

# Itasca Independent School District

## District of Innovation Plan 2018-2023



### Introduction

Itasca ISD is utilizing HB 1842 of the 84th Legislative Session, in order to have more local control in certain areas. HB 1842 allows a traditional public school so have some of the same local flexibility that public charter schools have always been allowed. We feel that this is a great opportunity for our local district to tailor plans based on the needs of our students and community.

### Term

The term of this plan begins on January 23, 2018, after board approval and will last for a duration of five years unless terminated or amended by the Itasca ISD Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas Law, or terminated by the Commissioner of Education. The five year term will end on January 22, 2023.

### **District of Innovation Committee Members: (Proposed)**

Mark Parsons - Superintendent

Kristi Sargent - I.M.S. Principal

Holli Merkel - Asst. Prin. & Coun. PK-8

Grace Hennig - H.S. Counselor

Emily Craig - Elem. Teacher

Greg Gipson - M.S. Teacher

Mike Rice - M.S. Teacher

Charlotte Martin - H.S. Teacher

Gabby Bell - M.S. Paraprofessional

Joe Marek - Business Member

Bob Wilson - Community Member

Andrew Rogers- Parent

**Mae McBride - M.S. Teacher**

(\***RED** - New Members)

Allison Middleton - I.H.S. Principal

Amy Reyna -I.E.S. Principal

Lisa Von Borstel - Special Programs

Toni Rutherford - Elem. Sp. Ed. Teacher

Chastity Benson - Elem. Teacher

Kelly Tinklenberg - M.S. Teacher

Cassi Stapp - H.S. Teacher

Rebecca Villarreal - Elem. Paraprofessional

Gabrielle Massey - H.S. Paraprofessional

Isaie Coronado - Business Member

Michael Sweet- Parent

**Jamie Rodriguez - Elem. teacher**

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## **Initial Planning Meeting**

Briefing on the possibilities and benefits of District of Innovation  
with District Educational Advisory Committee (DEAC)  
November 15, 2017

## **Plan Proposal**

Propose plan to the school board/board makes a resolution to pursue/hold a public meeting for  
discussion/board approves the District of Innovation (D.O.I.) committee members.  
December 11, 2017

## **D.O.I. Committee Develops Plan**

December 12-14, 2017

## **Proposed Plan Posted on District Website/ School Board Notifies the Texas Education Commissioner**

December 15, 2017

## **Final Approval**

D.O.I. committee holds a public hearing and votes on proposed plan - 6:00pm  
School Board votes on plan - 7:00pm  
January 22, 2018

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## District of Innovation Plan

### **1. School Start Date**

Exemption from: TEC §25.0811

Related Board Policies: EB LEGAL

#### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. The current process allows little flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. Several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

#### **Innovation Strategies**

a. Relief from the statute will allow IISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.

b. Alignment of the district calendar with local universities, local districts with shared services arrangements, etc. will be possible.

c. Provide for increased local control of the instructional calendar in order to be responsive to community needs.

### **2. Teacher Certification**

Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.057

Relevant Board Policies: DBA LEGAL/LOCAL; DK LEGAL/LOCAL

#### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

TEC 21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency.

In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of their certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board for Educator

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Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.

TEC 21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the District from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC 21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days.

## **Innovation Strategies**

a. The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

b. The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.

c. An individual with experience in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.

d. Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, and may be subject to increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.

e. Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

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f. The superintendent will notify the board annually of the districts exercise of this flexibility.

### **3. Probationary Contracts**

Exemption from: TEC 21.102(b)

Relevant Board Policies: DCA LEGAL

#### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

For experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years. A one year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior to District receipt of state assessment results.

#### **Innovation Strategies**

For experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years. All other teachers hired in the District may remain on probationary status for three years, and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC 21.102(c).

### **4. Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator**

Exemption from: Texas Education Code 37.0012

Relevant Board Policies: FO LEGAL/LOCAL

#### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

Senate Bill 107 amended the Texas Education Code by adding Section 37.0012, which requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A. Placing all discipline decisions on one person is counterproductive to building capacity for self-motivated behavior changes, and places a staffing burden on small school districts.

#### **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. IISD seeks exemption from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. IISD's approach to discipline is becoming more collaborative, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration in regard to student discipline, as outlined in the IISD Student Code of Conduct, and will

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provide campus administrators with flexibility when implementing the standards of conduct expected by the IISD board of trustees and community at large.

## **5. Teacher Contract Days**

Exemption from: Texas Education Code 21.401

Relevant Board Policies: DCB LEGAL/LOCAL

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

Texas Education Code § 21.401 currently requires a contract between the District and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. This inhibits the local districts ability to build a calendar that provides the greatest flexibility to meet the LEA's staff development and planning needs.

### **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. IISD teacher contract days will be based on the yearly needs of the student calendar, professional development goals and needs, and learning objectives of IISD students.
- b. Flexibility provided by this plan will allow teacher contract days to be a range from, no less than 182 days, and no more than 187 days, in any given staff calendar year. This stems from an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days.
- c. The District Educational Advisory Committee will be provided with calendar options annually that indicate the required number of staff days to provide input and feedback.
- d. The Board of Trustees will be notified annually of the number of staff days in the calendar before taking action on the school calendar.
- e. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days less than 187 days.
- f. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days up to 187, but in a previous year the expectation was for less days. For example, year one of this plan a teacher works 186 days and in year three the calendar changes to 187 days.

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## 6. Local School Health Advisory Council and Health Education Instruction

Exemption from: Texas Education Code 28.004

Relevant Board Policies:

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan**

Sec. 28.004 (d) d-1 of this code requires the SHAC to meet four times annually. In a small district, the same staff members are required to sit on several different committees thus limiting their ability to effectively serve on those that meet at the same time, or require several meetings throughout the year. Additionally, the members of the SHAC will have a much more intimate relationship with the needs and goals of this committee due to the small number of students it serves, thus not requiring four meetings throughout the year to update its plan and vision.

### **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. The District takes exemption from the requirement to hold a minimum of 4 meetings per year under Sec. 28.004(d-1) The IISD committee shall meet at least once each year, with a goal of once a semester. Rationale: As a small district committee members are intimately aware of the needs of the District's students and are often able to review and revise the District's plan in a single meeting. This should be a matter for the local board of trustees and the committee members to determine how often they need to meet to meet the district's needs.

## 7. Teacher and Administrator Appraisals

Exemption from: Texas Education Code Sections 21.352, 21.354, 21.3541

Relevant Board Policies:

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:**

The IISD's goal of developing exceptional staff requires building capacity towards personalize learning for students through an engaging, innovative learning environment including project-based, blended learning and competency based learning. This goal along with the implementation of the new state T-TESS and T-PESS evaluations require additional time allocated towards a support model surrounded by goal setting, observation and feedback through coaching and professional development. A comprehensive professional development plan that is personalized for staff requires flexibility in the evaluation process mandated by the TEC in the elements and timeline of the evaluation process. These goals have been bound by the laws governing educator appraisals set forth in Texas Education Code Sections 21.352, 21.354, 21.3541 to the extent these laws require that state standardized test scores be used as one of the evaluation measures for teachers and administrators.

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## **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. In order to promote professional development that focuses on individual growth, the District needs to maintain local flexibility to build a system of evaluating its employees that includes goal setting, observations, and collaborative practices, which may encompass a variety of measurements and strategies available such as T-TESS, T-PASS, or a locally developed instrument.
- b. The board of trustees will approve annually the teacher and administrator appraisal method and calendar.

**AMENDED JUNE 2020**

## **8. Preclusion From Providing Alternative Uniform Group Program Coverage Once the Program of Coverages Under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code is Implemented.**

Exemption from: Texas Education Code Sections 22.004(i)

Relevant Board Policies: CRD LEGAL/LOCAL

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:**

TEC §22.004(i) Group Health Benefits for School Employees 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 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 district employees. This provision also prohibits the district from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees at a lower cost. This provision does not give the district the flexibility needed to acquire benefits packages that would potentially be more attractive to prospective employees.

*On April 8, 2020 the Itasca ISD District Executive Advisory Committee unanimously voted 13 to 0 to recommend an alternative group health care program to the Itasca ISD Board of Trustees.*

### **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. Increase the local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs.



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AMENDED MARCH 2021

## 9. School District Depositories Contract

Exemption from: Texas Education Code Subchapter G 45.206

Relevant Board Policies: BDAE LEGAL/LOCAL

### **Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:**

- A) Except as provided by Subsection (b), the depository bank when selected shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified.
- B) A school district and the district's depository bank may agree to extend a depository contract for three additional two-year-terms. An extension under this subsection is not subjected to the requirements of Section 45.206.
- C) The contract term and any extension must coincide with the school district's fiscal year.

*On March 3, 2021 the Itasca ISD District of Innovation Committee unanimously voted 16 to 0 to recommend an exemption for bank depository contracts to the Itasca IISD Board of Trustee.*

### **Innovation Strategies:**

- a. By gaining this exemption from these statutes, Itasca ISD would be able to allow the district's existing bank contract to be extended beyond the total eight year allowable contract term if the district determines contract pricing remains competitive and there is no operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out to bid.
- b. This exemption would lessen the administrative burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP) when there are no other banking institutions within the district boundaries available to bid on the district's business. In addition, this would further mitigate any impact to employees that would have to alter their direct deposit instructions and afford district flexibility with respect to local banking relationships.