

# HARDIN-JEFFERSON

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



### Local Innovation Plan 2022-2027

HB 1842, of the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session,  
allows Texas districts to qualify as a District of Innovation.  
Districts of Innovation are able to gain local control of certain operations that are currently under the control of  
the Texas Education Agency.

Approved 6-13-2022 by Board of Trustees

## DISTRICT OF INNOVATION COMMITTEE

<b>Name</b>	<b>Committee Position</b>
Brad McEachern	Superintendent
Dr. Steven Cox	Assistant Superintendent
Dianne Timberlake	Principal, China Elementary
Ashley Causey	Principal, Sour Lake Elementary
Darrell Westfall	Principal, Henderson Middle School
Patrick Brown	Principal, Hardin Jefferson High School
Susie Brooks	Teacher, Henderson Middle School
Beth Holder	Teacher, China Elementary
Kym Fontenot	Teacher, Henderson Middle School
Kristi West	Teacher, Hardin Jefferson High School
Wyndi Padgett	Teacher, Sour Lake Elementary
Jaimee Jordan	Teacher, Hardin Jefferson High School
Tracie Begnaud	Parent
Wendy Brooks	Parent
Catherine Shute	Paraprofessional, Sour Lake Elementary
Whitney Weatherford	Community Member
Paul Sims	Assistant Principal, Sour Lake Elementary

Britney Johnson	Parent
Daisy Marino	Assistant Principal, China Elementary
Wendi Shiff	Teacher, China Elementary
Heather Stockwell	Parent
Donnell Devillier	Parent
David Morris	Parent
Lauren Ramirez	Parent

# HJISD INNOVATION PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB)1842, passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates including the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On April 18, 2022, the Hardin-Jefferson Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") passed a Resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. On April 18, 2022, the Board appointed a 24-member District of Innovation Committee ("Committee") composed of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District's stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators. At the Board Meeting, there was a public hearing of the proposed District of Innovation Plan. The Committee met again on May 17, 2022, to talk about the proposed changes received and for the committee to make any changes/adjustments to the plan. The approved plan was voted on by the committee by a unanimous vote. The HJISD Board of Trustees approved the Plan at its meeting on June 13, 2022.

## TERM

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning June 14, 2022, and ending June 13, 2027, unless terminated or amended earlier by the board of Trustees 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 appoint a new committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

# AREAS OF INNOVATION

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

## 1. School Start and End Date

*Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812*

*Related Board Policies: EB LEGAL*

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

*TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of August. TEC 25.0812 states that school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.*

*Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in August. The Texas tourism groups lobbied to have this stopped because they believed it was hurting their tourism business. Therefore, several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday, with no exceptions.*

### **Innovation Strategies**

- a. Relief from the statute will allow HJISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.
- b. Alignment of the district calendar with local universities, advanced placement exams, and STAAR timelines.
- c. Provide for increased local control of the instructional calendar in order to be responsive to community needs.

## **2. Kindergarten – Grade 4 Class Size Requirement**

*Exemption from: TEC 25.112; TEC 25.113*

*Related Board Policies: EEB LEGAL/LOCAL*

### **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 kindergarten – 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.*

*TEC 25. 113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this notice.*

### **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. HJISD believes in a low student to teacher ratio in all of its classrooms. The District has a goal of 18:1 in PK-4 and 24:1 in 5-12. HJISD will begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student to teacher ratio of at least 22:1 or less in each PK-4 home room class. In the event that any class exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees. Decisions regarding appropriate student to teacher ratios will be made at the local level, taking into consideration the age and grade level of the students, the subject matter of the class, the needs of individual teachers, and student groups, and the availability of additional instructional staff members.
- b. A TEA waiver request will not be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.
- c. Parents of students in K-4 classrooms that exceed a ratio of 22:1 will continue to be notified as per TEC 25.113.

### **3. Teacher Certification**

*Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.057*

*Relevant Board Policies: DBA LEGAL/LOCAL; DK LEGAL/LOCAL*

#### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

*TEC 21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor 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 for Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.*

*TEC 21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the District from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.*

*TEC 21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.*

#### **Innovation Strategies**

a. The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question. Special education and bilingual/ESL teachers will continue to be SBEC certified.

b. For grades 5-12, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.

c. An individual with experience in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.

d. Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.

e. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.

f. Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

G. Campus administrators will have the ability to consider out-of-state or out-of-country 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, as allowed by locally established policy. The Superintendent or designee will approve all local certifications and will report to the board of trustees.



#### **4. Probationary Contracts**

*Exemption from: TEC 21.102(b)*

*Relevant Board Policies: DCA LEGAL*

##### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

*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. A one-year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior to District receipt of state assessment results.*

##### **Innovation Strategies**

**a.** For experienced teachers, counselors, 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, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years. All other teachers hired in the District may remain on probationary status for three years, and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC 21.102(c).

#### **5. Professional Development/Mentor Teachers**

*Exemption from: TEC 21.451; TEC 21.458*

*Relevant Board Policies: DEAA LEGAL*

##### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

*TEC 21.451 prescribes staff development requirements for educators. These requirements impede the District's ability to provide timely professional development to employees based on newly emerging issues, data, and student needs.*

*TEC 21.458 sets eligibility requirements for teacher mentors and mentees. This provision states that the district may only assign a mentor to a teacher with less than two years of teaching experience, despite the fact that a teacher at any level of experience may benefit from a mentor-mentee relationship. The District needs the flexibility to assign mentors to more experienced teachers in need of assistance. The statute also sets eligibility requirements for mentor teachers, which limits the available pool of mentor teachers.*

##### **Innovation Strategies**

- a. The District will exercise local discretion in determining the areas of need, content, duration, and frequency for professional development for its instructional and non-instructional staff.
- b. The District will exercise local discretion in assigning teachers to serve as mentors based on a variety of factors, including experience, knowledge, and areas of instruction targeted for improvement or innovation.

6. **Suspension of 2nd Grade and Below**

*Exemption from: Texas Education Code: Sec. 37.005*

*Relevant Board Policy: FOB (Legal)*

**Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

*The Texas Education Code restricts a campus administrator's ability to place a student in a grade below third in out-of-school suspension, unless while on school property or while attending a school sponsored or school related activity on or off school property the student engages in certain dangerous conduct (weapons, violent offenses, or drugs). This limitation prohibits campus administrators from taking the sometimes-necessary action of removing a student from the campus, regardless of age, for the safety of the student, other students, and/or the staff.*

**Innovation Strategies:**

- a. To best serve the students of HJISD and provide a high-quality learning environment for all students, HJISD will allow campus administrators to exercise their own professional judgment when assigning discipline to students and place students of any grade in out of school suspension when the administrator determines that such action is necessary for school and safety and/or order to maintain an orderly learning environment for all students.
- b. This flexibility will allow for school-based decision making and allow administrators to more effectively ensure the safety and security of all students and staff.
- c. Criteria will be developed to identify situations that would initiate a suspension, and the superintendent's designee will provide oversight.
- d. The Superintendent/designee will report to the Board after the end of each school year the number of students in grade PreK through fifth grade placed in out of school suspension.

**7. Local School Health Advisory Council and Health Instruction**

*Exemption from: TEC 28.004*

*Relevant Board Policies: FFA (Legal and Local)*

**Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

*Sec. 28.004 (d) 1 of this code requires the SHAC to meet four times annually.*

**Innovation Strategies**

- a. The District School Health Advisory Council will meet a minimum of two times annually, once each semester. The council may convene for additional meetings if necessary.
- b. The exemption will allow the council to meet, review, and respond to data regarding the District's goals without creating a hardship on the membership.

**8. Student Transfer Revocations**

*Exemption from: TEC 25.036*

*Relevant Board Policies: FDA (Legal) and (Local)*

**Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

TEC 25.036 makes inter-district transfers effective for a period of one school year; however, certain infractions during the transfer application process or during the effective period of the transfer may warrant revocation of a student's transfer during the school year.

**Innovation Strategies**

- a. The District may revoke a student's transfer if the District learns that the student or the student's parent or legal guardian misrepresented any facts on the student's transfer application.
- b. The District may revoke a student's transfer during the school year if the student is assigned to DAEP for any reason or if the student has more than two (2) write-ups/referrals during any grading period.
- c. The District may revoke a student's transfer during the school year if the student misses more than 10% of any class period during a grading period.

## 9. **Removal of Individuals from School Property**

*Exemption from: TEC 37.105*

*Relevant Board Policies: GKA (Legal) and (Local)*

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

TEC 37.105 sets restrictions on when and how the District may remove or refuse entry to a person on school property or at school events. In order to promote the safety and wellbeing of students and staff and prevent unnecessary disruptions to the school day and school activities, the District would like flexibility in being able to remove individuals from school property or school events.

### **Innovation Strategies**

- a. Designated administrators and security personnel may, without verbal warning, remove or refuse entry to an individual who is behaving in an unruly or unsafe manner.
- b. The appropriate administrator will send written notice to any individual who is refused entry or removed from school property or a school event within a reasonable time after the removal or refusal of entry, outlining the events giving rise to the removal or refusal of entry and notifying the individual of their rights to appeal, if applicable.