



# **Board of Trustees Meeting**

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*December 4, 2025*



# Agenda Item

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*Alison Sims*



# District of Innovation

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*Alison Sims*



## What is a District of Innovation?

The District of Innovation concept, established by House Bill 1842 during the 84th Legislative Session, allows traditional school districts in Texas to gain flexibility similar to open-enrollment charter schools. This designation enhances local control and enables districts to identify and exempt specific Texas Education Code requirements that hinder their goals upon adopting the plan.



# District of Innovation Process

## Completed

Board adopted Resolution, held a public hearing, appointed District of Innovation Committee

District of Innovation Committee met to develop and modify plan

District-wide Consultation Committee votes on plan approval

**December 1**

Plan developed by committee is posted on Abilene ISD website for at least 30 days

**December 2**

Board votes on plan approval



**January 12**



# Exemption 1 - First Day of Instruction, Last Day of Instruction

Flexibility to establish a school start date prior to the fourth Monday in August and end before May 15.



## **Benefit:**

Flexibility to locally decide, on an annual basis, the most suitable start and end dates that cater to the needs of students, schools, and the community.





## **Exemption 2 - Certification Required, Presentation and Recording of Certificates, Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs**

To ensure high-quality teachers for non-core classes, Abilene ISD seeks flexibility to expand the candidate pool. This includes issuing local teaching permits to individuals deemed highly qualified, even if they lack a Texas teaching certificate, according to local guidelines. (Note - Abilene ISD will follow all state guidelines and requirement regarding teacher certification in foundation curriculum courses as outlined in HB 2.)

### **Benefit:**

This option allows Abilene ISD to issue a local teaching permit for experts in their fields who do not have teacher certification.





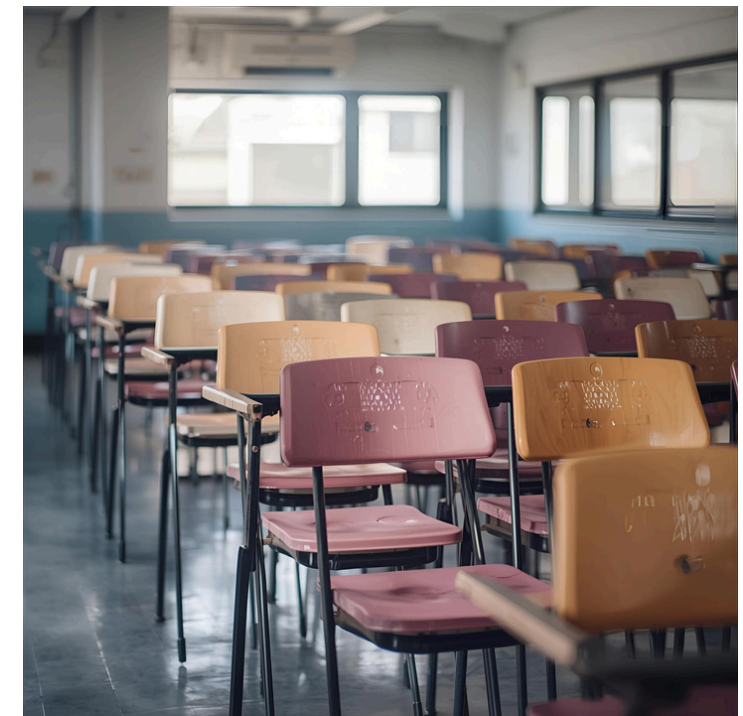


## Exemption 3 - Minimum Attendance for Class Credit

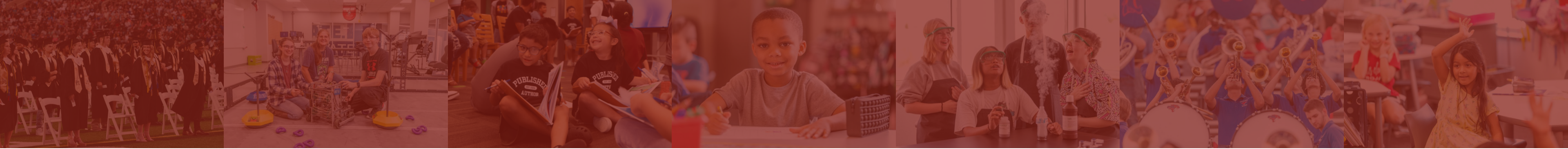
The Abilene Independent School District aims to enhance flexibility in assessing student attendance and academic performance. A team from Student Services and campus leadership will redefine attendance thresholds for credit loss and develop strategies to help students who master the material earn credit effectively.

### **Benefit:**

The exemption enables the district to award course credit based on content mastery rather than classroom time. This allows for innovative, flexible learning options that promote student engagement and facilitate learning outside traditional instruction methods.







## Exemption 4 - Probationary Contracts

Under Texas Education Code 21.102, teachers with at least five years of experience receive a one-year probationary contract. After three years, they must be offered a term contract or be terminated. Abilene ISD seeks the ability to extend probationary contracts for an additional year based on teacher performance and growth.

### **Benefit:**

Relief from TEC 21.102 enables Abilene ISD to extend probationary contract status at administration's discretion, benefitting the District's students and allowing a teacher another year to demonstrate proficiency.







## Exemption 5 - Inter-District Transfers

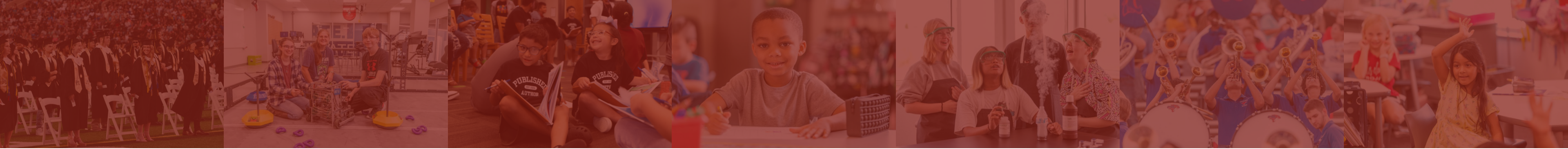
The relief from TEC 25.036 gives the district more flexibility with inter-district transfer students. The Superintendent could revoke a transfer at any time for disciplinary issues, such as suspensions or expulsion, and for failing to maintain good attendance.

### **Benefit:**

Relief from this requirement allows the district to revoke transfers due to attendance or behavioral issues, requiring those students to return to their home district.







## Exemption 6 - Staff Development

TEC §21.451 outlines staff development requirements for educators, but these may limit the District's ability to provide timely professional development that addresses emerging issues and student needs. Therefore, the District will exercise local discretion to identify needs and determine the content, duration, and frequency of professional development for all staff.



**Benefits:** The requirement for annual training impedes the professional development plans that are campus and district based. Professional development in Abilene ISD needs to be centered on the unique needs of the District and school community.





## Exemption 7 - Minimum Minutes of Instruction

The Texas Education Code (TEC) §25.081 requires a minimum seven-hour school day and 75,600 minutes of annual instruction. Waivers from this requirement can be requested by the Superintendent for severe weather or security concerns, as well as for staff development days related to district initiatives such as System of Great Schools before the academic year starts.



**Benefits:** Non-instructional days in the academic calendar aid teachers in planning based on student performance. The District aims to enhance scheduling flexibility with early release days to address student and District needs, including professional development, instructional changes due to unforeseen weather or disasters, collaboration, and parent-teacher conferences.





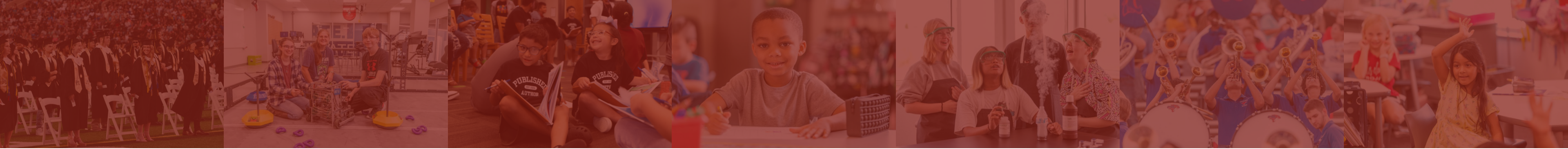
## Exemption 8 - Planning and Preparation Time

TEC 21.104 guarantees each classroom teacher a planning period. Under the current statute, teachers cannot voluntarily relinquish their planning period. Abilene ISD seeks the ability to allow teachers to voluntarily relinquish their 45-minute planning period for teaching activities.

**Benefits:** This will allow teachers the option to voluntarily forfeit their 45-minute planning period for either instructional activities—such as teaching an additional section or engaging in student intervention initiatives—or non-instructional activities, including attending an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meeting or participating in a Professional Learning Community (PLC).







## Exemption 9 - Teacher Contracts

Under TEC 21.002, individuals holding the titles of classroom teacher, librarian, nurse, or school counselor are mandated to receive a Chapter 21 Contract. Abilene Independent School District (ISD) seeks an exemption that would allow it to establish Letter Agreements with all non-certified teachers who are serving in instructional roles, instead of standard Chapter 21 contracts.



**Benefit:** Teachers who are not yet certified and are completing an alternative certification internship or are exempt by DOI exemption from TEC §21.003 remain in the process of acquiring the professional competencies required for full certification. This exemption reserves Chapter 21 contracts for fully certified teachers.





## Exemption 10 - Incentive for Early Retirement

TEC 22.007 prohibits the district from incentivizing teachers to retire early. Providing an incentive for staff members who have independently decided to retire from the district can encourage them to formally communicate their intentions within a designated timeframe. This, in turn, enables the district to proactively engage in recruitment efforts and secure qualified candidates to fill open positions in a timely manner.



**Benefit:** Amid a statewide shortage of teachers and educational staff, timely recruitment is crucial. Clear communication from current staff about retirement plans is essential for efficiently filling positions and maintaining instructional continuity.





## **Exemption 11 - Bank Depository Term, Bid, and Awards**

Texas Education Code 45.205 requires each school district to renew its depository contract every two years. School districts must use a uniform bid or proposal in the form prescribed by the State Board of Education. Abilene ISD seeks relief from this statute under the following guidelines: Once every two years, the District will evaluate the performance of the current depository bank. Should the district determine that the contracted services are provided effectively and the quality of service is acceptable, the district will seek to negotiate terms to extend the contract for one additional two-year period. At the end of each two-year term, the district and the depository bank may agree to extend the contract for an additional two-year period. The district must review the contract to ensure the best value and support for the district and obtain board approval for each extension and contract renewal.

This exemption would lessen the administrative and financial burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP). In addition, this would afford the district flexibility with respect to local banking relationships.

# Questions?