses in place of the requirements outlined in the law. By obtaining an exemption from existing teacher certification requirements for instructors/teachers with a college degree in a core area and such dual credit and career and technical/STEAM teachers, the District will have the flexibility to hire instructors/teachers with a college degree in a core area subject and

credentialed community college instructors, university professors in specific content areas to afford the District the flexibility to hire professionals with a college degree in core subject areas and certain trades and vocations to teach the crafts of those trades and vocations (such as welding, fine arts, etc.) in career and technical/STEAM courses if certified teachers are not available. The District shall establish local criteria for training and locally certifying individuals rather than adhere strictly to mandates outlined in Section §21.053. In doing so, parental notification of “inappropriately certified or uncertified teachers” under Section §21.057 would no longer be necessary. The exemption would also allow internal applicants seeking assignments outside their traditional certification area to be considered. This exemption directly supports the move from “highly qualified” requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

This exemption will allow BCSD the opportunity to hire nontraditional candidates who bring specific field experience, knowledge, and skills which would provide students with unparalleled learning experiences. It will allow flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades and vocations to teach the crafts which are more beneficial to our students than what a standard teaching certificate could accomplish. The flexibility to hire credentialed community college instructors will expand the opportunity for the dual credit courses outside of the norm and hire qualified and experienced instructors for dual credit and college credentialed to teach courses required for certifications and/or dual credit classes for the Pathways Technical Early College High School program (P-TECH). As a rural district, it will allow current teachers to teach outside of their field/grade level in situations where vacancies are not filled. Although it is the District’s intent to limit the use of this exemption, the District will always seek to hire certified and highly qualified teachers. The District will move to establish its own local criteria/qualifications for hard to fill positions. Special Education, Bilingual/ESL, and prekindergarten teachers must continue to be SBEC certified.

Probationary Contracts

Texas Education Code Chapter 21, Subchapter C

Current Status

For experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may be at least one year if the person has been employed in public education for at least five of the previous eight years. A one-year probationary period is insufficient to evaluate the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made before the District receives state assessment results.

Proposed

Considering the initiatives and processes in BCISD, this period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the employee’s effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the availability of end-of-year classroom and student data. Upon exemption from TEC §21.102(b), all contract employees (including experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses new to the district) will be subject to the probationary period set out in TEC §21.102(c), in order to allow more time for the district to fairly and thoroughly assess an employee’s performance.

Long-Range Energy Plan to Reduce Energy Consumption

Texas Education Code §44.902

Current Status:

The board of trustees is required to establish a long-range energy plan to reduce the district's annual electric consumption by five percent beginning with the 2008 state fiscal year and consume electricity in subsequent fiscal years in accordance with the district's energy plan.

Proposed

The 5% is an arbitrary number. It is a “one size fits all” law in an unrealistic situation. Energy consumption and savings are a building-by-building, district-by-district calculation. BCISD actively and constantly seeks ways to decrease electric consumption. Therefore, the requirements to develop plans and other bureaucratic steps to meet this arbitrary goal are unnecessary.

Summary

The direction provided by this District of Innovation Plan is an important step forward to ensure BCISD develops and supports our students, employees, and families in a more personalized, more effective, and strategically aligned way. Moving our system toward a more personalized environment our students deserve will enable us to better prepare them according to their individualized needs and unique passions, gifts, and talents. Through HB 1842, BCISD will be positioned to leverage increased flexibility to make the best decisions for our children because we will be able to make them locally.

In most cases, activation of exemptions from the TEC will require the revision of BCISD policies. BCISD will implement an enhanced local policy development process that is rigorous, transparent, and inclusive of stakeholder input through the District Education Improvement Committee (DEIC). The district has developed and communicated a detailed implementation plan for the current Strategic Plan; a similar process will occur with the District of Innovation Plan and will be seamlessly implemented as part of the District's Strategic Plan.