

Northwest ISD District of Innovation Plan



DECEMBER 11, 2023 - DECEMBER 11, 2028

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Original Local Innovation Plan Adopted
January 14, 2019

Approved Amendment
August 28, 2023

Local Innovation Plan Renewal/Adopted
December 11, 2023

Approved Amendments
August 25, 2025

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CORE BELIEFS

- Kids come first.
- Continuous learning is essential to prepare for college and career opportunities.
- Each student’s success is the shared responsibility of students, families, schools, and communities.
- Learning is influenced by environment.

VISION

Northwest ISD empowers learners and leaders to positively impact the world.

MISSION

Northwest ISD, in collaboration with students, families, communities, and global partners, will engage in a culture of learning that prepares all students to confidently navigate their future.

STRATEGIC GOALS

Northwest ISD will provide personalized learning experiences and cultivate the growth and achievement of every student.

NISD PRIORITIES

Literacy

1.1 Our students will annually increase literacy proficiency to reach or exceed grade-level standards.

Academic Progress

1.02 Our students will achieve individualized academic goals to reach a year’s growth or more in all content areas.

College, Career, Military & Life Readiness

1.3 Our students will graduate life ready and prepared for success in career, college, or military service.

Northwest ISD will recruit, value, and retain highly effective staff prepared to meet the individual needs of our students and learning community.

NISD PRIORITIES

Recruit

2.1 Northwest ISD will have an unwavering commitment to attract and welcome high-quality staff.

Value

2.2 Northwest ISD will invest in all staff through a culture of support, development, and empowerment to make a positive impact on the learning community.

Retain

2.3 Northwest ISD will retain highly effective staff through meaningful relationships, ongoing support, and professional growth opportunities.

Northwest ISD will foster a safe environment and a culture of engagement that values the voices of all students, staff, families, and community members.

NISD PRIORITIES

Engagement

3.1 Northwest ISD will foster an environment of engagement with every member of our community through collaborative dialogue and partnership opportunities.

Culture

3.2 Northwest ISD will model and instill a culture of belonging where all students, staff, families, and community voices are heard and valued.

Safety

3.3 Northwest ISD will continuously improve, maintain and communicate systems of support to strengthen the physical and emotional well-being of our students, staff, and community.

District of Innovation Introduction

District of Innovation is a concept passed during the 84th Legislative Session (House Bill 1842). Texas Education Code Chapter 12A gives traditional independent school districts the opportunity to gain flexibility through a variety of available exemptions to the Texas Education Code. The designation does not allow for exemptions from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements, academic or financial accountability, or student discipline and safety (Chapter 37).

A school district must adopt an innovation plan in order to access these exemptions and districts may amend, change, or extend an innovation plan through the same process utilized to adopt a plan. A school district's most recent academic performance rating must be at least acceptable in order to be eligible for designation as a District of Innovation.

Background

The Northwest ISD Board of Trustees adopted a Resolution for DOI Designation on September 24, 2017. A public hearing to consider whether the district should pursue a District of Innovation designation and develop a District of Innovation Plan was held on October 25, 2017. The DOI process was postponed pending the development of Northwest ISD's core beliefs, vision, mission, and goals, as ensuring alignment to those foundational elements was important.

The DOI process resumed in August 2018. After multiple meetings discussing the district's needs and various exemptions, a final plan was developed and the NISD Board of Trustees approved the plan on January 14, 2019, for the term January 14, 2019 through January 14, 2024.

The plan was amended with one additional exemption on August 28, 2023.

The designation as a District of Innovation may not exceed five years and Northwest ISD began the renewal process in 2023. Input on the renewal of the DOI plan and possible exemptions was received from Cabinet, District Leadership Team (campus and district administrators), and the District Education Improvement Council. The District of Innovation Committee met on October 12, 2023, to review the existing DOI Plan and to discuss additional exemption considerations. A public meeting of the DOI Committee was held on November 1, 2023, and the committee unanimously approved the District of Innovation Plan. The plan was presented to the NISD Board of Trustees on November 13 and unanimously approved on December 11 for a designation term of December 11, 2023, through December 11, 2028.

New legislation passed during the 89th Legislative Session impacted the plan’s exemptions, and the District of Innovation Committee met and unanimously approved plan amendments on August 19, 2025, adding four new exemptions and removing four exemptions no longer allowed.

2025 District of Innovation Committee

First Name	Last Name	Role / Title
Courtney	Baker	Teacher - Remote Math Teacher
Kim	Barker	Asst Supt for Human Resources
Katy	Barrey	Coordinator of Instructional Technology
Kelli	Baugh	Teacher - Daniel ES - Fifth Grade
Rebekah	Baus	Parent - Daniel ES
Brittnie	Bragg	Coordinator of Secondary ELA
Jake	Browarski	Business and Education Coordinator
Kristy	Butler	Instructional Technologist
Ginear	Campbell	Parent - Haslet
Cara	Carter	Chief Technology Officer
Melissa	DeSimone	Exec Director of Research, Accountability, and Assessment
Stephanie	Espinosa	Executive Director of Teaching and Learning
Stacy	Fanning	Career Access Coordinator
Jamie	Farber	Director of Guidance and Counseling
Jaime	Garcia	Coordinator of Elementary Mathematics
Kim	Garrett	Teacher - HS - NHS - Science
Micah	Gierkey	Executive Director of Student Services
Melanye	Griffin	Coordinator of Secondary Mathematics

Michael	Griffin	Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction
Patti	Hayes	CTE Data & Certification Coordinator
Kelley	Henderson	Executive Director of Career and Technical Education
Chris	Hill	Exec Dir of Secondary Education
Christie	Hobbs	General Counsel
Joel	Johnson	Executive Director of Athletics
Sunni	Johnson	Director of Curriculum
Elizabeth	Jones	Diagnostician
Dawn	Kelley	Teacher - CTMS - Social Studies
Kevin	Lacefield	Executive Director of Fine Arts
Tricia	Lutkenhaus	Principal - Barksdale Middle School
Ron	Mendoza	Assistant Principal - BNHS
Bobby	Morris	Director of College & Career Readiness
Jonathan	Pastusek	Chief Financial Officer
Reigan	Perez	Assistant Principal - Adams MS
Raine	Radicke	Education and Coaching Coordinator
Todd	Rogers	Principal - Steele Early College High School
Audra	Rowell	Coordinator of Advanced Academics
Jason	Sanders	Director of Instructional Technology
Angela	Scott	Public Affairs Coordinator
Ed	Shelstead	Director of Career and Technical Education
Liz	Smith	Teacher - ES - Schluter - Gifted and Talented
Lyndsie	Smith	Principal - Sonny and Allegra Nance Elementary School
Kelly	Suarez	Coordinator of Elementary Science
Tara	Teague	Counselor - Worthington MS
Denise	Tennison	English 4 AP Seminar - BNHS
Anthony	Tosie	Exec Dir of Communications
Monica	Valenta	Health Sciences Coordinator

Timeline

Action	Responsibility	Date
Adoption of Board Resolution for DOI Designation	Board	9/24/2017
Public Hearing	Board	10/25/2017
Committee approval of original DOI Plan	Committee	1/14/2019

NISD School Board Adoption of original DOI Plan	Board	1/14/2019
NISD School Board Adoption of Amendment	Board	8/28/2023

Renewal Process	Responsibility	Date
Superintendent Cabinet discussion	Cabinet	10/9/2023
District Leadership Team presentation and feedback	DLT	10/12/2023
DOI Committee Meeting – Review of existing DOI Plan and exemptions, introduction and discussion of additional exemption considerations	Committee	10/12/2023
DEIC presentation and feedback	Committee	10/24/2023
Public committee meeting to consider final exemptions; committee vote on final proposed DOI Plan	Committee	11/1/2023
DOI Plan posted on website	Administration	11/4/2023
NISD School Board presentation and discussion of proposed DOI Plan	Board	11/13/2023
NISD School Board consideration and approval of DOI Plan	Board	12/11/2023
Notification to Commissioner of Approval	Administration	12/13/2023
Anticipated development and consideration of DOI local policies	Board	2024

Amendment Process	Responsibility	Date
Conclusion of 89 th Legislative Session	State	6/2/2025
Public meeting of DOI Committee to consider amendments; unanimous approval of each exemption	Committee	8/19/2025
NISD School Board consideration and approval of Revised DOI Plan; unanimous approval	Board	8/25/2025

Innovation Exemptions

Educator Certification Requirement for Teachers and Other Educators **Statute: Texas Education Code § 21.003 and § 21.053**

Texas Education Code § 21.003 and § 21.053 outlines state certification standards for teachers. An exemption from these requirements allows NISD to issue a school district teaching permit to individuals who do not hold a teaching certificate, but whom the district deems best to teach in a particular area. NISD is committed to hiring the best staff available and lists “recruit, value, and retain exceptional staff to create a rewarding learning environment” as one of its district strategic goals. Occasionally, teachers are needed for positions that are difficult to fill. This exemption relates only to those positions the District identifies as difficult to fill and would be assessed on an individual basis. Staff hired under a school district teaching permit will benefit from the same rights and responsibilities as certified teachers within the district. After the required posting period and candidate interviews, the principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what specific credentials (i.e., experiences and expertise) the prospective teacher possesses that would qualify the individual to teach that subject(s). The superintendent must approve the selection and report the action to the Board at the first board meeting following the assignment. The District and local campus will assess appropriate training needs for any teacher hired under this exemption. Finally, this is a local certification only and does not transfer to another school district.

Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers **Statute: Texas Education Code § 21.102(b)**

Texas Education Code § 21.102(b) states that a probationary contract may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment with the district. This period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the teacher’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. For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians or nurses new to NISD who have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a second probationary contract may be offered when needed to benefit the teacher and students served. This action requires principal recommendation, in collaboration with the appropriate human resources administrator, and consideration and approval by the superintendent.

Teacher Mentors

Statute: Texas Education Code § 21.458

Texas Education Code § 21.458 requires that teacher mentors have three or more years of experience in the field. This limits the number of teachers who are allowed to serve as mentors and restricts teachers with exceptional skill or experience in the subject matter from sharing their knowledge with novice teachers. This is a need for NISD because of the rapid growth of the district.

Transfer of Children of Peace Officers

Statute: Texas Education Code § 25.0344

Texas Education Code § 25.0344 requires that a district, upon request of a peace officer/parent, transfer the peace officer's child to another campus within the district. Given the fast growth of the district, compliance with this law has the potential to overcrowd classrooms and require the hiring of additional staff when class sizes increase beyond board-approved ratios. Although existing administrative regulations would arguably apply to limit the application of this statute to open campuses only, this change is recommended to provide clarity to the community and administration.

Transfer of Children of Service Members

Statute: Texas Education Code § 25.0344

Texas Education Code § 25.0344 further requires that a district, upon request of a service member/parent, transfer the service member's child to another campus within the district. Given the fast growth of the district, compliance with this law has the potential to overcrowd classrooms and require the hiring of additional staff when class sizes increase beyond board-approved ratios. Although existing administrative regulations would arguably apply to limit the application of this statute to open campuses only, this change is recommended to provide clarity to the community and administration.

Minutes of Instruction

Statute: Texas Education Code § 25.081

Texas Education Code § 25.081 replaces the requirement of 180 days of instruction with the requirement of at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recesses). The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction, within the required 75,600 minutes, allows NISD the possibility to adjust the length of school day, early release days, and professional learning days.

Uniform Start Date for Academic Calendar

Statute: Texas Education Code § 25.0811(a)

Texas Education Code § 25.0811(a) does not allow school districts to begin school before the fourth Monday of August. This requirement restricts the local community from designing a calendar that best meets the needs of students and families. This requirement also limits the amount of instructional time available before state and Advanced Placement testing as well as inhibits true alignment with local community colleges providing dual credit courses. Exemption from this requirement allows NISD to collaboratively design an academic calendar based on the needs of and input from the community.

Minimum Days of Attendance

Statute: Texas Education Code § 25.092

Texas Education Code § 25.092 requires that students be in attendance a minimum of 90% of the school days to receive credit. While NISD believes strongly in student attendance, there may be a variety of ways to allow students to show mastery of a given course despite unforeseen circumstances that caused their attendance to fall below the 90% barrier. With a strategic goal that included personalized learning, instruction and learning platforms may be developed to allow NISD students a variety of options including those for non-traditional students.

Grievance Policies

Statute: Texas Education Code §§ 26A.001 – 26A.004

The 89th Texas Legislature created a new chapter concerning grievances against a school district, Texas Education Code Chapter 26A. Chapter 26A is contrary to Northwest ISD's commitment to resolving matters promptly and efficiently. For example, Section 26A.001 allows complainants to

amend their complaints and supplement the record at any point in the grievance process, thereby extending the grievance process and interfering with the administration's efforts to investigate and resolve the entire complaint at the lowest level possible. Section 26A.002 allows complainants up to 90 days to file a Level One complaint and up to 20 days to file each appeal, thereby delaying the administration's opportunity to resolve a complaint close to the time of the event or decision about which the person is complaining. The District has established strong policies and procedures for resolving grievances, and the District is committed to allowing complainants to seek redress for their grievances, within prompt and appropriate timelines. Through the exemption to this chapter, (1) complainants will submit their grievances in a timely manner, (2) administrative efforts will be allocated most efficiently, and (3) the District may hear and respond to complaints more effectively.

Note: This exemption does not include exemptions from requirements or authority of the Texas Commissioner of Education or the Texas Education Agency such as those in § 26A.001(f), § 26A.001(h), and § 26A.001(i).

Statute: Texas Education Code § 26.011

This exemption is limited to the following language in Section 26.011(a) which requires the board of trustees to adopt a grievance procedure "that complies with Chapter 26A". To effectuate the exemption discussed above for Texas Education Code §§ 26A.001 – 26A.004, the District should also be exempt from the language in Section 26.011(a): "that complies with Chapter 26A". This exemption allows the District to maintain local control over its grievance policies, procedures, and process.

Credit by Examination (CBE)

Statute: Texas Education Code § 28.023

The Texas Education Code § 28.023, allows students in primary grades to accelerate a grade level and students in secondary academic courses to earn credit for a course on the basis credit by examination. Credit-by-examination assessments (CBEs) must be approved by each local board of trustees. A student in grades 6-12 may be awarded credit based on performance on a CBE taken either with no prior instruction or with prior instruction. Students may not attempt to earn credit by exam for the same high school subject more than two times. This exemption would allow NISD the flexibility to create its own CBE process to meet the personalized learning of its students.

Local School Library Advisory Council

Statute: Texas Education Code § 33.025

Texas Education Code § 33.025 allows school boards to establish a Local School Library Advisory Council. A SLAC established under this statute is burdened with a number of statutory duties, membership requirements, and meeting requirements. The District values the engagement of

parents, community members, and staff in evaluating the library collection and challenges to library materials, but these requirements are unduly constricting. Exemption from this statute allows NISD to create and develop the SLAC to better serve the needs of the Northwest ISD community.

Acquisition of Library Materials

Statute: Texas Education Code § 33.026

Texas Education Code § 33.026 requires the board of trustees to approve all library materials procured for or donated to a school library. However, the board of trustees is made of unpaid elected officials, many of whom have families and full-time jobs separate from their unpaid work for the District. It is not reasonable to expect them to be familiar with every title on every campus in the District. Rather, library acquisitions should be made by the full-time educators and professionals hired to do this work, many of whom have graduate degrees in library science, education, or literature. Exemption from this statute allows the board of trustees to rely on the District's professional staff, in consultation with the Local School Library Advisory Council, to make these decisions on behalf of the District.

Challenge of Library Materials

Statute: Texas Education Code § 33.027

Texas Education Code § 33.027 creates a process for people to challenge library materials. The statutory process requires the board of trustees to consider a challenge to library materials within 90 days after the challenge is submitted. The statute requires that, immediately after a challenge is filed, all students must be prohibited from accessing the challenged material while the challenge is pending, regardless of where the library materials were housed or the intended age and maturity level of the students prohibited from accessing them. The District values community input, but the statutory framework for resolving challenges is unduly restrictive. The District can more effectively consider challenges through its own framework, tailored to meet the needs of its community, and in collaboration with its Local School Library Advisory Council. Exemption from this statute allows NISD to implement its own challenge procedures.