



Highland Park Independent School District
Local District of Innovation Plan

Effective School Years
2026-2027 to 2030-2031

Highland Park Independent School District
District of Innovation Plan

I. Introduction

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in the summer of 2015, allowing public school districts to obtain the designation of District of Innovation and gain exemption from certain Texas Education Code provisions. This designation allows independent school districts to have flexibilities currently available to open enrollment charter schools. During spring 2017, Highland Park ISD, having met the state's eligibility requirements, pursued the process of developing an innovation plan that was adopted for the next five school years. In spring 2021, HPISD developed its second District of Innovation Plan. In spring 2026, the District began developing its third District of Innovation plan that, if adopted, will reflect the unique needs of the district and allow the district to assume greater local control.

II. District Guiding Principles

A. Mission and Vision

MISSION

The Highland Park Independent School District, grounded in an unyielding commitment to tradition, excellence, community, and integrity, provides an unrivaled and well-rounded education in academics, athletics, arts, and service, equipping all students to be citizen leaders and lifelong learners.

VISION

Highland Park ISD will be the preeminent public school district in Texas and the heart and soul of the Park Cities. HP Scots will be honorable in conduct, devoted to scholarship, and charitable to all.

B. BELIEFS

We believe:

- The best interests of students must be at the center of all decision-making.
- Sustained excellence comes only through seeking continuous improvement.
- Education is a cooperative endeavor between schools, parents, and the community, requiring effective collaboration and transparent communication among all stakeholders. *"The spirit of a people is disclosed by the education of its youth."*
- Good citizenship requires a well-rounded development with a balanced emphasis on academics, arts, athletics, and service.
- An excellent education provides foundational knowledge, stimulates intellectual curiosity, cultivates critical thinking, fosters growth through academic challenge, and develops capacity for both sustained individual effort and productive collaboration.

- An excellent education instills habits of personal responsibility and integrity in academic work and personal conduct.
- Faculty and staff who are passionate about students, experts in their field and committed to continuous improvement are essential to providing an excellent education and must be equipped and supported through competitive compensation, targeted professional development, and effective evaluation.
- All district resources should be used efficiently and effectively to accomplish our mission and goals, addressing both present needs and long-term sustainability.

C. Priorities and Objectives

- Well-Educated and Well-Rounded Students
 - 1.1. Increase academic growth and mastery in all content areas
 - 1.2. Provide a well-rounded offering of arts and extracurricular activities that enhance the development of character and community
 - 1.3. Protect the physical and emotional well-being and safety of students
- Exemplary and Committed Staff
 - 2.1. Improve the culture and retention of current staff while recruiting exemplary new hires
 - 2.2. Ensure competitive compensation and benefits for staff
 - 2.3. Invest in staff development and continuous improvement
- Engaged Parents and Community
 - 3.1. Improve parent and community satisfaction
 - 3.2. Strategically leverage and engage with community partners
- Strategic Financial Stewardship
 - 4.1. Optimize annual operating resources to meet district priorities
 - 4.2. Implement a long term plan to strategically manage facilities and assets to support student experiences
 - 4.3. Facilitate strategic alignment and deployment of community-raised funds to meet district priorities.

D. Profile of an HPISD Student

HPISD Students are developing **Well-Rounded CHARACTER**

Well-Rounded-Knows that balance is key to physical and emotional well-being and develops a broad range of interests and abilities.

Curious-Explores, seeks knowledge, and has a love for lifelong learning.

Honorable-Acts with integrity and the courage of conviction and takes responsibility for actions.

Articulate-Communicates and expresses ideas effectively in both written and spoken word.

Resilient-Knows that success lies in continuous effort and persists with determination in the face of challenge.

Analytical-Listens and reads carefully, thinks critically, reasons effectively, and applies knowledge.

Collaborative-Builds relationships, exchanges ideas respectfully, and contributes meaningfully as a member of a team.

Thoughtful-Treats everyone with kindness and respect and uses skills and gifts to serve others.

Enterprising-Works diligently, seeks personal excellence, and is dedicated to continuous improvement.

Resourceful-Innovates, adapts, and solves problems with creativity.

E. Profile of an HPISD Teacher

HPISD Teachers [SHAPE CHARACTER](#)

Skillful – Demonstrates subject matter expertise and utilizes best instructional practices.

Helpful-Remains responsive and available to students; provides timely and meaningful feedback to students both verbally and in written form.

Adaptable-Innovates and adapts to meet the needs of every student.

Passionate-Displays enthusiasm for teaching and brings energy to the classroom.

Engaging-Encourages and inspires active participation by students.

Curious-Explores, seeks knowledge, and has a love for lifelong learning.

Honorable-Conducts oneself ethically and professionally and takes responsibility for actions.

Articulate-Communicates and expresses ideas effectively in both written and spoken word.

Resilient-Demonstrates determination, patience, and perseverance in the face of challenges and frustrations.

Analytical-Acquires and utilizes quantitative and qualitative data through effective assessment and instruction.

Collaborative-Builds relationships, exchanges ideas respectfully, and contributes meaningfully as a member of a team.

Thoughtful-Shows kindness and genuine care for the well-being of students and models service to others.

Enterprising-Works diligently, seeks personal excellence, and is dedicated to continuous improvement.

Resourceful-Solves problems with creativity and maximizes available instructional tools to achieve greatest learning outcomes possible.

III. Process

A. The Board of Trustees approved the existing District Leadership Council, with its varied and extensive membership, to create and approve the local district of innovation plan.

2025-2026 DLC Member	Role
Kamela Aboussie	Bradfield Parent
Peyton Aldridge	Boone Teacher
Monet Ball	Armstrong Parent
Kim Banuelos	University Park Principal
Bryce Benson	School Board Member
Amy Brown	HPHS Teacher
Debbie Burt	Hyer Principal
Betsy Cummins	Armstrong Principal
Chris Dahl	Boone Teacher
Dr. Jacob Donnell	Assistant Superintendent for Business Services
Caroline Gosnell	Bradfield Teacher
Annabel Goyak	Hyer Teacher
Melissa Groshans	University Park Teacher
Dr. Shorr Heathcote	Deputy Superintendent
Ann Higginbottom	Hyer Parent
Dr. Aimee Hilton	Bradfield Principal
Dr. Kevin Hunt	HPHS Principal
Courtney Kemendo	Bradfield Teacher
Caroline Massey	Armstrong Teacher
Ashraf Mobh	Boone Principal
Annuar Ortiz	HPHS Assistant Principal
Savannah Pacheco	MIS/HPMS Teacher
Jacky Pincoffs	MIS/HPMS Parent

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Amanda Reyes	MIS/HPMS Principal
Dr. Josue Romero	Director of Student Services
Chase Russell	MIS/HPMS Assistant Principal
Page Ryan	Boone Parent
Sara Sherrieb	University Park Parent
Blair Smith	Armstrong Teacher
Neely Thrash	HPHS Parent
Amy Wood	Executive Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development

B. District of Innovation Timeline

Timeline	Date
Renewal of District of Innovation Plan is introduced at Principals' Meeting	September 4, 2025
Education Services staff presents information about Districts of Innovation to the District Leadership Council (DLC)	October 29, 2025
Committee develops innovation plan	October 29 - December 3, 2025
District Leadership Council (DLC) holds Public Meeting and votes by majority vote to post proposed DOI Plan	December 3, 2025
Proposal is posted on the district website for 30-day public review	December 8, 2025 - February 3, 2026
District Leadership Council (DLC) holds Public Meeting and votes by majority vote to approve proposed DOI Plan	February 4, 2026
Proposed DOI Plan is reviewed by District counsel	February 5-23, 2026
Board of Trustees approves the District of Innovation Plan by at least a two-thirds majority vote	March 31, 2026
Board formally notifies Texas Commissioner of Education of plan's adoption	April 1, 2026
District posts and maintains plan online in a prominent location	April 1, 2026

C. Innovation Plan Development

The Local District of Innovation Plan was developed through a series of steps.

1. Information about frequently sought exemptions was sent to the campus principals and district administrators. Each was asked to consider the possible exemptions available and indicate those for which they wished to have additional discussion.
2. The District Leadership Council was introduced to the DOI concept and current exemptions.
3. The options were discussed during a series of Principals' Meeting.
4. Meetings were held with district administrators.
5. Exemptions being considered were shared with the TASB consultant to determine policies that will require revision.
6. District counsel was consulted.
7. District Leadership Council reviewed and discussed each proposed exemption.

Each proposed exemption was discussed and evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Identify the challenge intended to overcome.
- Describe how enacting the exemptions will address the identified challenge(s).
- Discuss how the plan assists in achieving district goals.
- Identify any budget considerations arising from adoption of the plan.
- Determine the measures that will determine whether or not the plan assists in meeting the goals.

The committee also developed strategies, in collaboration with HPISD Communications, to ensure that the plan will be communicated effectively with the entire HPISD community.

IV. Innovation Plan Exemptions

Under the flexibility provided by the District of Innovation Plan, HPISD seeks exemption from several laws currently under the Texas Education Code and will instead implement unique, local guidelines that better meet the needs of the students, staff and community.

A. First day of instruction

Exemption from Texas Education Code §25.0811(a)

Other: Board policy EB(LEGAL), EB(LOCAL)

Current Statute

TEC §25.0811 First day of instruction

(a) "Except as provided by this section, a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August."

Rationale

This law restricts the District from having the flexibility to design its calendar to best meet the needs of its students, staff and community. Because the community expects the fall semester to end with final exams before the Winter Break, the restricted start date creates a significant imbalance in the number of instructional days in each semester. By starting earlier, not only will there be greater balance, particularly important in semester-long courses, but it will allow more instructional days prior to state testing dates. This exemption could also result in an earlier end date, closer to the Memorial Day holiday, which is also an expressed preference of the community. Finishing school closer to the Memorial Day holiday will better allow students to enroll in summer school classes within the district as well as institutions of higher learning.

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With input from staff and community stakeholders, the District Calendar Committee will develop its annual calendar recommendation for approval by the Board of Trustees. Through the exemption, the first day of instruction can begin prior to the fourth Monday in August. Preference will be given to starting instruction around the third week in August with assurances to the community that it will not begin prior to the second Monday in August.

B. Teacher certification

Exemption from Texas Education Code §21.003,

Other: Board policy DBA(LEGAL), DBA(LOCAL), DK(LEGAL), DK(LOCAL), DK(EXHIBIT)

Current Statutes

TEC §21.003(a) Certification Required

"A person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trained, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B."

Rationale

Current laws require a district to submit a request to TEA when the district is unable to hire a certified teacher or if a teacher is teaching outside of his/her certification area. Relief from these statutes will allow the district flexibility to make local decisions in determining who is hired in the hard to fill areas, such as career and technical education (CTE) and technology, engineering, and fine arts (STEAM).

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The district fully intends to maintain its commitment to hire certified professionals and will continue to seek employees with appropriate certifications. However, this exemption will permit district leadership to have the flexibility to establish its own criteria in hiring quality personnel who may have knowledge in the hard-to fill areas of CTE and STEAM but lack the traditional certifications. This would permit hiring community college instructors, university professors, and individuals from trades, industries and vocations with real world experience and industry knowledge of the field. The district will establish its own criteria for such hiring under this exemption.

C. State reporting of class size limits in grades K-4

Exemption from TEC §25.112a-g, TEC §25.113a-b

Other: Board policy BF(LEGAL), EEB(LEGAL)

Current Statutes

TEC §25.112 Class Size

(a) "Except as otherwise authorized by this section, a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third or fourth grade class."

(b) "Not later than the 30th day after the first day of the 12-week period for which a district whose average daily attendance is adjusted under Section 42.005(c) is claiming an exemption under Subsection (a), the district shall notify the commissioner in writing that the district is claiming an exemption for the period stated in the notice."

(c) "In determining the number of students to enroll in any class, a school district shall consider the subject to be taught, the teaching methodology to be used, and any need for individual instruction."

(d) "On application of a school district, the commissioner may except the district from the limit in Subsection (a) if the commissioner finds the limit works an undue hardship on the district. An exception expires at the end of the school year for which it is granted."

(e) "A school district seeking an exception under Subsection (d) shall notify the commissioner and apply for the exception not later than the later of:

(1) October 1; or

(2) the 30th day after the first school day the district exceeds the limit in Subsection (a)."

(f) "If a school district repeatedly fails to comply with this section, the commissioner may take any appropriate action authorized to be taken by the commissioner under Section 39.131."

(g) "[Expired Acts 2009, 81st Leg., ch 1347, ...]"

TEC §25.113 Notice of Class Size

(a) "A campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112(d) from class size limits shall provide written notice of the exceptions to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception...."

(b) "The notice required by Subsection (a) must be provided not later than the 31st day after:

(1) the first day of the school year; or

(2) the date the exception is granted after the beginning of the school year."

Rationale

State law limits class sizes to a maximum of 22 students in kindergarten through grade four. If any class exceeds that limit, the district notifies the Board and is required to file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency that is typically approved without exception. Upon notification of TEA's approval, the district is then required to notify parents of the approved class size exception via a highly specified notice. Frequently these class sizes fluctuate during the course of the year with this process only accounting for the often limited time during which a class exceeds 22 students.

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The district fully intends to continue its practice of maintaining reasonable class sizes in kindergarten through grade four. Those standards include staffing at 23:1 with a maximum K-4 class size of 24:1. However, flexibility from these statutes will allow principals to make decisions about reasonable class sizes based on local factors such as the concept of neighborhood schools, the needs and interactions of the particular students involved, the age of the students, the subjects to be taught, and the teacher's skill and experience. The administration will continue to consider the timing in the school year, available space and the need for another teacher or teacher aide to ensure that decisions about class size continue to be made in the best interest of the students. This exemption would provide relief from the reporting encumbrances currently required by state law.

D. Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers

Exemption from TEC §21.102(b)

Other: Board policies DCA(LEGAL)

Current Statute

TEC §21.102(b)

Probationary Contract

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“b) A probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period 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 by the district.”

Rationale

State law currently requires the probationary period for newly hired teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years to be limited to a maximum of one year. Given that personnel decisions are typically made as early as the end of January, this is insufficient time to evaluate the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom.

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Exemption from this statute will better permit administrators the time necessary to evaluate a teacher’s performance and provide opportunities for additional improvement and growth. This change in the probationary contract from one year to three years will be available as an option for teachers newly hired by HPISD or rehired after a break in service. Such recommendation will be in collaboration between the principal and executive director of human resources.

E. District-Level and Site-Based Decision-Making Exemption from TEC §11.252, 11.253, 11.255

Current Statute

TEC §11.252 District-Level Planning and Decision-Making

“(a)(3) strategies for improvement of student performance that include:

(A) instructional methods for addressing the needs of student groups not achieving their full potential;
(B) evidence-based practices that address the needs of students for special programs, including:

(i) suicide prevention programs, in accordance with Subchapter G, Chapter 38, which include a parental or guardian notification procedure;
(ii) conflict resolution programs;
(iii) violence prevention programs; and
(iv) dyslexia treatment programs;

(C) dropout reduction;
(D) integration of technology in instructional and administrative programs;

(E) positive behavior interventions and support, including interventions and support that integrate best practices on grief-informed and trauma-informed care;

(F) staff development for professional staff of the district;

(G) career education to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for a broad range of career opportunities;

(H) accelerated education; and

(I) implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program under Section [33.005](#);

(4) strategies for providing to elementary school, middle school, junior high school, and high school students, those students' teachers and school counselors, and those students' parents information about:

(A) higher education admissions and financial aid opportunities, including state financial aid opportunities such as the TEXAS grant program and the Teach for Texas grant program established under Chapter [56](#);

(B) the need for students to make informed curriculum choices to be prepared for success beyond high school; and

(C) sources of information on higher education admissions and financial aid;"

TEC §11.253 Campus Planning and Site-Based Decision-Making

"(d) (8) include goals and methods for violence prevention and intervention on campus; (10) if the campus is an elementary, middle, or junior high school, set goals and objectives for the coordinated health program at the campus based on:

(A) student fitness assessment data, including any data from research-based assessments such as the school health index assessment and planning tool created by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;

(B) student academic performance data;

(C) student attendance rates;

(D) the percentage of students who are educationally disadvantaged;

(E) the use and success of any method to ensure that students participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity as required by Section [28.002](#)(I); and

(F) any other indicator recommended by the local school health advisory council."

TEC §11.255 Dropout Prevention Review

"(a) Each district-level planning and decision-making committee and each campus-level planning and decision-making committee for a junior, middle, or high school campus shall analyze information related to dropout prevention, including:

(1) the results of the audit of dropout records required by Section [39.308](#);

(2) campus information related to graduation rates, dropout rates, high school equivalency certificate rates, and the percentage of students who remain in high school more than four years after entering grade level 9;

(3) the number of students who enter a high school equivalency certificate program and:

(A) do not complete the program;

(B) complete the program but do not take the high school equivalency examination; or

(C) complete the program and take the high school equivalency examination but do not obtain a high school equivalency certificate;

(4) for students enrolled in grade levels 9 and 10, information related to academic credit hours earned, retention rates, and placements in alternative education programs and expulsions under Chapter 37; and

(5) the results of an evaluation of each school-based dropout prevention program in the district.

(b) Each district-level planning and decision-making committee and each campus-level planning and decision-making committee shall use the information reviewed under this section in developing district or campus improvement plans under this subchapter.”

Rationale

Texas Education Code includes a prescriptive process for district-level and campus-level planning and decision-making committees to develop, evaluate, and revise district and campus improvement plans annually that include several compliance measures. The bureaucratic requirements in content and format of the improvement plans shift an otherwise important planning initiative into a process that detracts from the importance of local design and meaningful implementation

While Highland Park ISD will continue to develop district and campus planning documents based on Board priorities and administrative goals, the content and format of such plans should be a local decision. Highland Park ISD has a strong history of involving teachers, administrators, parents, community members and students in the decision-making process. Highland Park ISD believes the process of district and campus planning should be a local decision rather than a response to a state mandate

Local Innovation Plan

Highland Park ISD will replace a prescriptive list of compliance requirements in Campus and District Improvement Plans with relevant strategic plan components, including action steps, resources and metrics aligned with local Board priorities and goals. Required state and federal mandates will be included in reporting documents but may no longer be represented in District and Campus Improvement Plans.

V. Term

The Highland Park ISD Local District of Innovation Plan has a term of five years, beginning with the 2026-2027 school year and concluding at the end of the 2030-2031 school year. The Board of Trustees has the right to amend or terminate the plan at any time and will review the plan annually. If additions or revisions are recommended, the review process will resume with the District Leadership Council, move through the required web posting and notification to the Commissioner and continue with a majority vote by the DLC. Finally, a two-thirds majority vote of the Board will be required for final approval of the revision. Through this increased autonomy and greater local control, HPISD hopes to better meet the needs of its students and community.