

Ferris ISD

District of Innovation

January 2022 through January 2027



The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration will make allowable governance decisions that best serve the needs of Ferris ISD students, staff, and community.

District of Innovation Update Committee

District Personnel

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Community/Parents

Parent Ambassador Group

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/remaining 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. Same applies to updates and renewals.

On December 19, 2016, the Ferris Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") passed 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 sought to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. The Board also approved the formation of a District of Innovation Committee comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District's stakeholders including teachers, parents, community members, and administrators. The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees considered and approved the original Plan at its meeting on March 21, 2017.

TERM

The initial term of the Plan was for five years, beginning in the 2017-2018 school year and ending with the 2021-2022 school year, 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.

RENEWAL

All sections of the Plan and exemptions shall be reviewed and the district must follow all steps in 19 TAC 102.1307 for adoption of a new local District of Innovation Plan.

GOAL OF INNOVATION PLAN

Ferris ISD has developed an update to our District of Innovation Plan as authorized by HB 1842 of the 84th Legislature, in order to exercise more effective local control in specific areas. The Board of Trustees reviewed and approved this plan on November 16, 2021.

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 the State Board of Education.

- Continuation and renewal from previous plan:
 - Uniform Start Date
 - Teacher Certification
- New portions being added to our plan:
 - Interdistrict Transfer
 - 90% Attendance Law
 - College Visits
 - DAEP/Expulsion
 - Removal of Individuals from District Property

SUMMARY

This plan is a renewal of our first and will include some additional exemptions. Our first plan was scheduled to end at the conclusion of this school year. Our new plan that follows will begin on January 1, 2022 and will continue until January 1, 2027. Our first plan will no longer be in effect during the spring semester of 2022.

Uniform School Start Date – Exemption from TEC §25.0811 & EB(LEGAL)

Currently

Statute dictates that students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August. Although this has been the rule for many years, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to start earlier. The majority of Texas districts applied for the waiver and sought to begin school earlier. However, past legislative action took away all waivers and mandated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Innovation

This flexibility of start date allows Ferris ISD to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of our students and our local community. This empowers us to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, and balance the amount of instructional time per semester. Specifically, flexibility in the school start date creates flexibility for school end date so students will be able to enroll in college courses that begin in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Removing the uniform start date provision will also allow Ferris ISD to start classes using a short week, easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school; while still being true to community needs for specific local and federal holidays. Additionally, this flexibility creates enhanced professional development opportunities to better meet the needs of our instructional staff.

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration will make governance decisions related to the school calendar that best serve the needs of Ferris ISD students, staff, and community.

Teacher Certification (General) – Exemption from TEC §21.003 & DK(LEGAL)

Currently

In the event that a district cannot secure a certified educator for a specific position, or a teacher accepts an assignment outside of their certification area, the district must submit a request for approval to the Texas Education Agency. The Commissioner of Education receives the request and, within 30 days, either grants or denies the request.

Innovation

Ferris ISD is committed to placing the best teacher available into each child's classroom. As one of our Core Beliefs states, "Given the right opportunity, every student can blossom." In order to provide this "right opportunity" and better serve Ferris ISD students, certification decisions will be made locally rather than by an absentee bureaucracy in Austin. The current state teacher certification requirements often inhibit our ability to hire quality instructors for hard-to-fill and/or high demand positions such as dual credit, CTE, STEM, and foreign language. In order to ensure that more students can access the educational benefit of these course offerings, Ferris ISD will establish its own local qualification and training requirement for certified teachers, professionals, and industry licensed experts to teach courses in lieu of the current requirements set forth in law. This proposed exemption request directly aligns with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the move away from "highly qualified" requirements. Ferris ISD will have the flexibility to employ community college instructors and university professors for dual credit courses; internal and external teaching applicants seeking assignment outside of their traditional certification area; and industry professionals to teach career and technical education courses based on their vocational expertise. The net result of this flexibility will be enriched applicant pools for hard-to-fill and/or high demand positions and, more importantly, enhanced learning opportunities for our students.

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration will further our calling to be a "District of Opportunity" by making teacher hiring decisions based on distinct qualifications that meet the specific needs of FERRIS ISD students and our community.

Interdistrict Transfer – Exemption from TEC §25.036 & FDA(LOCAL)

Currently

A district may choose to accept students as transfers, even if they are not entitled to admission in the district. This provision, however, has been interpreted to require a student transfer to be for a period of one school year, and to restrict a district's ability to revoke a transfer mid-year.

Innovation

Ferris ISD maintains a student transfer policy under Board Policy FDA (Local), which requires that all nonresident students who wish to transfer must file a transfer application each school year. In making decisions regarding applications for transfer, the policy currently permits for the consideration of the availability of space and instructional staff, the student's disciplinary history, the student's attendance records, and academic records (including, but not limited to, their current report card and state assessment data). In addition to considering all of these factors in approving or denying a transfer request, the District also seeks the flexibility to revoke a student's transfer status during the school year based on the student's failure to meet expectations for behavior, attendance, or academic efforts while in Ferris ISD. This mid-year revocation option will be reserved only for those students who consistently fail to meet District expectations for behavior, attendance or academic effort:

- Students that are placed in DAEP or are expelled for criminal behavior
- Students that are truant or do not meet the state's 90% attendance standard
- Students that are not being successful academically in class and/or state assessments (if applicable)

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration maintain that students who do not meet the District's expectations for behavior, attendance, or academic efforts interfere with our school district's ability to educate resident students as well as transfer students who come to Ferris ISD to receive quality instruction in a small group setting. Ferris ISD needs to be able to focus time and attention on developing creative and innovative instruction to prepare students for eventual success in the workplace and to prepare them for achievement on state assessments in the present. When students are disruptive, excessively absent, or do not make adequate efforts towards academic success, our teachers and administrators must take time correcting the behavior, catching those students up, and cannot adequately prepare the students who are present and ready to learn. For these cases, Ferris ISD seeks exemption from the interpretation of TEC §25.036 which prohibits a district from revoking a transfer during the school year.

90% Attendance Law – Exemption from TEC §25.092 & FEC(LOCAL)

Currently

State law currently requires students to attend class 90% of the school days on a district calendar to earn credit. The law requires districts to award class credit to students based on the time a student is present in a classroom for instruction, rather than solely on mastery of content and subject proficiency.

Innovation

Ferris ISD is a District of Opportunity and we are charged with meeting the needs of our 21st century learners. Flexibility from the requirement means the district will not have to penalize students who miss class due to enriching activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances that support Ferris ISD's goal to educate the whole child.

Note: Relief in the area of minimum attendance for class credit or final grade does not impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. It does not limit a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with TEC §28.214 nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with TEC §28.216. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages and alternatives to students of Ferris ISD by promoting active learning through innovative methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates. In addition, exemption from this requirement will allow Ferris ISD not to penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities or extenuating circumstances and will promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, and also encourage more students to participate in such activities.

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration realize that our students attain valuable and meaningful learning from extra-/co-curricular activities and experiences that currently count against the student's 90% attendance. Blended learning or other innovative approaches to learning will help students meet compulsory attendance requirements.

College Visits – Exemption from TEC §25.087

Currently

Texas Education Code states that students are excused for a limit of two days for college or university visits.

Innovation

Ferris ISD students would be allowed up to 4 excused absences their junior year for documented college/university/trade school/military visits and 4 more their senior year.

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration know that our students would benefit from more excused absences to visit colleges, universities, trade schools, or military institutions. The opportunities to explore their future exists and we should support those endeavors rather than hinder them.

DAEP/Expulsion – Exemption from TEC §37.007 & TEC §37.010(b)

Currently

A student placed in a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) who engages in documented serious misbehavior as outlined in Texas Education Code may be removed from class and expelled. The definition of “serious misbehavior” means:

- Deliberate violent behavior that poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others;
- Extortion, meaning the gaining of money or other property by force or threat;
- Conduct that constitutes coercion, as defined by Section 1.07, Penal Code; or
- Conduct that constitutes the offense of:
 - Public lewdness under Section 21.07, Penal Code;
 - Indecent exposure under Section 21.08, Penal Code;
 - Criminal mischief under Section 28.03, Penal Code;
 - Personal hazing under Section 37.152, Penal Code; or
 - Harassment of a student or district employee under Section 42.06(a)(1), Penal Code

Innovation

Ferris ISD understands that other factors could also affect the learning environment of the DAEP classroom. As such, DAEP students who persistently misbehave in their classroom by disrupting instruction and being detrimental to the educational environment may be expelled.

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration value ALL educational settings and it is not fair for one student to deter another student’s learning opportunities. Persistent and defiant misbehavior can impede the learning of others and will not be tolerated.

Removal of Individuals from District Property – Exemption from TEC §37.105, GKA(LEGAL), & GKA(LOCAL)

Currently

Texas Education Code requires Ferris ISD to maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from district property, including the name of the person to whom the warning was issued and the date of issuance. At the time a person is refused entry or removed from district property, Ferris ISD is also required to provide to the person written information explaining the appeal process.

Innovation

To better ensure the safety and security of students, staff, and other guests, Ferris ISD would allow designated staff members the authority to remove parents or visitors, whose behavior is deemed inappropriate, from district property without warning or written notice.

Rationale

The Ferris ISD Board of Trustees and Ferris ISD Administration believes the current law makes it unnecessarily complicated to remove a dangerous or disruptive individual in a timely manner.