

**ABILENE
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Local Innovation Plan
2022-2026**

To be considered by the AISD Board of Trustees

May 9, 2022

Amended August 28, 2023

PLACED ON WEBSITE March 30, 2022



Board of Trustees

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Cindy Earles, Vice President
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Dr. Ketta Garduno, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction
Dr. Joseph Waldron, Chief Financial Officer

Timeline of Events

BOARD CONSIDERATION	DATE	ACTIVITY
	January 6, 2022	Board Information The Abilene ISD Board of Trustees will be provided an overview of TEC Chapter 12A District of Innovation provisions.
	February 7, 2022	Resolution Adoption Abilene ISD Trustees will be asked to approve a resolution to initiate the process of amending our District of Innovation plan,
	February 7, 2022	Public Hearing Abilene ISD Trustees will hold a public hearing to solicit input on the District of Innovation amendment opportunity.
	February 7, 2022	Committee Appointment Abilene ISD Trustees will appoint a Local Innovation Committee to amend and develop a Local Innovation Plan.
PLAN DEVELOPMENT	February 8, 2022	Texas Education Agency Notification The Abilene ISD will notify the Texas Education Agency of its Board of Trustees intention to amend and develop an Abilene ISD Innovation Plan.
	3 meetings	Plan Development The Abilene ISD Innovation Committee will amend and develop the Abilene ISD Innovation Plan
PUBLIC INPUT/FEEDBACK	March 23, 2022	District Wide Consultation Committee Approval The Abilene ISD District Wide Consultation Committee will be asked to approve the proposed Abilene ISD Innovation Plan.
	March 24, 2022	District Innovation Plan Posted The proposed Abilene ISD Innovation Plan will be posted online for at least 30 days.
APPROVAL	May 9, 2022	Board of Trustees Approval The Abilene ISD Board of Trustees will be asked to approve the proposed Abilene ISD Innovation Plan.

INNOVATION PLANNING COMMITTEE

The LIFT	Zach Hageman	CTE Teacher
Abilene High	Lori Wallace	Foreign Language Teacher
Cooper High	Michael Goodman	Math Teacher
Holland	Holley Davila	Science Teacher
DAEP	Todd Nix	History Teacher
Clack	Amanda Hamilton	Math Teacher
Craig	Krystal Villarreal	English Teacher
Madison	Nicholas Edwards	CTE Teacher
Mann	Cheryl Macke	History Teacher
Alcorta	Kallie Pringle	3 rd grade Teacher
Austin	Kari McQueen	1 st grade Teacher
Bassetti	Summer Morgan	3 rd grade Teacher
Bonham	Kevin Wright	2 nd grade Teacher
Bowie	Bethany Connell	Art Teacher
Dyess	Alan Jones	Music Teacher
Martinez	Monica Hutchison	Music Teacher
Ortiz	Ivana Bailey	Bilingual Teacher
Purcell	Teresa Adkins	3 rd grade Teacher
Stafford	Mary Cathryn Timpner	5 th grade Teacher
Taylor	Teresa Graham	Music Teacher
Thomas	Kim Rowlands	Special Education Teacher
Ward	Amanda Rosser	1 st grade Teacher
Long	Danielle King	Head Start Teacher
Woodson	Jini Lee Wallace	Teacher

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 met with the Districtwide Consultation Committee on February 28, 2018. The DWCC conducted a public forum and accepted input on the proposed District of Innovation Plan. At the conclusion of the public forum, the DWCC approved the plan. The Abilene ISD Board of Trustees adopted the Plan at its meeting on April 9, 2018.

TERM

The term of the Plan is for four years, beginning May 9, 2022 and ending April 30, 2026, 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. To adequately supply programs with qualified candidates, the district requires the flexibility to hire community college and university professors, community professionals, and college graduates with Bachelor's Degrees, as well as current staff members who would qualify for placement in assignments outside of their traditional certification areas and to retain them. The district will establish local qualification and training requirements for professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of state requirements. These exemptions are of particular importance for hard-to-fill and high-demand courses.

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. Applicants without a Bachelor's degree will only be considered for Career and Technology Education positions.

When positions are posted and candidates are interviewed, certified teachers in their fields 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 Associate Superintendent for Human Resources. **Certification is required for core subjects. Teachers hired under this exemption must complete the Texas teacher certification process and present documentation of valid Texas certification to the Personnel Department within three years of hire.** Candidates with advanced degrees teaching in grades 7th-12th may be exempt from the certification requirement after review of credentials by the Associate Superintendent for Human Resources. Parents will be notified in writing if students are being taught by a teacher hired under this exemption.

Commented [1]: Remove "Certification is required for core subjects" Start the sentence with "Teachers hired under this exemption..."

Commented [2]: Remove "in grades 7-12."

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. Notwithstanding the foregoing, all certification requirements will remain in place for special education and primary ESL (bilingual) teachers.~~

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 37.006 ; T.E.C. Section 37.008; Student Discipline

Effective September 1, 2023, TEC §37.006 mandates the following:

(b) Subject to the requirements of Section 37.009(a), a student shall be removed from class and placed in a disciplinary alternative education program as provided by Section 37.008 if the student:

.. (2) commits the following on or within 300 feet of school property, as measured from any point on the school's real property boundary line, or while attending a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off of school property:

... (C) sells, gives, or delivers to another person or possesses or uses or is under the influence of:

... (C-1) possesses, uses, or is under the influence of, or sells, gives, or delivers to another person marihuana, as defined by Section 481.002, Health and Safety Code, or tetrahydrocannabinol, as defined by rule adopted under Section 481.003 of that code;

(C-2) possesses, uses, sells, gives, or delivers to another person an e-cigarette, as defined by Section 161.081, Health and Safety Code;

Current Status:

The above language allows no flexibility, other than the mandatory mitigating factors provided in TEC §37.001. Previously, districts could handle student misconduct regarding e-cigarettes and/or vape pens pursuant to their respective Codes of Conduct or Student Handbook. The statute essentially creates a zero-tolerance, automatic DAEP placement for students.

Benefit of Exemption:

- Relief from the statute will enable the District to create its own discipline matrix and provide students a "second chance" if found with e-cigarettes, vape pens, or other related paraphernalia.
- Relief from the statute will enable the District to offer students a lesser consequence for violating the above statute, such as detention, in-school suspension, or another appropriate consequence.

Local Innovation Procedures:

The Abilene ISD will develop its own discipline matrix as it relates to the above instances of misconduct.