Hutto ISD
District of Innovation Plan

I. Vision and Mission

Vision: Inspiring Excellence

Mission: Hippo Nation inspires all students to achieve excellence in academics, character, and community.

II. Hutto ISD as a District of Innovation

House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, provided an unprecedented opportunity for Texas public school districts to challenge the status quo. As a District of Innovation, Hutto ISD is able to implement our Strategic Plan with the increased flexibility and freedom necessary to personalize learning experiences and inspire excellence in academics, character, and community.

Our Strategic Priorities require Hutto ISD to evolve, to think fundamentally differently about critical systemic components such as how we deliver instruction, how we recruit and retain top talent, how we engage and support our families, how we increase efficiencies, and what experiences we provide as we continually grow as a learning organization.

To think differently, we must be able to respond differently.

Leveraging the freedom and flexibility afforded as a District of Innovation assures we are empowered to do so. Under HB 1842, districts may identify certain requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) "that inhibit the goals of the plan and from which the district should be exempted on adoption of the plan. . ." The first plan was developed and implemented in 2016.

The plan was renewed in 2021 with some modifications and amended in 2022. Our district seeks to amend the current plan as we continue to find innovative ways to meet the needs of our students.

Because Hutto ISD's Strategic Plan sets forth specific goals under the initiative to improve college and career options and because Hutto ISD seeks to maximize local control of educational decisions for students, Hutto ISD seeks exemption from the following permissible provisions of the TEC as allowed in the statute:

Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade (TEC §25.092)

Texas Education Code Section 25.092 restricts the District from issuing class credit or a final grade if a student is not in attendance the required "seat time, referred to as the 90% rule. This

requirement is an arbitrary percentage, where school districts award credit based on seat time rather than demonstrated mastery of the learning.

Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to Hutto ISD students through innovation in the method, location, and times instruction may be delivered to students.

Hutto ISD will continue to seek innovative instructional arrangements once provided this flexibility. The District pilot under this exemption will be the partnership with Temple College, Texas State Technical College, or another post-secondary institute in the area of dual credit instruction who offer onsite, hybrid or distance learning options.

Blended learning, where instruction is delivered through a combination of time in class and time spent learning online, is one example where exemption from Section 25.092 will likely foster greater innovation to promote and increase college and career readiness options.

This exemption will also allow the District not to penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities. Relief granted from Section 25.092 does not constitute any substantive exemption from compulsory attendance or UIL rules, nor does it limit or modify a teacher's ability to assign or determine grades in accordance with Texas Education Code 28.0214 and 28.021.

Teacher Certification for Dual Credit, Career and Technical Education Instructors, and Hard-to-Fill Areas (TEC §21.003 and TEC §21.053)

School districts always seek to hire a certified and highly qualified teacher for its open positions. With the current staffing situations this often presents a challenge. In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position, or if an educator is teaching a subject outside of their certification, the district must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency. TEA has the flexibility to approve or deny this request. Currently, non-certified professionals cannot be hired or paid without proper credentials on file with the State Board of Education.

Through an exemption from existing teacher certification requirements in Texas Education Code Sections 21.003, and 21.053, Hutto ISD will be granted the flexibility to:

- Employ and pay as a contracted teacher an uncertified person. An individual would be eligible to teach any eligible course on a non-certified contract.
- Allow a certified teacher to teach outside of their certification area or grade level.

Allowing elementary certified teachers to teach in either intermediate or middle schools, middle school certified teachers to teach in either elementary or high schools and high school certified teachers to teach in middle schools.

The District shall develop minimum required qualifications for persons hired in the above manner and will also require certain professional development in the areas of student management, instructional strategies, curriculum and parent engagement. The district will

require the individual to complete certification requirements within three years of employment for areas outside of career-tech education. CTE teachers who meet local requirements will not be required to complete certification requirements. HISD will continue to provide notification to the parents/guardians of students in those classes where the instructor does not hold a traditional teaching certificate in that particular content area.

In particular, Hutto ISD will use this exemption for secondary science courses, Career and Technical Education courses, and foreign language courses. However, we may exercise this option for other courses as permitted by applicable law, if the need arises.

Certification of Educators from Outside the State (TEC §21.052 and §21.053)

In the event a district cannot locate a state certified teacher for a position, the district must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency. Out-of-state certified teachers are required to complete Texas certification requirements. TEA has the flexibility to approve or deny this request. Currently, non-certified professionals cannot be hired or paid without proper credentials on file.

Hutto ISD will be able to fill vacancies by recognizing out-of-state and/or international certifications as highly qualified. The district will require the individual to complete the Texas certification requirements for the assigned teaching field within three years of employment. HISD will continue to provide notification to the parents of students in those classes where the instructor does not hold a traditional teaching certificate in that particular content area.

Teacher Employment Contracts (TEC §21.002 and §21.102)

Currently, experienced teachers new to the district have a probationary period that 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 a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

Hutto ISD would like the flexibility to extend the continuation of probationary contract status at the discretion of administration beyond what is allowed if it is in the best interest of the learners involving innovation with Subchapter A and C, TEC's 21.002 and 21.102.

Specifically, Hutto ISD teachers that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years from the last date of district employment. This will allow the district more time to evaluate a staff member's effectiveness.

Uniform School Start Date (TEC 25.0811)

Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday of August. The Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of active learning, college and career readiness, and social and emotional learning. The Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 inhibits these goals by prohibiting the District from beginning instruction before the fourth Monday of August. Flexibility to begin instruction earlier in the calendar year will enable the District to improve active learning by balancing the amount of instructional time

in the semesters, allow teachers to better pace and deliver instruction before and after the winter break.

In addition, by having the flexibility to start and end the school year earlier, students will be able to enroll in college courses that start in June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Removing the uniform start date could also let Hutto ISD start classes as a short week, easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school. This will also allow for more flexible professional learning opportunities for our staff.

This section will not reduce the number of instructional minutes below 75,600 required by Texas Education Code 25.081(a).

Class Size in Grades Pre-Kindergarten–4 (TEC §25.112, §25.113)

Texas Education Code currently requires the District to maintain a class size of 22 students or less in each prekindergarten through fourth grade class. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency (TEA). These waivers are rarely rejected by the TEA, making the process of applying for a waiver no more than an administrative step of putting the TEA on notice. Along with the waiver, the District is required to notify parents of the waiver or exception to the class size limit. Many times, soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of the District and the class returns to a size at or below 22 students, thus negating the need for the waiver or notification to parents.

The average class size in prekindergarten through fourth grade in Hutto ISD is 22 students. While Hutto ISD certainly believes that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, research does not support a negative effect when only one or two more students are added. Class size must be balanced with the logistics of funding, availability of resources and space, and adding qualified staff. Hutto ISD's purpose is not to disregard the intent of class size ratios, but rather to allow the District more flexibility in determining appropriate class sizes based on the unique facts and circumstances. Hutto ISD maintains local ratios for all prekindergarten through fourth grade classes and attempts to keep all classes sufficiently staffed, but will allow local consideration in placing students. The Board of Trustees will be notified of all class sizes that exceed the locally established ratios.

Class Size Waiver Submission and Parent Notification (Board Policy EEB Legal, TEC 25.111, TEC 25.112 & TEC 25.113)

Texas Education Code Section 25.113 requires a campus or district that is granted a class size waiver to provide parental notice. The district will attempt to keep all prekindergarten through Fourth Grade core classrooms within the 22:1 ratio. In the event the class size exceeds this ratio the district will not request an exemption through the TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a prekindergarten through Fourth Grade classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

TEC 25.113 Notice of Class Size TEC 25.113 states that "A campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112(d) from class size limits shall provide written notice of the exception to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception. Flexibility in this area will allow the district to determine the appropriateness of parent notification.

HUTTO ISD

Inter District Transfers–TEC 25.036

District transfers are for an entire school year. (FDA Local). Under Texas Education Code, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year. The District is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. Rationale: On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, Hutto ISD seeks exemption from the one-year transfer commitment. Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer may have such transfer status revoked by the superintendent or designee at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

~~*Campus Behavior Coordinator TEC 37.0012~~

Currently, a person at each campus must be designated to serve as the campus behavior ~~coordinator. The person may be the principal or administrator selected by the principal. TEC 37.0012 limits children's ability to develop positive relationships with various adults who have a vested interest in their mental and emotional development and wellness. Current law restricts campus administrators' and educators' ability to focus on each student's needs through a collaborative disciplinary approach. The designation of one person who will be primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline restricts the District's ability to promote a more collaborative discipline program, in which multiple members within the organization collectively support students and maintain student discipline. Each campus will undergo a process to develop a plan that collaboratively creates a chain of communication that will best meet students' needs and the campus.~~

~~*DAEP Placement of Elementary Student TEC 37.006 (f)~~

~~TEC § 37.005 and 37.006 require a District to establish a disciplinary alternative education program for certain students. TEC § 37.006 states that an elementary student may not be placed in a DAEP with any other student who is not an elementary student. However, students younger than 10 years old may only be placed in a DAEP if they commit an expellable offense under § 37.007. Exemption from this requirement would allow the District to make common-sensedecisions about which students are age-appropriate to be in the same room together and allow the District to better utilize existing staff and facilities in the event of an elementary DAEP placement. Currently, when an elementary student is placed in DAEP, it pulls staff away from the~~ secondary DAEP or requires a guest educator. This exemption would allow Hutto ISD to make ~~staffing determinations and to staff DAEP appropriately.~~

~~*Suspension of Students in Grades Below Third TEC §37.005 (c)~~

~~Students below grade three may not be placed in out-of-school suspension unless the student engages in behaviors that include weapons, violent offenses or being under the influence. There are times when students engage in behaviors that do not necessarily fit into the categories of weapons, violent offenses or being under the influence, but warrant removal from the instructional setting. An example might include students who engage in "persistent misbehaviors" that are deemed to be harmful to the student or others. Currently, students in these situations sometimes~~

fail to understand the seriousness of their behaviors due to administrative limitations in responding to their behaviors. The District will establish a district protocol to facilitate appropriate disciplinary steps to address the behavior of students in grades three and below. The protocol might include consideration of such student behaviors by campus administration in collaboration with district support staff. In an effort to provide and maintain a high quality learning environment that is safe and orderly for all students, this flexibility will allow for school-based decision making to more effectively ensure the safety and security of all ~~students and staff.~~

~~*Possession of nicotine e-cigarettes TEC 37.006(a)(2)(C-2)~~

~~Texas Education Code §37.006(a)(2)(C-2) requires school districts to place students who possess, use, sell, give, or deliver to another person, an e-cigarette, as defined by §161.081, Health and Safety Code in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP).Exception from this provision allows the District to utilize the six factors set out in Texas Education Code §37.001(a)(4) when assigning discipline to students who possess nicotine e-cigarettes at school.~~

~~Without exemption from this provision, students possessing an actual cigarette containing nicotine would receive a lesser disciplinary consequence under the Student Code of Conduct. Additionally, removing students from campus to a disciplinary setting can negatively impact student learning. The District's DAEP has limited capacity. The seats in DAEP should be reserved for students who engage in serious Student Code of Conduct violations, such as assaultive offenses and offenses that disrupt the educational environment.~~

~~The District will provide students who use, possess, sell, give, or deliver nicotine, regardless of the form, educational support regarding the dangers of nicotine use in addition to disciplinary consequences based on the factors set out in Texas Education Code §37.001(a)(4).~~

~~*Expulsion from DAEP for Persistent Misbehavior TEC 37.007(1)(c)~~

~~Currently, a student may be expelled without services if while placed in a disciplinary alternative education program engages in documented serious misbehavior while on the program campus despite documented behavioral interventions.~~

~~Exemption from TEC 37.0071c changes the language in TEC 37.007(1)(c) from "serious misbehavior" to "persistent misbehavior". This change allows Hutto ISD to expel a student for "persistent misbehavior", enabling Hutto ISD to address ongoing disruptive behavior effectively, ensuring a safe and productive learning environment for all students.~~

~~* Not implemented due to new legislation~~

Counselor 80/20 Rule TEC 33.006(d)-(h)

Exemption from: TEC § 33. 006(d)-(h) Texas Education Code § 33. 006(d)-(h), passed during the 87th legislative session, requires a school counselor to spend at least 80 percent of the school counselor's total work time on duties that are components of a counseling program, requires the Board to adopt a related policy, and requires the District to provide documentation relating to compliance to the Commissioner of Education. To comply with this new requirement and ensure the ability to provide requested documentation to the Commissioner, District counselors are expected to track their time.

Relief from this statute will allow the following opportunities: Allow the District to utilize counselors in a manner that best meets student and District needs without concern as to whether there is strict compliance with § 33.006(d)-(h). Eliminate the administrative burden of requiring counselors to track their time daily. Eliminate the administrative burden of responding to requests from the State regarding compliance with § 33. 006(d)-(h).

Teacher Contract Days Minimum Service Required TEC 21.401

Exemption from: TEC § 21.401. A contract between a school district and an educator must be for a minimum of 10 months' service. An educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

The minimum required days of service for an educator employed under a 10-month contract will be determined on an annual basis. This exemption will allow the district to reduce teacher contract days as needed.

This would provide flexibility to align teacher contract days to instructional days, which would improve morale and make positions more competitive helping with recruitment efforts. This exemption would better align the number of teacher contract days teacher days to the required 75,600 minutes of instruction for students.

The number of contract days will be determined on an annual basis per the approved district calendar. The decrease in the number of contract days will have no effect on teacher salaries. The amendment to the plan gives the district the flexibility to reduce educator contract service days.

Required Professional Development TEC 21.451

Texas Education Code Section 21.451 outlines required annual training for all educators.
The District will provide opportunities for professional learning requirements through regular and ongoing sessions, some of which may be less than annual dependent upon the employee's years of service and/or demonstration of mastery knowledge with pre-assessments.

Minutes of Instruction TEC 25.081

Texas Education Code §25.081 (a-c) requires school districts to operate (i.e., provide instruction to students) at least 75,600 minutes each school year and gives the commissioner the authority to grant exceptions in the event of disasters and other types of emergencies.

If the commissioner does not grant an exception, schools must add minutes to meet the time requirement. Exemption from this provision eliminates the possibility of the commissioner not approving a request by the District to reduce the number of required minutes of instruction in the event of a weather or other type of disaster that could impact the ability of students to attend school. It will give the District, through its Board of Trustees, in non-disaster situations, the authority to determine the number of minutes of instructional time that best meets the needs of its schools, students, their families, and staff.

The District will determine the needs of its campuses in setting the amount of required instructional time. Having flexibility will give the District options to alter the length of school days, modify school start and stop times, and allow for early or late release based on the needs of the District

and/or the needs of individual schools or programs.

This flexibility will also give teachers time to learn from one another, make instructional decisions based on student data, build in regular time for parent conferences, and give the District discretion to determine if it is necessary to make up instructional minutes lost due to a disaster or other event resulting in loss of instructional minutes.

Mentor Teachers TEC 21.458

TEC 21.458 sets eligibility requirements for teacher mentors and mentees. Each school district may assign a mentor teacher to each classroom teacher who has less than two years of teaching experience in the subject or grade level to which the teacher is assigned.

A teacher assigned as a mentor must to the extent practicable teach at the same school, teach the same subject or grade level, complete commissioner approved mentor training program and complete a district provided mentor program.

In addition, the mentor must have at least three complete years of experience with a superior record in improving student performance as well as interpersonal and leadership skills.

This statute's teacher-mentor requirements are a considerable barrier to identifying and training high-quality mentors in Hutto ISD. Additionally, the District needs the flexibility to assign mentors to more experienced teachers in need of assistance or any other teacher who could benefit from a mentor-mentee relationship as well as allowing effective teachers with more than two years of experience who excel in Hutto ISD areas for improvement or innovation to be assigned as mentors, better utilizing our most effective teachers as peer coaches.

Thus, Teachers assigned to serve as mentors would be selected based on various factors, including experience, knowledge, and areas of instruction targeted for improvement or innovation.

Local Grievance Policy TEC 26.001, 26A.001-.003

TEC 26.001 requires school district grievance procedures to match the structure provided by TEC 26A.001-26A.003. This grievance procedure restricts the District's ability to conduct grievances in a manner in line with the needs of the Hutto ISD community and limits the District's ability to respond to complaints in a timely and efficient manner using the procedures that employees, students, and community members have experience and a familiarity with.

The district believes that a requirement for complaints to be submitted within 15 district business days from the date the grievant either knows, or with reasonable diligence, should have known, of the decision or action that is the subject of the grievance ensures prompt attention and resolution of concerns. Accuracy of information and access to individuals that are needed to provide necessary information surrounding an issue could be compromised by an extended filing period. It is imperative that grievances and complaints are filed in a timely manner to ensure the best prompt response.

Hutto ISD will maintain its established grievance policy with procedures and timelines as outlined in its local Board's policies DGBA, FNG and GF. Such policies ensure thorough documentation of each step in the grievance process and provides adequate time for complaints to be filed, and

for complaints to be heard. All records related to grievances, including submitted forms, communications, investigations, findings, resolutions, and any corrective actions are systematically maintained at the district level to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with legal and policy standards. The District is further committed to hearing, reviewing, and attempting to resolve all complaints, as well as to taking corrective action, where appropriate. Hutto ISD's long-standing grievance policy will ensure that all such complaints are carefully reviewed and that district responses are in alignment with state and federal regulations, as well as all other local board policies.

Library Acquisition/Challenge Policy and Local School Library Advisory Council TEC 33.025, 33.06, 33.027

TEC 33.025 establishes a means by which a school district can be compelled to establish a Local School Library Advisory Council if either 10% of parents or 50 parents (whichever is fewer) submit a written request for such a council to be established. That council then is tasked with reviewing library materials, providing input on the selection and removal of resources, making recommendations to ensure materials are age-appropriate and aligned with community values, reviewing all books and other material objected to by any District parent, and advising on such objections. TEC 33.026 requires school districts to adopt a policy for the acquisition of library materials that meets specific requirements in statute, including requiring the Board of Trustees to approve all library materials. TEC 33.027 provides procedures by which any employee, parent, or other community member can challenge a library material and compel the Board of Trustees to make a final decision on whether to remove the challenged material from a school library. Creating such advisory councils risks undermining the professional judgment of educators and librarians, introduces the judgment of non-certified individuals, introduces potential for politicization of instructional resources, and could very easily lead to inconsistency across campuses. Furthermore, the statute presents an administrative burden, requiring staff time and resources that would be better directed toward student learning and support These provisions restrict the District's ability to efficiently fill and manage its school libraries, and further interfere with Hutto ISD's ability to craft a unified curriculum and provide a well-rounded educational experience for every child.

The District will maintain its current collection acquisition and development policy. The District's existing library acquisition policy is robust and effective, as librarians, professional library staff, and other designated professional staff who are trained on the proper collection standards select and acquire library materials in accordance with applicable state law and rules, the District's existing policies, and administrative procedures. The District's policy shall continue to be aligned with the standards as promulgated by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC). The District shall also continue to recognize parents as the primary decision makers regarding their student's access to library materials and provides parents and employees with an opportunity to request the reconsideration of any library material maintained in the District's library program.

I. Term

The term of this plan is for five years, beginning January 12, 2022, and ending January 12, 2027, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board in accordance with the law. The District Advisory Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modification to the Plan.

Hutto ISD's District of Innovation plan may be amended, rescinded, or renewed if the action is approved by a vote of the district-level committee established under Section 11.251, or a comparable committee if the district is exempt from that section, and the board of trustees under Section 12A.005.

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 nominate a new committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in this form of an amendment. Any amendment adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at one time.

The commissioner may terminate a district's designation as a district of innovation if the district receives for two consecutive school years:

- an unacceptable academic performance rating under Section 39.054;
- an unacceptable financial accountability rating under Section 39.082; or
- an unacceptable academic performance rating under Section 39.054 for one of the school years and an unacceptable financial accountability rating under Section 39.082 for the other school year.

Instead of terminating a district's designation, the commissioner may permit the district to amend the district's local innovation plan to address concerns specified by the commissioner.

The commissioner shall terminate a district's designation as a district of innovation if the district receives for three consecutive school years:

- an unacceptable academic performance rating under Section 39.054;
- an unacceptable financial accountability rating under Section 39.082; or
- any combination of one or more unacceptable ratings under Subdivision (1) and one or more unacceptable ratings under Subdivision (2).

A decision by the commissioner under this section is final and may not be appealed.

II. Implementation

Specific implementation plans will be developed by the appropriate campuses and departments; and approved by the Superintendent.

Adjustments to Board Policy will be reviewed by school attorneys and adopted where appropriate.

III. Timeline (Draft)

- September 12, 2022– District Advisory Committee meeting to amend District of Innovation plan

- October 13, 2022– Proposed Hutto ISD District of Innovation plan reviewed by Hutto ISD Board of Trustees
- October 14, 2022– Proposed District of Innovation plan posted to Hutto ISD website
- November 15, 2022– Notification of Commissioner of Education of intention to adopt the proposed plan
- December 8, 2022–Proposed Hutto ISD District of Innovation plan approved by Board of Trustees
- December 9, 2022–Board notifies the Commissioner of Education that the plan was adopted and submits required documentation
- January 16, 2023–Amended District of Innovation plan in effect on January 16, 2023
- December 16, 2024–Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee to amend District of Innovation Plan
- January 23, 2025–Hutto ISD District of Innovation plan reviewed by Hutto ISD Board of Trustees
- District notifies the Commissioner of Education that the plan was adopted and submits required documentation on January 29, 2025
- Amended District of Innovation plan is in effect on January 24, 2025
- August 20, 2025–Meeting of the District of Innovation Committee to amend District of Innovation Plan
- August 28, 2025–Hutto ISD District of Innovation plan reviewed by Hutto ISD Board of Trustees
- District notifies the Commissioner of Education that the plan was adopted and submits required documentation on September 3, 2025
- Amended District of Innovation plan is in effect on August 29, 2025