HAMLIN COLLEGIATE ISD

District of Innovation Plan

2026-2031

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Introduction

The Hamlin Collegiate Independent School District (HCISD) was first designated as a District of Innovation in March 2017 under the provisions of House Bill 1842, enacted by the 84th Texas Legislature. The District's Local Innovation Plan was renewed by the Board of Trustees in April 2021 and has provided HCISD with the flexibility to make local decisions that best serve the unique needs of its students, staff, and community while remaining accountable to the high standards established by the State of Texas. As the current plan reaches the end of its term, HCISD is renewing its District of Innovation Plan to continue utilizing these locally approved flexibilities in support of student success.

This District of Innovation Plan serves as an extension of the HCISD Strategic Plan. While the Strategic Plan establishes the district's mission, vision, beliefs, goals, and priorities, this plan outlines the specific statutory flexibilities and local innovations that support their implementation. By aligning the District of Innovation Plan with the Strategic Plan, HCISD ensures that local decision-making remains focused on building a strong foundation that empowers Pied Pipers to persevere, achieve, and lead in life. Through thoughtful governance, continuous improvement, and responsible stewardship of district resources, HCISD remains committed to providing innovative educational opportunities that prepare every student for success in college, career, military service, and life.

District of Innovation Timeline

Date	Action
March 2017	HCISD Board of Trustees approved the initial District of Innovation Plan.
April 2021	Board of Trustees approved the first renewal of the District of Innovation Plan.
August 2026	Board of Trustees consideration and anticipated approval of the second renewal of the District of Innovation Plan (effective 2026-2031).

Strategic Plan Alignment

Mission

The mission of Hamlin Collegiate ISD is to build a strong foundation that will empower Pied Pipers to persevere, achieve, and lead in life.

Vision

Pied Pipers: Foundation to Future

Beliefs

- STUDENTS persevere with determination, are respectful of self and others, and think deeply and independently as critical thinkers who question, analyze, and engage with the world around them.
- PARENTS and FAMILIES empower learning as involved and trusted participants in their child's education, holding them accountable for their behavior and academic responsibilities, using failure as an opportunity to grow.
- FACULTY and STAFF MEMBERS are driven by passion and purpose to develop relationships that ensure every student feels safe, respected, and loved.
- CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS lead by example, through word, deed, action, and integrity, while maintaining trust, professionalism, and a supportive environment for all.
- THE SUPERINTENDENT and CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF are visionary leaders who consistently lead with purpose and integrity, upholding ethical principles and high standards to inspire excellence and success for all.
- THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES serve as ambassadors and representatives of our community, while strategically and proactively making decisions in the best interest of ALL students.

Goals & Priorities

- Priority 1: Focus on student growth and achievement
    - Increase student academic achievement through data-informed instruction, resulting in measurable growth in student performance in reading and math
    - Increase CCMR outcomes by expanding access to work-based learning and industry-based certifications
    - Promote a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment by implementing proactive safety measures and cultivating a school culture that prioritizes the health and well-being of all students
- Priority 2: Recruit, develop and retain high-quality staff
    - Recruit high-quality, certified staff
    - Retain high-quality, certified staff
    - Provide meaningful professional growth opportunities to build internal capacity and ensure excellence in teaching and learning
- Priority 3: Stakeholder participation and engagement
    - Create meaningful opportunities for parents and families to actively support student learning and participate in district decision-making
    - Cultivate and expand external partnerships, ensuring stakeholders work together to enhance student learning and district success
    - Enhance communication with parents and the broader community by establishing transparent, two-way communication channels that build trust in the district's mission
- Priority 4: Financial integrity and transparency
    - Ensure safe and well-maintained school facilities that create an optimal learning environment for student success
    - Improve operational efficiencies across the district by streamlining processes and optimizing resource allocations to reduce costs
    - Modernize district infrastructure and technology systems to support innovative teaching

Innovation Areas

District staff in conjunction with the Local Innovation Committee reviewed the subchapters of the Texas Education Code to determine which permissible exemptions currently inhibit the district from maximizing the educational opportunities of the students who attend Hamlin Collegiate ISD.

Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.0031, and §21.053)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §21.003 mandates that a person employed as a teacher by a school district must hold an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) or the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC). *(effective 8/11/2026)*
- TEC §21.0031 specifies conditions under which uncertified individuals may teach and dictates contract rules regarding certification status. *(effective 8/25/2026)*
- TEC §21.053 requires educators to present their certificate to the district before a contract is binding and before receiving compensation. *(effective 8/11/2026)*

When a district cannot locate a certified educator or seeks to assign a teacher outside their certified field, traditional state rules require applying for emergency permits or statutory waivers through TEA/SBEC.

Rationale for Exemption

As a rural district committed to expanding College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) pathways and providing high-quality foundational instruction, Hamlin Collegiate ISD faces unique recruitment challenges. These challenges impact hard-to-fill secondary academic disciplines, high-demand Career and Technical Education (CTE) fields, specialized dual-credit or P-TECH coursework, and late-season elementary vacancies. Standard certification pathways do not always accommodate industry experts, trades professionals, higher education instructors, or qualified elementary candidates whose real-world experience, advanced domain knowledge, or academic background would greatly benefit HCISD students.

Exemption from these statutes allows HCISD to locally establish qualification criteria, streamlined hiring workflows, and local employment terms. This ensures the district can quickly secure qualified instructional talent, expand course offerings, and maintain high instructional standards without unnecessary administrative delays.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To maintain high educational standards, administrative oversight, and community transparency, HCISD will utilize local certification under the following structured guidelines:

- Subject-Area Qualification Standards Across All Grade Levels:
    - CTE & Trade Pathways: Candidates must demonstrate industry expertise, relevant workforce experience, professional licensures/credentials, or specialized vocational skills.

    - Secondary Academic Core & Electives: Candidates must hold a bachelor's degree (or higher) in the related discipline or demonstrate verified subject-matter proficiency.
    - General Elementary & Middle School Assignments (Pre-K – Grade 8): While the district prioritizes hiring fully state-certified educators, local certification may be utilized across all grade levels under exceptional circumstances (e.g., severe applicant pool shortages or late-season hiring challenges). Candidates must hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree and demonstrate content knowledge in the subject area(s) to be taught.
- Statutory Exclusions:
    - Local certification under this District of Innovation plan does not exempt the district from state or federal certification mandates governing Special Education or Bilingual/ESL services. Qualified certification/endorsements will remain mandatory for these student populations as required by law.
- Approval Process:
    - Principal Recommendation: The campus principal submits a formal request detailing the candidate's qualifications, credentials, subject-matter expertise, and instructional suitability to the Superintendent.
    - Superintendent Authorization: The Superintendent evaluates the credentials and approves or denies the local certificate based on district need.
    - Board Reporting: The Superintendent notifies the Board of Trustees of all local certification approvals prior to or at the next regularly scheduled board meeting.
- Employment Terms & Support:
    - Locally certified individuals will be employed under an at-will employment agreement or single-year local contract rather than a standard Chapter 21 state contract.
    - All employees hired under local certification across any grade level must participate in targeted professional development, classroom management training, and instructional support.
- Parental Transparency & Notification:
    - The district will comply with state law (TEC §21.057) and federal Title I guidelines regarding parental notification. Written notice will be provided to parents if an uncertified or inappropriately certified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly aligns with Priority 2 (Recruit, develop, and retain high-quality staff) and Priority 1 (Focus on student growth and achievement) of the HCISD Strategic Plan by allowing the district to recruit qualified instructional talent for hard-to-fill positions while expanding access to high-quality CCMR, CTE, and work-based learning pathways.

Teacher & Counselor Employment Contracts (TEC §21.102)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §21.102 governs the terms of probationary contracts for educators. *(effective 8/11/2026)*

- Under standard state law, a probationary contract may not exceed one school year and may be renewed for up to two additional one-year periods, allowing a maximum probationary period of three school years for educators new to the profession.
- However, for an experienced educator who has been employed in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment with the district, state law restricts the probationary period to a maximum of one year.

Rationale for Exemption

A single school year is often insufficient time for campus and district leadership to fully evaluate an experienced educator's instructional effectiveness, classroom management, professional collaboration, and long-term fit within Hamlin Collegiate ISD. Because contract renewal timelines require employment decisions to be made early in the spring semester—often prior to receiving end-of-year student growth data or state assessment results—a one-year cap places unnecessary pressure on both the district and the educator.

Exemption from TEC §21.102 provides HCISD with the flexibility to extend the probationary period for experienced educators who are new to the district. This additional time allows the district to conduct thorough evaluations, provide tailored professional growth opportunities, and ensure that staffing decisions align with high expectations for student achievement and district culture.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To ensure fair, consistent, and supportive employment practices, HCISD will implement this exemption under the following structured guidelines:

- Scope & Application:
    - This flexibility applies exclusively to experienced teachers and counselors new to HCISD who have been employed in public education for at least five of the preceding eight years.
    - Standard probationary contract rules (up to three years) will continue to apply to educators with less than five years of public school experience.
- Probationary Terms:
    - Upon initial employment with HCISD, an experienced teacher or counselor will be issued a one-year probationary contract.
    - At the conclusion of the first year, the district may, at its local discretion:
        i. Issue a term or continuing contract if performance meets district standards.
        ii. Offer a second one-year probationary contract to allow for continued evaluation and professional development.
        iii. Terminate the probationary contract at the end of the contract period in accordance with local policy and statutory guidelines.
    - In no event will an experienced educator remain on a probationary contract beyond two full school years.
- Evaluative & Mentoring Support:
    - Experienced educators serving a second probationary year will receive targeted professional growth support, regular administrative feedback, and access to peer coaching or instructional mentoring.
    - Decisions regarding contract status will be informed by formal observations, campus leader evaluations, and student performance data.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly supports Priority 2 of the HCISD Strategic Plan (Recruit, develop, and retain high-quality staff) by giving district leaders the necessary time to make informed, data-driven personnel decisions while supporting educators through meaningful professional growth.

Local Determination of Educator Contract Service Days (TEC §21.401)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §21.401 establishes that an educator employed on a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. *(effective 8/11/2026)*
- While Texas law previously transitioned student attendance requirements from days to 75,600 instructional minutes (TEC §25.081), the statutory requirement for educator contract service days remained fixed at 187 days.

Rationale for Exemption

The rigid state mandate requiring 187 contract days limits Hamlin Collegiate ISD's ability to design educator work schedules that align with student instructional needs, professional learning goals, and operational efficiency. Because student schedules are built around required annual minutes rather than days, requiring a fixed 187 days often results in extra professional days that do not efficiently serve teachers or students.

Exemption from TEC §21.401 provides HCISD the local flexibility to determine the number of contract days required for 10-month employees through the annual, Board-approved school calendar process. Reducing contract service days (e.g., to 180–183 days) without reducing annual salaries serves as a powerful tool to enhance teacher recruitment, boost retention, reduce burnout, and increase time for high-quality instruction and targeted professional development.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To ensure operations remain transparent, fair, and fiscally sound, HCISD will utilize this flexibility under the following structured guidelines:

- Salary Protection Guarantee:
    - Any reduction in the total number of teacher contract service days below 187 days will not result in a reduction of annual compensation or daily pay rates for 10-month professional employees.
    - Educator salaries will remain competitive and aligned with the district's approved salary schedule.
- Calendar & Work Schedule Approval:
    - The specific number of contract service days for each school year will be determined annually by the Superintendent and approved by the Board of Trustees as part of the official district calendar adoption process.
    - The calendar committee, staff, and Local Innovation Committee will provide input during calendar development.
- Instructional & Professional Standards:
    - The district will continue to meet or exceed all state-mandated instructional minute requirements for students (75,600 minutes).

- Contract days will be strategically allocated between student instruction, embedded professional development (e.g., Professional Learning Communities/PLCs), and teacher preparation time.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly aligns with Priority 2 (Recruit, develop, and retain high-quality staff) and Priority 4 (Financial integrity and operational efficiency) of the HCISD Strategic Plan by providing a competitive compensation package, supporting staff retention, and optimizing operational schedules.

Local Flexibility for Instructional Day Structure (TEC §25.081)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §25.081 requires school districts to operate for at least 75,600 minutes of instruction, including intermissions and recesses, for students during the school year. *(effective 8/11/2026)*
- The statute and related state rules dictate the structure of the instructional day, establishing specific operational parameters required to earn credit for instructional time and calculate Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for state funding purposes.

Rationale for Exemption

Rigid state guidelines governing the standard daily schedule limit Hamlin Collegiate ISD's ability to create flexible instructional structures that best serve students, faculty, and working families. While HCISD fully commits to meeting or exceeding the required 75,600 annual instructional minutes, rigid daily hour rules restrict the district from periodically modifying the start or end times of specific school days for high-impact educational purposes.

Exemption from TEC §25.081 provides HCISD the local authority to structure the daily operational schedule when strategically beneficial. This flexibility allows the district to build in dedicated time for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) planning, student data analysis, targeted staff development, parent-teacher conferences, and specialized student intervention/enrichment sessions—without losing state attendance credit or funding.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To ensure that instructional quality remains paramount and families receive timely communication, HCISD will exercise this flexibility under the following structured guidelines:

- Annual Instructional Minute Guarantee:
  - The district will continue to satisfy or exceed the state requirement of 75,600 operational/instructional minutes per school year.
  - Modified schedules will be balanced across the academic calendar so that total student learning time is fully preserved.
- Types of Modified Schedules:
  - Professional Learning & Collaboration Days: Strategic early release or late start days to allow teachers to conduct data reviews, align curriculum, and receive targeted coaching.

    - Intervention & Enrichment Blocks: Flexible scheduling adjustments to accommodate targeted student academic interventions, CCMR work-based learning opportunities, and P-TECH program initiatives.
- Approval & Stakeholder Notice:
    - All planned modified instructional days will be incorporated into the annual school calendar recommended by the Local Innovation Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees.
    - The district will provide advance notice to parents, guardians, and the community regarding any modified school day schedules to support family planning.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly supports Priority 1 (Focus on student growth and achievement), Priority 2 (Recruit, develop, and retain high-quality staff), and Priority 4 (Financial integrity and operational efficiency) by maximizing dedicated time for teacher collaboration and data-driven instruction while ensuring optimal operational scheduling.

Local Determination of School Start Date (TEC §25.0811)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §25.0811 prohibits school districts from beginning student instruction before the fourth Monday in August, unless the district operates an all-year school system as defined by state law. *(effective 8/11/2026)*

Rationale for Exemption

The mandatory fourth-Monday-in-August start date creates unnecessary academic calendar constraints for Hamlin Collegiate ISD. Rigid start date rules force an unbalanced school calendar with a significantly shorter fall semester than spring semester, placing stress on course completion timelines and student pacing prior to winter break.

As a rural district featuring P-TECH and dual-credit programs, HCISD must align its secondary academic schedule with postsecondary higher education partner calendars (e.g., local colleges and universities). Starting earlier in August allows dual-credit and P-TECH students to synchronize coursework, avoid attendance gaps, and maximize College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) pathways. Additionally, an earlier start date allows the district to balance fall and spring instructional days, complete fall semester exams prior to the winter break, and provide targeted instructional time prior to spring STAAR/EOC state assessments.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To ensure that calendar decisions serve the entire school community, HCISD will utilize this flexibility under the following structured guidelines:

- Higher Education & P-TECH Alignment:
    - The district will structure the annual calendar to closely align secondary schedules with collegiate partner academic calendars to support dual-credit, P-TECH, and work-based learning students.

- Instructional & Semester Balance:
    - The calendar will be designed to balance the number of instructional days in the fall and spring semesters, allowing for mid-term and fall final exams to occur prior to the winter holiday break.
    - Additional instructional days prior to state testing windows will be strategically utilized to maximize student preparation and academic growth.
- Community Input & Calendar Approval:
    - The specific school start date for each academic year will be recommended by the Local Innovation Committee with input from staff, parents, and community members.
    - The calendar will be formally submitted to the Board of Trustees for review and adoption prior to public release for each upcoming school year.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly aligns with Priority 1 (Focus on student growth and achievement) and Priority 3 (Stakeholder participation and engagement) by optimizing academic pacing, aligning dual-credit and P-TECH opportunities, and engaging stakeholders in the annual calendar development process.

Local Determination of Attendance Requirements for Course Credit (TEC §25.092)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §25.092 (often referred to as the "90% Rule") requires a student to be in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days a class is offered in order to receive course credit or a final grade. *(effective 8/11/2026)*
- State law permits a student who attends between 75 and 90 percent of class days to earn credit only if the student completes a principal-approved attendance recovery plan and satisfies course instructional requirements.

Rationale for Exemption

The mandatory 90 percent rule establishes a rigid time-based metric for credit recovery that focuses heavily on physical seat time rather than demonstrated academic mastery and student learning outcomes. In a modern educational environment—especially within Hamlin Collegiate ISD's P-TECH, dual-credit, and work-based learning frameworks—learning often occurs through non-traditional formats that do not always align with regular classroom hours.

Exemption from TEC §25.092 provides HCISD the local flexibility to evaluate credit attainment based on content mastery, completed course performance standards, and verified learning outcomes. This flexibility allows the district to accommodate students participating in approved off-campus educational activities, industry internships, dual-credit coursework, CCMR career exploration, and extenuating personal circumstances, without penalizing them strictly for seat-time hours when high academic standards are maintained.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To ensure academic rigor, consistent administration, and full compliance with governing laws, HCISD will exercise this flexibility under the following structured guidelines:

- Demonstrated Mastery Standard:
  - Course credit will be awarded when a student demonstrates mastery of the Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and satisfies required course competencies, as verified by campus leadership and instructional staff.
- Support for CCMR & Innovative Pathways:
  - Flexibility will specifically support students participating in approved work-based learning, P-TECH career experiences, dual-credit courses, UIL/extracurricular opportunities, and specialized academic pursuits aligned with district goals.
- Intervention & Committee Oversight:
  - Campus Attendance Committees will focus targeted intervention and support on students whose absences stem from true academic disengagement, while offering practical credit-restoration options for students with legitimate, documented extenuating circumstances.
- Statutory & Policy Protections:
  - Compulsory Attendance Safeguard: This local exemption does not impact or alter state compulsory attendance laws (TEC Chapter 25, Subchapter C) or truancy intervention mandates.
  - Teacher Grading Authority: This exemption does not override a teacher's statutory authority to assign grades under TEC §28.0216.
  - UIL Eligibility: All University Interscholastic League (UIL) eligibility rules regarding passing grades and attendance standards remain fully in effect.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly aligns with Priority 1 (Focus on student growth and achievement) and Priority 3 (Stakeholder participation and engagement) by removing artificial seat-time barriers to graduation, expanding access to CCMR and work-based learning pathways, and fostering individualized support for student success.

Local Flexibility for Kindergarten–Fourth Grade Class Sizes (TEC §25.112)

Texas Education Code Requirements

- TEC §25.112 mandates that a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth-grade class. *(effective 8/11/2026)*
- Under current state law, if a class exceeds the 22:1 ratio at any point during the school year, the district must formally apply for a waiver from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and send written notifications to the parents of every student in the affected classroom.

Rationale for Exemption

While Hamlin Collegiate ISD recognizes the instructional value of maintaining manageable class sizes, the rigid 22:1 statutory cap can lead to unintended educational disruptions. In a small rural district, an unexpected enrollment increase of just one or two students mid-year can force the

district to split existing, cohesive classrooms, hire additional staff unexpectedly, or create multi-grade combination classes.

Exemption from TEC §25.112 provides HCISD the local authority to manage minor class size fluctuations locally without filing formal waivers with TEA. This flexibility prevents unnecessary classroom redistributions, preserves student-teacher relationships, avoids financial strains on the district budget, and allows administration to evaluate total classroom composition, staff expertise, and available instructional aide support when making placement decisions.

Local Implementation & Safeguards

To ensure instructional quality and operational integrity, HCISD will exercise this flexibility under the following structured guidelines:

- Target Class Size Standard:
    - The district will continue to target and plan for a 22:1 student-to-teacher ratio in grades Pre-K through 4 during annual staffing and schedule design.
    - Local flexibility will only be utilized in response to unexpected enrollment growth, facilities limitations, or unique classroom dynamics where adding a section is not educationally or fiscally practical.
- Administrative Review & Approval Process:
    - Campus Assessment: The campus principal will evaluate class composition, teacher input, instructional space, and student needs before requesting a class size exemption.
    - Superintendent Review: The Superintendent will review class size data and approve or deny local exemptions based on total campus enrollment and resources.
    - Board Oversight: The Board of Trustees will be informed of any K–4 classrooms exceeding the 22:1 ratio.
- Instructional Support Safeguards:
    - If a classroom exceeds 22 students, campus leadership will evaluate the need for additional instructional support, such as assigning a classroom aide, providing supplemental instructional materials, or offering co-teaching support.
- Parental Communication:
    - Although state TEA waivers are eliminated under this plan, campus administration will maintain transparent communication with parents and families regarding class sizes and instructional support structures.

Strategic Plan Alignment

This innovation directly aligns with Priority 1 (Focus on student growth and achievement), Priority 2 (Recruit, develop, and retain high-quality staff), and Priority 4 (Financial integrity and operational efficiency) by protecting instructional stability, supporting classroom management, and ensuring efficient allocation of district resources.

Plan Implementation, Monitoring, & Renewal

Implementation

Following approval by the Hamlin Collegiate ISD Board of Trustees, this District of Innovation Plan shall become effective for the 2026–2031 term (a period of five years) unless amended, terminated, or renewed in accordance with Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.

- Administrative Authority: The Superintendent or designee shall be responsible for implementing the provisions of this plan and ensuring that district policies, local administrative procedures, and daily practices align with the approved local exemptions.
- Operational Alignment: District leadership will work collaboratively with campus administrators and staff to execute these flexibilities in direct support of the HCISD Strategic Plan, maintaining full compliance with all non-exempted state and federal mandates.

Monitoring

The Superintendent or designee shall monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this plan on an ongoing basis.

- Periodic Review: District leadership will regularly assess the impact of each local exemption to confirm that approved innovations continue to support student academic growth, recruit and retain high-quality staff, and enhance operational efficiency.
- Stakeholder Feedback: The monitoring process will gather ongoing feedback from campus leadership, instructional staff, the Local Innovation Committee, parents, and community members.
- Reporting: Periodic updates and progress measures will be shared with the Board of Trustees in alignment with the district's strategic reporting schedule.

Amendments

The Board of Trustees may amend this District of Innovation Plan during its term in accordance with TEC Chapter 12A and applicable state rules.

- Any proposed amendment must follow the statutory procedures required by law, including consultation with and review by the Local Innovation Committee, public notice requirements, and formal approval by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Trustees.

Renewal & Expiration

This District of Innovation Plan will remain in effect through July 2031.

- Prior to the end of the five-year term, the Board of Trustees may consider renewing the plan by following the renewal process set forth in Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.
- The renewal process will include comprehensive stakeholder input, a public hearing, Local Innovation Committee review, and final Board action to ensure the district's local flexibilities continue to serve the strategic priorities of Hamlin Collegiate ISD.