

# **HCISD: Becoming A District of Innovation**

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

The District of Innovation concept was passed into law by the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, which created Texas Education Code chapter 12A.

The law allows traditional independent school districts to access most of the flexibilities available to Texas’ open enrollment charter schools. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Chapter 12A.

## **What do we know about the District of Innovation Opportunity?**

HB 1842 was passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in Spring, 2015, and provides Texas public school districts the opportunity to be designated as Districts of Innovation. On Tuesday, May 17th the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation.

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;
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

## **What is the process for becoming a District of Innovation?**

In HCISD, the District of Innovation process will align with the District’s strategic plan adopted in February 2014. Additionally, the plan will also align to the strategic financial plan as outlined in our recent Tax Ratification Election (TRE). The process is as follows:

- Discuss process for becoming a District of Innovation during the Transforming Teaching & Learning Committee Meeting
- Board of Trustees initiates District of Innovation process with the adoption of the Board Resolution
- Board of Trustees hold Public Hearing to consider developing a plan for District of Innovation
- Strategic Plan Committee convenes to review year two of the strategic plan and a draft of the District of Innovation Plan
- District-wide Educational Improvement Council (DEIC) convenes to review & finalize plan
- Board of Trustees notifies Commissioner of Education of intent to approve plan
- District of Innovation Plan presented to Board of Trustees for approval

### **How long does an innovation plan stay in effect?**

The term of the District of Innovation Plan, as outlined by the Texas Education Agency, is five years; therefore, the plan shall commence with the 2016-2017 academic year and conclude at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The Strategic Plan Committee (SPC) will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications as needed to address innovative disruptions.

TEA's proposed rules indicate that a district may have only one innovation plan at a time. A district innovation plan may be amended, rescinded, or renewed. An Amendment to an approved plan does not change the date of the term of designation as a district of Innovation, and exemptions that were already formally approved need not be reviewed. The proposed rules limit renewal of a plan to the period within six months of the expiration of the plan's term. During renewal, all sections of the plan and exemptions must be reviewed, and the original statutory adoption process must be followed.

### **What impact could designation as a District of Innovation have on district policy?**

The District of Innovation Plan will require changes to some of our LOCAL policies. Policy changes will be shared with stakeholders in accordance with current practices.

### **What impact will innovations have on HCISD school personnel?**

The only innovation that will directly impact personnel is that of teacher certification in the area of Career & Technology Education (CTE) at the high school level. As part of the District of Innovation Plan, HCISD will gain increased local control over the certification process. House Bill 5 has added significant support for the need to expand college and career opportunities for students. An exemption from TEC Code 21.055 would allow our district to issue a school district teaching permit to individuals who do not hold a teaching certificate but who the district deems qualified to teach based on a determined set of criteria. All candidates would be carefully considered to ensure the individual has sufficient education and expertise to provide instruction necessary to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the course(s) to be taught. The intent is to enhance CTE by expanding course offerings at the high school level. Local control of teacher certification will enable experts to teach our students while providing authentic learning opportunities.

## **Under the District of Innovation Plan, what individual qualifications would need to be present to locally certify teachers?**

The individual qualifications would include demonstrated subject matter expertise, such as

- Professional work experience
- Formal training and education
- Relevant industry license, certification, or registration
- Any combination of work experience, training and education or industry credential related to the subject matter he or she will be teaching.

All candidates would be carefully considered to ensure the individual has sufficient education and expertise to provide instruction necessary to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the course(s) to be taught.

## **Will locally certified teachers be required to complete certain steps prior to being hired?**

Yes, before issuing a school district teaching permit to an individual, the district would ensure that the individual completed the criminal background check in compliance with the State Board of Education (SBEC) rules. This would require the superintendent to certify to the board of trustees that the individual has undergone a criminal history background check and is capable of proper classroom management. In addition, the individual would be required to obtain a set number of hours in classroom management training.

## **How will the District of Innovation Plan impact the academic calendar?**

HCISD will look to exercise this flexibility with Harlingen Early College High School for the 2016-17 school year and explore this opportunity for other campuses in the 2017-18 school year.

## **What innovations will HCISD pursue as a District of Innovation?**

To achieve the District's Mission and Board Goals, to align the District's practices and operations and to meet the expectations of the Strategic Plan, flexibility is required to exert local control, at both the District and campus levels to create the following benefits:

1. An academic calendar to address the needs of students, in particular those enrolled at our Early College High School. As well, this innovation will guide the decision making process for future academic calendar development;
2. An adjust class size ratio requirement to meet the needs of elementary campuses;
3. An innovative practice for addressing teacher certification so as to enhance any area of the curriculum.

The District requires local flexibility in the areas listed above to support each student in attaining the skills needed to succeed in the college/career pathway of their choice through personalized learning and to ensure a system aligned to the needs of our graduates as they enter the post-secondary world.

**Why is the district seeking local control over the class size ration?**

Local control over the class size ratio will enable the district to minimize disruption at the beginning of the year due to class size. Furthermore, the district will also eliminate time utilized to complete and submit annual waivers on class size ratios, thus increasing the time spent on campus related operations.

**How will the flexibility in class size ratio impact staffing at the campus level?**

While HCISD will relax the 22:1 ratio, class ratios will not exceed 25:1. Furthermore, the target enrollment for every classroom will remain at 22:1. HCISD will continue with the current practice of assessing student teacher ratios and staffing campuses in alignment with current practices.

**Where should questions/comments about the District of Innovation opportunity be directed?**

Please direct all questions/comments regarding the district of the Innovation opportunity [dofinnovation@hcisd.org](mailto:dofinnovation@hcisd.org)