

**ABILENE
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Local Innovation Plan
2020-2024**

Approved by the AISD Board of Trustees

March 16, 2020

DRAFT VERSION PLACED ON WEBSITE JANUARY 24, 2020



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Dr. Joseph Waldron, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources

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Dr. Dan Dukes, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction

Timeline of Events

November 7	Report on renewal of District of Innovation to Trustees at Board Workshop.
December 9	Board considered resolution to become District of Innovation. Board passed resolution to renew our current District of Innovation Plan. Board conducted a Public Hearing to consider whether the district should renew our local innovation plan.
January 13	Board appointed an Innovation Planning committee.
January	Committee worked to determine need/construct renewed Innovation Plan maintaining the 2018 Innovations, adding one additional Innovation.
January 24	Plan posted on district website for minimum of 30 days.
January 24	Board notifies the Commissioner of intent to renew plan.
February 27	District of Innovation Plan Committee holds a public meeting to consider and approve final version.
March 16	Board of Trustees considered and unanimously approved the plan.
March 18	District notified Commissioner that Abilene ISD renewed the District of Innovation Plan through March 2024.

INNOVATION PLANNING COMMITTEE

Amy Sparks

Teacher, Abilene High School

Beth Green

Teacher, Cooper High School

Shawna Parmelly

Teacher, Cooper High School

Jera Bunton

Teacher, ATEMS High School

Margaret Hope

Teacher, ATEMS High School

Patrick Desso

Teacher, Jefferson Center

Jennifer Faulkenberry

Teacher, Clack Middle School

Jamie Smith

Teacher, Craig Middle School

Courtney Saunders

Counselor, Madison Middle School

Vanessa Burns

Secretary, Madison Middle School

Paula Olson

Teacher, Madison Middle School

Kody Travis

Teacher, Madison Middle School

Justin Rosenquist

Teacher, Mann Middle School

Becky Heatherly

Teacher, Austin Elementary

Kaylie Lucas

Teacher, Austin Elementary

Karrie Turk

Secretary, Austin Elementary

Carey Kitts

Assistant Principal, Bassetti Elementary

Keri Thornburg

Principal, Bassetti Elementary School

Taylor Moreno

Teacher, Bonham Elementary

Jessalyn Woods

Counselor, Bowie Elementary

Cindy Crawford

Secretary, Bowie Elementary

Lorina Harris

Teacher, Dyess Elementary

Deborah Hill

Teacher, Dyess Elementary

Lilly Brown

Teacher, Jackson Elementary

Kelsey Schroeder

Teacher, Jackson Elementary

Lacy Bruce

Teacher, Johnston Elementary

Chelsea Rico

Teacher, Lee Elementary

Christina Cortez

Secretary, Martinez Elementary

Monica Diaz

Assistant Principal, Ortiz Elementary

Tina Campbell

Teacher, Ortiz Elementary

Tonja Gray

Teacher, Reagan Elementary

Ysidra Rayburn

Teacher, Reagan Elementary

Rebecca Tolar

Teacher, Thomas Elementary

Staci Armstrong

Instructional Aide, Ward Elementary

Pepper Creel

Instructional Aide, Ward Elementary

Billie Walker

Teacher, Ward Elementary

Brittney Lomax

Teacher, Ward Elementary

Tammy Jones

Family Advocate, Long Early Learning Center

Karen Chiasson

Associate Teacher, Crockett Early Head Start

Darrin Cox

Homeless Liaison, One AISD Center

Kandace Grenwelge

Office Manager, Student Nutrition

Jay Towell

Executive Director, Student Nutrition

Joseph Waldron

Chair, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources

ABILENE ISD INNOVATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates including the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On November 6, 2017, the Abilene Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") considered a Resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. On December 11, 2017, the Board held a public hearing, approved a Resolution and appointed a 35-member Innovation Planning Committee ("Committee"). The committee was comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District's stakeholders, including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators. The Committee met on December 14, 2017, January 11, 2018, January 25, 2018, February 8, 2018 and February 15, 2018 to discuss and draft the Local Innovation Plan ("Plan"). The Committee will meet with the Districtwide Consultation Committee on February 28, 2018. The DWCC will conduct a public forum and accept input on the proposed District of Innovation Plan. At the conclusion of the public forum, the DWCC will consider approval of the plan. The Abilene ISD Board of Trustees will consider adoption of the Plan at its meeting on April 9, 2018.

TERM

The term of the Plan is for four years, beginning March 16, 2020 and ending June 30, 2024, 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, the Board will appoint a new committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

The innovation planning committee that worked to develop this plan was appreciative of the transparent and inclusive nature of the innovation planning process utilized. The members felt that the composition of the committee, which included a staff member from every campus in the district, honored the insight and input of the district's teachers. The committee strongly recommends that the membership of any innovation planning committee convened in future years will respect this commitment to teachers as instructional leaders and a vital stakeholder

group in our district.

AREAS OF INNOVATION

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

1. T.E.C. Section §25.0811 First Day of Instruction (Uniform School Start Date)

Section §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.

Current Status:

Texas Education Code Section §25.0811 restricts Abilene ISD's ability to annually establish an instructional calendar that best meets the instructional needs of students and the priorities of the community by prohibiting the District from beginning instruction before the fourth Monday in August. Restricting the school start date to the fourth Monday in August operationally challenges Abilene ISD because the required 75,600 instructional minutes must be scheduled between the fourth Monday in August and early June. The flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the need of the students, the schools, and the community.

Benefit of Exemption:

Having the flexibility to establish a school start date prior to the fourth Monday in August will enable the District to:

- provide the District Wide Consultation Committee (DWCC) the flexibility to determine locally, on an annual basis, what start and end dates best meet the needs of students, schools, and the community. For example, the district may start with a shortened week at the beginning of school to ease transition for students, families and staff
- 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, and to complete the first semester prior to the winter break
- provide more instructional time prior to the administration of spring state assessments and minimize lost instructional time after the conclusion of state assessments
- provide additional time at the conclusion of the school calendar for provision of remedial instruction prior to summer administration of state assessments required for grade level promotion or graduation
- utilize flexibility to schedule student breaks/holidays, professional development or other options during the school year
- complete the school year prior to the end of May to allow for increased flexibility in scheduling graduation and allow students to enroll in college courses that begin in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness

Local Innovation Procedures:

The Abilene ISD District Wide Consultation Committee (DWCC), comprised of teachers, administrators, support personnel, parents, and business and community leaders, serves as the District's calendar committee. The DWCC will develop instructional calendar options and recommend a preferred option for Board consideration. In developing calendar options, the DWCC will utilize the flexibility of having

more local control on the school start date, not to exceed more than one week before the Uniform School Start Date.

Exemption from the Texas Education Code Section §25.0811 may require revisions in the District policies at EB (LEGAL) and (LOCAL).

2. T.E.C. Section §21.003 (a); T.E.C. Section §21.053 (a)-(b); Certification Required

Section §21.003 CERTIFICATION REQUIRED (a) A person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, 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.

Sec. 21.053. PRESENTATION AND RECORDING OF CERTIFICATES. (a) A person who desires to teach in a public school shall present the person's certificate for filing with the employing district before the person's contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding.

(b) An educator who does not hold a valid certificate may not be paid for teaching or work done before the effective date of issuance of a valid certificate.

Current Status:

T.E.C. Section §21.003 requiring appropriate state certification for all teaching positions, and T.E.C. Section §21.053 requiring a teacher to present his or her certificate to the district before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibiting the district from paying an educator if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time of hire, inhibit the District's ability to fill certain teaching positions having very limited certified candidate pools. In addition, these sections do not allow flexibility of placement for certified teachers within grade levels in elementary schools, or for the district to hire a teacher fully certified in another state until Texas certification or a T.E.A. approved waiver is obtained.

In the event a district cannot locate an appropriately certified teacher for a hard-to-fill position, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification, and the Commissioner may subsequently deny such requests. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district. These sections make it difficult for the district to recruit, employ and retain persons who have appropriate expertise, experience and/or industry certifications that make them well qualified to fill such positions. In some cases, these statutory requirements have resulted in the termination of certain courses of study due to the inability to hire certified teaching candidates, and the transfer of certified teachers to other campuses.

Benefit of Exemption:

Abilene ISD prides itself in hiring the highest quality teaching staff for the benefit of all learners. Occasionally, teachers are needed for positions that are extremely difficult to fill due to the lack of a certified teacher candidate pool. To supply the high quality teachers needed for all programs, this flexibility would allow the district to expand the pool of qualified candidates and employ highly qualified educators that might not ordinarily meet the requirements under the traditional teacher certification pathways. An exemption from these requirements will allow Abilene ISD to issue a local school district teaching permit to individuals who do not hold a Texas teaching certificate, but whom the district deems highly qualified to teach in a particular subject area as specified in the local guidelines. This flexibility in certification requirements will also allow more flexibility in elementary teaching and Disciplinary Alternative Education Program/Juvenile Detention Center assignments, and provide more options for

secondary students in course scheduling, dual credit classes, and course offerings leading to industry-recognized certifications.

Local Innovation Procedures:

Abilene ISD will maintain its current expectation for teacher certification, and continue to seek highly effective certified educators for all teaching positions. The district will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position(s) in question at the time of hire. However, where that is not reasonably possible, the district will have the flexibility to issue a local teaching permit and hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and are fully equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question based on local certification criteria without requesting a waiver from T.E.A.

A. A campus principal may submit to the Superintendent and/or the Superintendent's Designee a request to issue a local school district teaching permit to a highly qualified candidate who does not hold a Texas teaching certificate. The district will consider this certification exemption based on staffing needs only in the areas of:

- Career and Technology Education (CTE); and
- Languages Other Than English (LOTE)

Qualification for a local school district teaching permit could include, but not be limited to: demonstrated subject expertise, professional work experience, formal training/education in the content area, active/relevant professional industry certification, or a combination of work experience, advanced training and education, and/or demonstration of successful experience working with students.

When positions are posted and candidates are interviewed, certified teachers will be considered first. However, the candidate who is considered to be of highest quality may be selected regardless of certification. After the required posting period and candidate interviews, if the principal desires to hire a candidate with other qualifications, the principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what specific credentials (i.e. experience, expertise, and/or industry certifications) the prospective teacher possesses that would qualify the individual to teach that subject(s). The Superintendent must approve the selection and report the action to the Board at the first board meeting following the assignment. The individuals hired under this exemption will be provided with district identified training and resources, and the support of a mentor to ensure their success. The candidate's need to obtain SBEC certification will be determined by the Executive Director of Human Resources. When certification is required, teachers hired under this exemption must complete the Texas teacher certification process and present documentation of valid Texas certification to the Personnel Department within two years of hire. Parents will be notified in writing if students are being taught by a teacher hired under this exemption.

B. A campus principal may submit to the Superintendent and/or the Superintendent's Designee a request to issue a local school district teaching permit to a highly qualified candidate who holds valid teacher certification in another state, but does not currently hold Texas SBEC certification.

After the required posting period and candidate interviews, the principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what specific credentials (i.e. certification in another state) the prospective teacher possesses that qualify the individual to teach that subject(s). The Superintendent must approve the selection and report the action to the Board at the first board meeting following the

assignment. Individuals hired under this exemption will be provided with district identified training and resources, and the support of a mentor to ensure their success. Teachers hired under this exemption must complete the Texas teacher certification process and present documentation of valid Texas certification to the Personnel Department within two years of hire. Parents will be notified in writing if students are being taught by a teacher hired under this exemption.

C. For grades K-5, a campus principal may submit to the Superintendent and/or the Superintendent's Designee a request to issue a local school district teaching permit to an SBEC certified teacher currently employed by the district to teach an elementary grade level for which he/she is well qualified but not currently certified. For example, a teacher that holds certification for grades 4-8 might be assigned to 3rd grade, or a teacher with EC-4 certification might be assigned to 5th grade. In addition, a campus principal for a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) and/or the Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) may also submit a request to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's Designee for issuance of a local school district teaching permit for an SBEC certified teacher to teach a grade level/subject for which he/she is well qualified but not currently certified. DAEP/JDC teacher certification exemptions may be utilized as needed to teach the full range of students served in these temporary placements. The District will only utilize exemptions outlined in this section when the out of grade-level assignment within the District is mutually agreeable to both the principal and teacher in question. Elementary teachers assigned under this exemption must complete the Texas teacher certification process for the grade level to be taught and present documentation of their certification to the Personnel Department within two years of assignment. Parents will be notified in writing if students are being taught by a teacher assigned under this exemption.

D. Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency for any of these proposed exemptions.

E. All other teachers and staff not specifically exempted by these guidelines will not be exempt from TEC Sections §21.003 or §21.053.

Exemption from the Texas Education Code Sections §21.003 and § 21.053 may require revisions in the District policies at DBA (LEGAL) and DBA (LOCAL); DK (Legal), DK (Local), and DK (Exhibit).

3. T.E.C. Section §21.004 (i); Preclusion from providing Alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program (New in 2020)

Current Status:

TEC §22.004 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 Abilene 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.

Benefit of Exemption:

Abilene ISD values our staff and the quality of the total employment compensation package we can offer. One major benefit of any potential employment opportunity is quality medical insurance at the best possible cost. This exemption allows Abilene ISD the opportunity to sample the market for group medical insurance and creates the possibility for flexibility in plan design and focus. The availability of an alternative to the current TRS options will also create a database of medical claims information from our own district employees that can be utilized to drive a targeted wellness program and increase the overall health of our employees and community.

Local Innovation Procedures:

Abilene ISD will sample the market for group medical insurance plans through an official procurement process, evaluate the components of those plans, and then present to our employees an additional group medical insurance option (or options) alongside the TRS offerings during open enrollment. Employees would then have an additional choice in the options for group medical insurance, along with the associated benefits which come in a competitive insurance marketplace.