

Meridian ISD

District of Innovation Plan

Introduction

House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of their unique student populations, in order to prepare them for success and lifelong learning. As a District of Innovation, Meridian ISD wishes to implement an Innovation Plan with increased flexibility and freedom necessary to personalize learning experiences. This plan is specific to the exemptions as outlined. The district intends to follow the Texas Education Code in all other areas. If at some point it is decided that changes or additional innovations should be considered, as per the Districts of Innovation process, the district will reconvene the District of Innovation Planning committee to explore the request.

Term

Meridian ISD's Innovation Plan will begin after approval by MISD school board (February 2020 board meeting) and conclude in February 2025, unless the plan is terminated or amended by the Meridian ISD Board in accordance with HB1842. To ensure success of Meridian ISD students, the committee is committed to constantly monitoring and making necessary amendments to be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval.

District Innovation Committee, appointed by MISD board of trustees, Dec, 16, 2019

1. Colby Blackwell, Assistant Principal
2. Jena Bridgefarmer, Parent
3. Christi Coverdale, MHS teacher
4. Wendy Cummings, MES teacher
5. Kim Edwards, Superintendent
6. Johnny Hauerland, Community
7. Kyle Hood, Parent
8. Kristi Kinney, MHS Principal
9. Pam Knowles, Parent
10. Kim Koonsman, MES teacher
11. Kelley Lauderdale, MHS teacher
12. Jaime Leinhauser, MES Principal
13. Leisha Martin, MES teacher
14. Alicia Reed, MHS teacher
15. Nansy Reiss, MES teacher
16. Sharla Rowland, Parent
17. Jeff White, Parent
18. LeAnn Wilkins, MHS teacher

District of Innovation Timeline

- November 18, 2019 *Board discusses and approves a resolution to explore the opportunity to become a District of Innovation.
- December 16, 2019 *Board holds a public hearing to consider developing an innovation plan (30 days to vote to proceed)
*Board appoints the District of Innovation Committee.
- December 18, 2019 *District of Innovation Committee meets to develop local innovation plan
- January 8, 2020 *District of Innovation Committee meets to develop local innovation plan.
- January 16, 2020 *DOI Committee considers the final version of the proposed plan and holds public meeting, passes plan by majority vote
- January 23, 2020 *Board votes to pursue DOI
*District of Innovation Plan posted to district website. (Must be on website for 30 days)
- January 29, 2020 *Notice of intent to Vote and Plan sent to Commissioner
- February 17, 2020 *District of Innovation plan presented to Meridian ISD staff.
- February 25, 2020 School board approved final DOI plan by 2/3 vote.
- February 27, 2020 *District notifies commissioner of approval of the plan along with a list of approved TEC exemptions by completing TEA's form
*Meridian ISD is a District of Innovation effective immediately.
*District sends plan to the Agency within 15 days of adoption.
*District posts and maintains plan online in prominent location.

Innovations

1. Teacher Certification

(TEC 21.003); Policies DCA, DCB, DK

Currently

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.

Proposed Plan

- In order to best serve Meridian ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally.
- The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high demand dual credit, and career and technical/STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics) courses. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training of professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law.
- This exemption directly supports the move from “highly qualified” requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, the District will have the flexibility to hire community college instructors, university professors, or internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area.
- In addition, this exemption will afford the District the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades or vocations to teach the crafts of those trades or vocations (such as welding, fine arts, health sciences, law, etc.) if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses.
- The superintendent will submit this action to the Board of Trustees for Board approval prior to the individual beginning any employment. Local teaching certificates will be for one year. Teachers employed by local certification will only be offered a probationary contract.
- Special education and bilingual/ESL teachers must continue to be SBEC certified.

2. School Calendar

(EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.0811) (TEC 25.0811) (TEC 25.0812); Policy EB

Currently

Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday in August. Texas Education Code Section 25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15.

Proposed Plan

- The flexibility of start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and local community.
- Students will begin no earlier than the 2nd Monday of August.
- Will allow for the elimination of imbalanced grading periods and semester schedules.
- Will allow for more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff.
- Enables students to enroll in college classes in early June.

3. College Visits

Currently

(Ed. Code 25.087 (b-2)) EXCUSED ABSENCES. (b-2) A school district may excuse a student from attending school to visit an institution of higher education accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization during the student's junior and senior years of high school for the purpose of determining the student's interest in attending the institution of higher education, provided that: (1)the district may not excuse for this purpose more than two days during the student's junior year and two days during the student's senior year; and (2)The district adopts: (A) a policy to determine when an absence will be excused for this purpose; and (B) a procedure to verify the student's visit at the institution of higher education

Proposed plan

- Currently students are only allowed to have two excused school days to visit college or universities as college days. In some cases, where students are visiting colleges out of state or traveling long distances, students need more than the two days that are currently allowed to safely visit a college they are interested in attending or doing comparative visits to multiple colleges.
- Meridian ISD will be exempt from the two-day excused absence limit for students visiting institutions of higher education. Junior students would continue to be allowed 1 college visit per semester but senior students would be allowed up to 2 college visits per semester.

4. Transfer Students

Currently

Inter-district Transfers Exemption from TEC §25.036-Meridian ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, the student's disciplinary records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules, and regulations of the District. TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one-year commitment by the District.

Proposed Plan

- The District is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion.
- In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, Meridian ISD seeks exemption from the one-year transfer commitment.
- Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfers may have such transfer statute revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned disciplinary consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion.
- In addition, students not meeting the state's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

5. Teacher Probationary Contracts

(DCA Legal) TEC 21.102(b)

Currently

A probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district.

Proposed Plan

- This time period is not sufficient to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Relief from this law would allow time to sufficiently determine a staff member's effectiveness.
- Meridian ISD would like to have the ability to renew the probationary contract one additional year, for a maximum of two school years, for all teachers that are new to the district but who have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of eight years preceding employment by the District.

6. Student Discipline while in DAEP

(Ed. Code 37.007c) (Ed. Code 37.010b)

Currently

The Texas Education Code states that a student placed in a District Alternative Educational Program (DAEP) who engages in documented serious misbehavior while in DAEP despite documented behavioral interventions may be removed from class and expelled. These "serious misbehaviors" include violent behavior, extortion, coercion (according to Penal Code 1.07), public lewdness, indecent exposure, criminal mischief, personal hazing, and harassment.

Proposed

- This makes no provision for students who are assigned to DAEP but continue to disrupt the learning environment and/or fail to follow the rules to be expelled if the behavior continues despite documented interventions.
- In addition to serious misbehavior, a student placed in a DAEP that engages in documented persistent misbehavior while in DAEP, despite documented behavioral interventions, may be removed from class and expelled.

7. Unauthorized Persons: Refusal of Entry, Ejection, Identification

(Ed. Code 37.105)

Currently

A district must maintain a record of each verbal warning issued under Section 37.105 (a)(2)(A), 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 to or ejected from a school district's property under Section 37.105, the district must provide the person a written information explaining how to appeal. Each school board must adopt a policy that uses the district's existing grievance process to permit a person ejected or denied entry to address the Board of Trustees in person within 90 days of the commencement of the appeal, unless the appeal is granted sooner.

Proposed

- Texas Education Code section 37.105 includes a process for ejecting or denying entry to a visitor who presents a substantial risk of harm or behaves in a manner inappropriate for the school setting.
- To better ensure the safety and security of students and staff in Meridian ISD, we propose that the District not be required to maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from district property/facilities.
- The District currently provides written notice to persons who are subject to potential refusal for entry or for removal from district property/facilities. Should an exemption from TEC §37.105 be granted, the District shall continue to provide written notice to persons who are subject to potential refusal for entry or for removal from district property/facilities in situations where the administrator on site feels it is reasonable and safe to do so.
- Campus and District administrators, as well as school resource officers and District police officers if applicable, may refuse to allow a person to enter or may eject a person from property under the District's control in accordance with law.
- An appeal notice must be filed with the Superintendent, in writing, and submitted to the Administration Office for review within 10 business days.