



Brooks County Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan 2023-2028

Amendment Date: 10/15/2025

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Introduction

What is a “District of Innovation”?

An exciting opportunity! A District of Innovation (DOI) is a concept passed by the 84th Texas Legislative 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, a school district must adopt an innovation plan for its district.

Why choose a District of Innovation?

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, parent or community involvement, school calendar, budgeting, or other ideas. 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 innovation plan is sculpted by the committee, the District will evaluate necessary changes to Brooks County ISD policies.

How long does an innovation plan stay in effect?

Hopefully as long as it benefits the District! Under current law, the plan may have a term of up to five years, and it may be amended, rescinded, or renewed during that time period.

Exemption from Laws?

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

- 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)

Not all of these possibilities will be right for Brooks County ISD. It is up to the DOI committee to determine what laws to exempt ourselves from and which to leave in place.

Term

In accordance with TEC §12A.006, this Comprehensive Local Innovation Plan shall remain in effect for a period of 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 have the freedom to make decisions at the local level within the parameters set forth in the 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. Essentially, innovation plans are about local control that best fit 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 level of school (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:
 - School start date
 - Class-size ratios
 - Minimum Minutes of Instruction and School Day Length
 - Site-based decision-making processes

- Use of planning and preparation periods
- Teacher Certification

This plan is specific to the exemptions as outlined. The district intends to follow the Texas Education Code in all other areas. If at some point it is decided that changes or additional exemptions should be considered, as per the Districts of Innovation process, the district will reconvene the District of Innovation Planning committee to explore the request.

The House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, it provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of their unique student populations, in order to 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 have the ability to make important educational decisions for our students at the local level.

We must also be able to 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 which is constantly changing. The same process will be followed as we prepare to be a District of Innovation. As we begin to 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 assure 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 educational decisions for students. 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

District of Innovation Committee

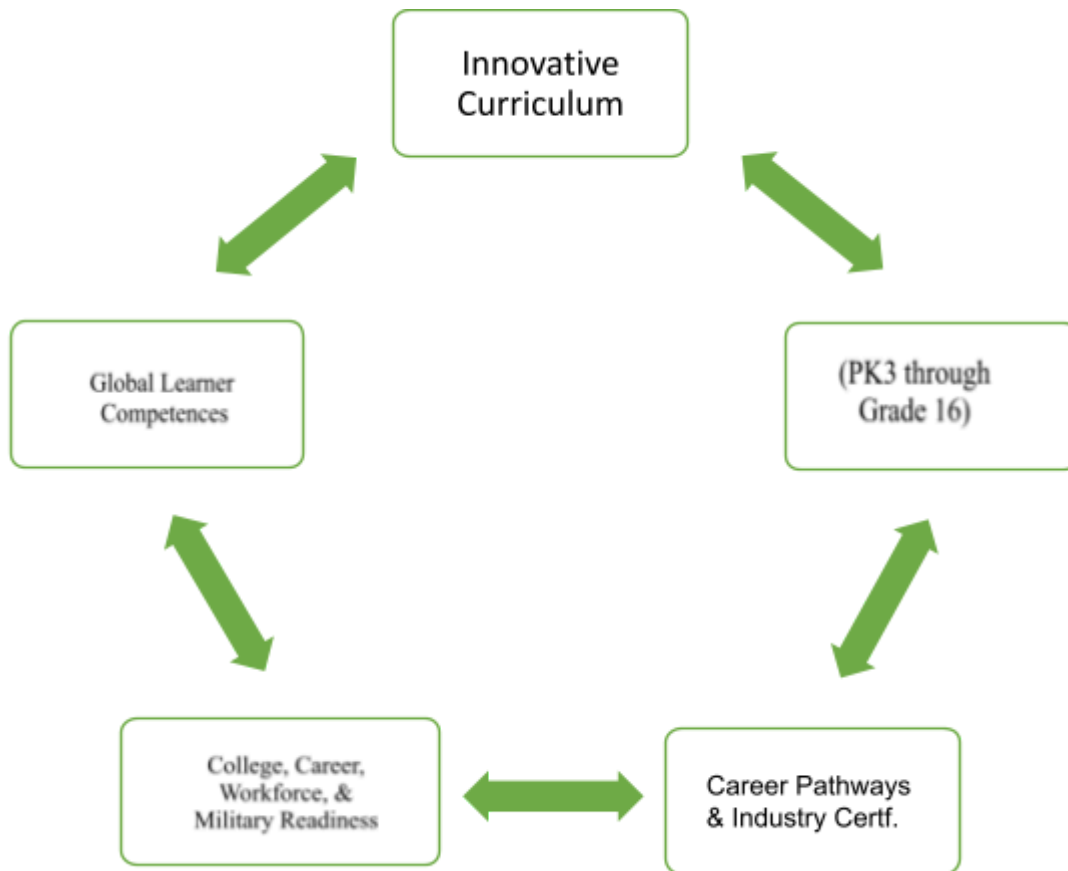
Representative	Name
Parent	Melynda R Perez
Parent	Cindy Alegria
Teacher	Domonika Trevino, Elementary Teacher
Teacher	Euladio Guzman, Secondary
Teacher	Felix De Leon, Secondary
Teacher	Lisa Lara, Early Childhood
Teacher	Angela Garcias, Early Childhood
Principal	F.J. Trevino, Elementary Principal
Principal	Louella Cortez FJH Principal
Principal	Arnulfo T. Guerra
Other School Leader	Mercedes Longoria, FHS Counselor Nora Lopz, FJH School Counselor
	Kristina Lopez, FHS Dean Of Inst.
Paraprofessional	Sandra Alaniz, Librarian
Paraprofessional	Jennifer Munoz
Specialized Instructional Support	Julie Garza, SPED Teacher
School Staff	Melinda Arevalo, Lasater School Counselor
Other Member of the Community	Rebecc Garza, Owner Rebecca's
Superintendent of Schools	Scott Rogers

Special Programs Director	Ricardo Garica
Federal Programs Coordinator	Roxane Vasquez

Timeline

October 16, 2024	Adopt a Resolution The Board of Trustees approved a resolution to explore the opportunity for Brooks County ISD to become a District of Innovation at the regular March Board meeting.
October 16, 2024	Have a Public Hearing The Brooks County ISD Board of Trustees held a public hearing for public input on the District of Innovation Opportunity.
August 27, 2024	Appointment of a Committee The Brooks County ISD Board of Trustees appointed a District Local Committee to develop an innovation plan.
September 12, 2024	Develop an Innovation Plan The District-Level Committee met on three separate occasions to discuss and develop an Innovation Plan.
September 12, 2024	District Education Improvement Committee (DEIC) approves Innovation Plan The District Education Improvement Committee held a public hearing and unanimously approved the Innovation Plan.
November 6, 2024	District of Innovation Plan presented and Board action regarding letter to Commissioner of Education regarding board intent to vote on becoming a district of Innovation
November 16, 2024	Post District of Innovation Plan on BCISD website (30 days)
October 16, 2024	Board of Trustees to vote on District of Innovation Plan

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, college-ready.

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

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 institutions of higher learning to help students to 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 better 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 state assessment.

Class Size Ratio

Texas Education Code 25.111, 25.112, and 25.113

Current Status:

Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes are to be kept at a 22 student to 1 teacher ratio according to state law. 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 we certainly believe that 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, but the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees. This exemption only allows BCISD the local control over class size not exceed 23:1 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 23:1. This stipend may be prorated upon the duration of a class size ration of 23:1.

Teacher Certification

Texas Education Code 21.003, 21.053, 21.057, and 19 TAC Chapter 231)

Current Status:

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 development of post high school plans, improvement of workforce skills, and expansion of 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. In order to best serve the needs of BCISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such dual credit and career and technical/STEAM course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements for dual credit and career and technical/STEAM teachers, the District will have the flexibility to hire credentialed community college instructors, university professors in specific content areas in order to afford the District the flexibility to hire professionals in 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 of their traditional certification area to be considered. This exemption directly supports the move from “highly qualified” requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Probationary Contracts

Texas Education Code Chapter 21, Subchapter C

Current Status

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.

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.

Uniform Group Coverage Program

Texas Education Code: §22.004(i)

Current Status:

TEC §22.004 (i) states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees pursuant to TEC 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code.

The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all Brooks County ISD employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. This provision is in direct contradiction to the wishes of the Brooks County ISD Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter. Texas Education Code 22.004 is not in any of the prohibited exemptions that can be included in a District's local innovation plan pursuant to Texas Education Code 12A.004 and the list of the Commissioner's prohibited exemptions in Texas Administrative Code Title 19, Chapter 102, subchapter JJ, Section 102.1309.

Proposed:

Increased local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the district to be responsive to employee and community needs.

Other:

Attendance for Credit – Amendment (10/16/2024)

TEC 25.092, Policy FEC

Current Status:

Students are required to attend class 90 percent of the day's class is offered regardless of whether their absences are excused or unexcused to receive credit for the class.

Proposed

Student credit for class will be assessed by their grade performance and the lack of student attendance by state truancy laws.

Inter-district Student Transfers – Amendment (10/16/24)

TEC 25.036, Policy FDA

Current Status:

Transfer request factors include consideration of availability of space, instructional staff, and the student's disciplinary history and attendance records. The transfer agreement allows for termination of the transfer at the end of the school year if there is a violation of terms.

Proposed

Students who violate the student code of conduct, persist in unacceptable academic performance, or enter a truancy intervention program are to receive a written notice from the principal that the student is subject to a transfer revocation during the current school year. If the behavior described in the notice or any other qualifying behavior continues, the student is subject to transfer revocation at the end of the six-week grading period on the recommendation by the principal to the superintendent.

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 their 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 it will be seamlessly implemented as part of the District's Strategic Plan.

Exhibit A
AMENDMENT TO BROOKS COUNTY ISD'S DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

Area of Innovation:

Pursuant to Texas Education Code Section 12A.007 and 19 Texas Administrative Code Section 102.1313, the District incorporates the following amendment to BCISD's District of Innovation Plan:

Exemption from Texas Education Code Section 22.004(i) [Related Board Policies are CRD (LEGAL) and CRD (LOCAL)]

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TEC §22.004 (i) states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees pursuant to TEC 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all BCISD employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. This provision is a contradiction to the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent the school district's and community interests in this matter.

Texas Education Code 22.004 is not in any of the prohibited exemptions pursuant to Texas Education Code 12A.004 and the list of the Commissioner's prohibited exemptions in Texas Administrative Code Title 19, Chapter 102, subchapter JJ, Section 102.1309. The exemption would cure statutory prohibition on offering an alternative health care plan under Texas Education Code 22.004.

Innovation Strategies:

Increased local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs.

An amendment to the current district of innovation plan does not change the date of the term of designation as an innovation district. The District of Innovation Committee voted unanimously to approve the amendment on July 22, 2020.

The amendment was approved by the BCISD Board of Trustees by a two-thirds majority vote on July 23, 2020.