



# District of Innovation Plan

## Gonzales Independent School District

Board Approved: March 7, 2022

Amended: June 12, 2023

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## **What is a District of Innovation?**

House Bill 1842 was passed by the 84th Texas Legislature in the spring of 2015. This bill allows public school districts to be designated as Districts of Innovation and obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. This designation will provide for more local control at the district level, providing the opportunity for Gonzales ISD to better serve our community and focus on the unique needs of each student. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.

Districts of Innovation may be exempted from a number of state statutes and will have:

- Greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students
- Increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

Districts are not exempt from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements as well as academic and financial accountability. Gonzales ISD believes this is a great opportunity for our local district to establish plans based on the unique needs of our students and community.

## **Term**

The term of the plan is for five years, beginning March 7, 2022 and ending in March of 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, an amendment to the plan will be presented to the Board for adoption.

## Timeline

**Board Notifies the Commissioner of Intent to Renew the Plan, Draft of Plan is Posted for Public Comment**

January 2022

**Board Notifies the Commissioner of Intent to Renew the Plan, Draft of Plan is Posted for Public Comment**

January 2022

**District Level Committee Holds Public Hearing and Votes on Innovation Plan**

January 2022

**Board Adopts the Plan with 2/3 Vote, Notifies the Commissioner of Adoption, and Posts Final Plan to the District Website**

March 7, 2022

## **Gonzales ISD Comprehensive Educational Program**

The district's educational program follows all provisions of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and all mandates as required expanded upon pursuant to and as written into the GISD Improvement Plan.

### **Vision Statement**

Gonzales ISD is a destination district committed to growing greatness.

### **Mission Statement**

Gonzales ISD designs meaningful learning experiences that inspire students to make an impact beyond themselves.

### **GISD Goal Areas**

- Developing Effective Communication Strategies
- Focusing on Students and the Work Provided to Students
- Recruiting, Inducting, and Retaining High-Quality Staff
- Strategic Resource Management

## Local Innovation Plan Components

### District and Campus Level Planning Requirement

**Education Code:**

11.1511(b)(5);11.251-253;11.255

**Policy:**

BQA, BQB

**Requirement:**

Currently, TEC requires District and campus-level planning and decision-making committees to include representative professional staff, including, if practicable, at least one representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities, parents of students enrolled in the District, business representatives, and community members. The committees shall include a business representative without regard to whether the representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is located in the District. Community members must reside in the District and must be at least 18 years of age. A parent who is an employee of the District is not considered a parent representative on the committee. A parent is not considered a representative of community members on the committee.

**Approved Flexibility:**

The District will continue efforts to ensure that all required stakeholders are represented. Due to the size of the community, it is often a difficult task to secure appropriate representation on all committees. The required committee membership limits the degree of parent involvement in the decision making process. The limited number of professional staff-members available to serve makes it unnecessary to nominate and elect members. Flexibility will allow the District and campuses to establish membership that ensures the most effective decisions are made.

## **Certification Required (Assignments and Schedules) and Presentation of Recording of Certificates**

### **Education Code:**

21.003;21.057

### **Policy:**

DBA, DK

### **Requirement:**

Currently, 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 for issuance of a school district teaching permit (TEC §21.055) to the Texas Education Agency. TEA then approves or denies this request. Currently, non-certified professionals cannot be hired or paid to serve in a position requiring certification without proper credentials on file. Additionally, TEC §21.057 requires the district to provide parent notice if their child's teacher does not hold the required certification for the assignment, regardless of experience or other significant qualifications.

### **Approved Flexibility:**

GISD is committed to placing a life changer in every classroom. In order to best serve GISD students, decisions on certifications will be handled locally. The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high-demand vacancies. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training of professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, the District will have the flexibility to hire community college instructors, university professors, or internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area. This exemption is not applicable to special education or Bilingual/ESL education as they must continue to be SBEC certified.

## Probationary Contract Requirement

**Education Code:**

21.102(b)

**Policy:**

DCA

**Requirement:**

Currently, TEC limits the probationary contract period for experienced teachers who are hired with at least five years of teaching experience in the previous eight years.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD seeks exemption from this statute. With this added flexibility, newly hired teachers who meet the 5 of 8 threshold may be issued a probationary contract for up to two consecutive school years. This additional probationary period will enable the district more time to evaluate the performance of newly hired teachers prior to the teacher transitioning to a term contract.

## Teacher Professional Development and Planning Time

**Education Code:**

21.404;11.253

**Policy:**

DLA

**Requirement:**

State law currently requires a specified number of minutes for teacher's planning and preparation time (TEC §21.404), as well as oversight of this requirement provided by the campus-level committee established under §11.253.

**Approved Flexibility:**

TEC §21.404 limits the campus's ability to schedule required staff development or instructional planning meetings during this time. The exemption from the required number of minutes in TEC §21.404 will allow for the District's teachers to participate in instructional meetings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis during the workday without compromising instructional time or requiring after hours meetings, where they can share best practices, critically examine student data, and plan collaboratively.

The exemption from the staff development requirements under TEC §11.253 will allow more flexibility to the local committees in making staff development decisions based on local need and newly emerging data.

## First Day of School Instruction (School Calendar)

**Education Code:**

25.0811; 25.0812

**Policy:**

EB

**Requirement:**

Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August nor may the school year end before May 15. In the past, districts could apply for a waiver to start the school calendar earlier in August to meet the needs of the local community. The Texas Legislature removed the waiver process and as a result, all districts were required to begin school on the 4th Monday with no exceptions.

**Approved Flexibility:**

GISD seeks exemption from this statute. Beginning school prior to the 4th Monday, enables the district flexibility in beginning and meeting the needs of our students and staff. The district will continue to adhere to current practices of District Site Based committee approval of school calendars with best efforts made not to begin prior to the 3rd Monday. Benefits of this flexibility include:

- Increased local control of the instructional calendar to be more responsive to the needs of students, teachers, and the community.
- Enhanced responsiveness to bad weather or disaster needs
- Equitable distribution of days in a grading period
- Increased flexibility in scheduling professional development
- Adequate time for summer school programming
- Increased instructional time before state-mandated testing, as well as AP and SAT testing.
- Alignment with college and university partners to support OnRamps and Dual Credit students.

## Attendance Committee Requirements

**Education Code:**

25.092

**Policy:**

FEC, DGC, EHDB, EI

**Requirement:**

Commonly referred to as the 90% rule, this requirement provides conditions for credit or a final grade for a class based on student attendance for at least 90 percent of the days a class is offered. The law also provides provisions for students who are in attendance at least 75 percent of the days a class is offered, in that he/she may be given credit or a final grade if the student completes a plan approved by the principal that meets the instructional requirements of class time.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD seeks exemption because awarding student credit for a final grade for a class is based on more than just seat time. A multitude of factors contribute to student success and eligibility for a final grade. This exemption provides flexibility for campus administrators to consider the whole child, content-based mastery, and attendance before withholding credit due to absenteeism.

## 80/20 Rule for Counselors (School Counselors Work Time)

**Education Code:**

33.006(d)-(h)

**Policy:**

DP

**Requirement:**

Recently, Districts were required to adopt a policy that requires school counselors to spend at least 80 percent of the school counselor's total work time on duties that are components of a counseling program with the remaining 20 percent of their time on other duties.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Due to the unique needs of a rural school district, Gonzales ISD's school counselors play an integral part in the administrative teams on campuses. Counselors' duties consist of additional responsibilities and needs throughout the day, therefore, Gonzales ISD seeks an exemption from TEC 33.006.

## Campus Behavior Coordinators

**Education Code:**

37.0012

**Policy:**

FO

**Requirement:**

Currently, each public school district must specify a campus behavior coordinator to maintain student discipline.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD seeks exemption from this statute. GISD follows an approved Code of Conduct and all requirements as specified. The Assistant Principals and Principals manage discipline on campus and make all notifications as required by Code.

## Inter-District Transfer of Student

**Education Code:**

25.036

**Policy:**

FDA

**Requirement:**

TEC §25.036(a) states that any school-aged child may transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in this state if the receiving district approves the transfer. The Commissioner of Education has interpreted this statute to prohibit mid-year student transfer revocation except in the case of failure to pay tuition.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD is seeking the flexibility to revoke a student's transfer status during the school year should the student fail to uphold the standards set by the district. Transfer students will be admitted upon District approval, following District requirements and procedures. Transfer students not meeting local guidelines, may be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer agreement. Gonzales ISD will be able to revoke a student's transfer during the academic year based on violations of the Student Code of Conduct and/or failure to meet expectations for student attendance. Gonzales ISD will attempt to provide the same resources to transfer students, as all other students receive, prior to their transfer status being revoked. The resources include, academic tutorials and assistance, behavioral interventions, parent/guardian meetings, and support from the campus counselor. Following revocation of a student's transfer status, that student will not be permitted to reapply for transfer status during that same school year. The principal and/or counselor, with teacher input, will review the parameters of the transfer student agreement each grading cycle to determine if there are any violations of the terms within the agreement.

## Class Size Ratio

**Education Code:**

25.111;25.112;25.113

**Policy:**

EEB

**Requirement:**

Currently, Pre -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. 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.

**Approved Flexibility:**

As students move in and out of our district on a daily basis, it has become a yearly need to apply for a class size waiver. 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. We do not believe it has a negative effect when a school adds only one or two more students. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom that influence the learning environment. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. In the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio for Pre -Kindergarten–4th grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, but the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees for approval. This exemption only allows GISD the local control over class size ratios, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements. This plan also emphasizes the importance of flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passions and needs. This grants flexibility in class size at all times-regrouping for success, small groups, large groups, etc. It also works to minimize paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place additional focus on student success. An exemption in meeting Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112, will allow the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waivers when the need arises.

## Purchasing Contracts

**Education Code:**

44.031

**Policy:**

CV, CH

**Requirement:**

Currently, the District is required to procure all school district contracts for the purchase of goods and services, except contracts for the purchase of produce or vehicle fuel, valued at \$50,000 or more in the aggregate for each 12-month period by the method that provides the best value for the district from a listing of options found in TEC 44.031.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD seeks an exemption from TEC 44.031 for products and services for which the district has solicited a contract utilizing a method found in TEC 44.031 (a) (1-3) on at least two occasions during the most recent 10 years and has only received one proposal, from the same company, both times while honoring federal regulations that cannot be exempted.

## Management Fees Under Certain Cooperative Purchasing Contracts

**Education Code:**

44.0331

**Policy:**

CH

**Requirement:**

Currently, the district is required to document a contract-related fee, including a management fee, paid by or to the district and the purpose of each fee under a cooperative purchasing contract when valued at over \$25,000 and procured utilizing the method found in TEC 44.031(a)(5). The District is also required to present, in an open board meeting, the amount, purpose, and disposition of any fee.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD seeks exemption from TEC 44.0331 because purchasing cooperatives were developed to assist districts with procurement and remove administrative burden. Further, the information as to the amount, purpose, and disposition of any fee is already tracked in the Gonzales ISD financial records.

## Long-Range Energy Plan to Reduce Consumption of Electric Energy

**Education Code:**

44.902

**Policy:**

CL

**Requirement:**

Currently, the District 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.

**Approved Flexibility:**

Gonzales ISD seeks an exemption from TEC 44.902. Five percent is an arbitrary number. It is a "one size fits all" law. Energy consumption and savings are a building by building, district by district calculation.