



# **Mineola ISD**

## **District of Innovation Plan**

### **June 2021**

#### **I. Mineola ISD as a District of Innovation**

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. The original approved District of Innovation Plan by Mineola ISD was placed into effect in the 2016-2017 school year and was approved for a term of five years, to expire at the end of the 2021 school year. Our local school board has presented a letter of intent to revise and renew our District of Innovation Plan to the Commissioner of Education on April 23, 2021, and a committee was formed to prepare the updated plan for renewal before the start of the 2021-2022 school year. The final draft of the updated plan was voted upon and approved by a majority vote.

On March 21, 2016, the Board held a public meeting and made the determination to pursue the District of Innovation designation. At that time, the Board decided to extend the existing Strategic Planning Committee as the appointed Local Innovation Committee consisting of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District's various stakeholders, including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators. The Strategic Planning Committee meetings began in January of 2016 and extended into the Strategic Planning/Innovation Committee in April. The original draft Local Innovation Plan ("Plan") was developed from April through June (see Timeline in Section V). The Committee sought and considered input for the Plan through the community values survey, a student survey of all 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders, and input from staff and administrators. Based on direction provided by the Board and input from various District stakeholders, the Committee proposed the original Plan.

Subsequently, as the five year timeline expired on the original District Improvement Plan, the Mineola ISD Board of Trustees authorized the Superintendent to submit a Letter of Intent to renew our Plan on April 26, 2021. A district-level committee was formed and met on May 5, 2021 to review and revise the plan, and ultimately voted unanimously to approve the final version of the proposed plan. Following approval by the district-level committee, the Board of Trustees voted to approve and adopt the plan in the public meeting on June 21, 2021.

#### **II. Comprehensive Educational Program**

The Mineola ISD District of Innovation Plan is founded and aligned to the Board's Mission, Values, Strategic Objectives and Goals for the District.

**A. Mission:** The following adopted Mission Statement is used as the foundation for District:

*Mineola Independent School District, in partnership with the community, is dedicated to developing lifelong learners and leaders prepared to contribute to a diverse and dynamic world.*

**B. Values:** The operation of the District as well as organizational behavior are based upon the core values of:

***Respect, Empathy, Resilience, Integrity, Ambition***

**C. Strategic Objectives:** The District Strategic Plan includes the three following objectives:

- Personalized Opportunities:
  - All students will have the opportunity to develop their individual interests and abilities in a safe and innovative environment.
- Exceptional Staff and Facilities:
  - All students will benefit by attracting and retaining excellent staff.
- Strong Support Network:
  - All students will grow through strong community partnerships.

**D. Strategies:** Establishing a culture of innovation requires flexibility and additional local control in order to achieve our District Mission and Strategic Plan. The critical elements include:

- Provide innovative curriculum and schedules within quality facilities
- Promote high quality learning through innovative instruction
- Promote intensive support for students and staff
- Promote innovative partnerships with the community
- Provide innovative ideas for parental involvement
- Provide innovative programs by modifying the school day and year

The District needs local flexibility for the elements presented above to improve student outcomes on college and career readiness, high quality learning, character development, social and emotional learning, leadership skills, and workforce ready skills; to expand quality engagement and enrichment opportunities for families; to enhance professional development opportunities for staff to build leadership capacity and collaborate on support systems that will benefit students; and to strengthen community partnerships.

By providing an innovative curriculum and schedules for students, the District will promote a more authentic and engaging learning environment that is challenging and supports problem solving, creative and critical thinking, and

effective communication. This innovative environment will include an emphasis on Fine Arts and Career and Technology programs as well as support for all extra-curricular and academic programs. Designing and maintaining quality facilities that support innovative instructional practice is also a priority. The promotion of rigorous learning through innovative instructional methods develops the leadership capacity for students to become productive, contributing members of the community with social and emotional skills. Promoting intensive support for students and staff employs a growth mindset utilizing goal setting and continuous improvement through building strong support systems. Promoting partnerships with the community will increase community involvement and unify business, civic organizations, families, and schools towards support and services for the District. Providing ideas for parental involvement will strengthen the relationship of home and campuses to ensure student success. Providing innovative programs by modifying the school day and year will enable the District to provide more time for professional development for staff and parents along with more time for enrichment opportunities for students and support.

### **III. Texas Education Code exemptions required for the fulfillment of the goals upon adoption by the District of Innovation Plan**

Under HB 1842, districts may identify certain requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) that “inhibit the goals of the plan from which the district should be exempted on adoption of the plan”. Given the comprehensive education program outlined in this plan and the necessity for local control in decision making of the plan elements, Mineola ISD seeks exemption for all allowable TEC requirements under the HB 1842 statute. The following exemptions are highlighted as examples, but not all inclusive.

#### **A. Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Credit**

In order to provide engaging and challenging learning to all students, the District needs relief from Texas Education Code Section 25.092, which inhibits the goals of the Plan by not allowing the District to issue class credit or a final grade for a class if a student is not in attendance an arbitrary percentage of the time that a class is offered. In other words, the law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on content mastery. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the District by promoting active learning through innovation in the 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.

One of the overarching goals in the Strategic Plan within the focus area of providing engaging and challenging learning is to implement tools, resources, and training that support high quality learning for both students and teachers. Virtual learning is one example where exemption from Section 25.092 will likely foster greater innovation to promote active learning and improve student outcomes. In addition, exemption from this requirement will allow the

District not to penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities and will promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities.

Relief from Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

## **B. First Day of Instruction**

The Mineola ISD Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of an innovative learning environment, college and career readiness, along with leadership and social and emotional development. Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 inhibits these goals by prohibiting the District from beginning instruction before the fourth Monday in August. Flexibility to begin instruction earlier in the calendar year will enable the District to improve active learning by balancing the amount of instructional time in the semesters, which will allow teachers to better pace and deliver instruction before and after the winter break. In addition, by having the flexibility to start and end the school year earlier, students will be able to enroll in college courses that start in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Finally, starting the school year earlier for students transitioning from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school will promote social and emotional learning by giving those students additional time and support to enable them to adjust socially and emotionally to their new campus environments.

## **C. School Year Calendar**

The flexibility to utilize the 75,600-minute yearly requirement without restriction on the number of early release days will enhance the ability to increase intervention support for those students in need of additional learning time as well as provide support to build capacity in developing an exceptional staff through job-embedded professional development opportunities. The exemptions could include requirements pursuant to Texas Education Code Sections 25.081, 25.083

As designated in the Mineola Strategic Plan, time to collaborate within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in addition to the need for mentoring support is a priority to provide innovative curriculum, instructional methods, and personalization for each student. Staff development days will be strategically placed to maximize the professional development support for staff in planning for these interventions and student support.

#### **D. Teacher Certification for Dual Credit, Career and Technical Education Instructors, and High School Courses**

Within the focus area of providing engaging and challenging learning, the Strategic Plan sets forth specific goals under the initiative to improve college and career readiness options. Three of these goals -development of post high school plans, improvement of workforce skills, and expansion of dual credit programs- are inhibited by Texas Education Code Sections 21.003, 21.053, 21.044 and 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 231 to the extent these laws limit the District's ability to hire teachers in hard-to-fill, high demand dual credit and career and technical/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics) courses when high quality certified teachers are not available. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such dual credit and career and technical/STEAM course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law.

By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements for dual credit, career and technical/STEAM, and hard to fill content teachers, the District will have the flexibility to hire credentialed community college instructors or university professors in specific content areas in order to afford more students the opportunity to take dual credit courses if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses. In addition, this exemption will afford the District the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades and vocations to teach the crafts of those trades and vocations (such as welding, HVAC, auto mechanics, fine arts, etc.) in career and technical/STEAM courses if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses. This will also apply to content area teachers for hard-to-fill positions.

#### **E. Teacher and Administrator Appraisals**

The Mineola ISD Strategic Plan's element of developing exceptional staff requires building capacity towards high quality learning for students through engaging, innovative learning, including project-based and competency based learning. This goal along with the implementation of the new state T-TESS and T-PESS evaluations and TIA 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 21.351, 21.352, 21.354, 21.3541 and 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 150 to the extent these laws require that state standardized test scores be used as one of the evaluation measures for teachers and administrators. We would also seek flexibility in the frequency of teacher evaluations. Under TEC 21.352 teachers are required to be evaluated annually. We would request to evaluate teachers who earn an average of "proficient" on their annual evaluation to be evaluated only once every three years.

In order to promote professional development that focuses on individual growth, the District needs to maintain local flexibility to build a practice of using a variety and frequency of measurements, including goal setting, observations, and student growth progress toward learning objectives. These measures can be included in evaluations with teacher and administrator appraisals.

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

Embedded in multiple strategies within the Mineola ISD Strategic Plan is to help students become socially and emotionally intelligent individuals. Social and emotional learning is inhibited by Texas Education Code Section 37.0012, which constrains campus governance by requiring one person at each campus to be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator. This requirement inhibits social and emotional learning because it restricts the District's ability to promote a more collaborative discipline program in which the schools, along with the community, provide social and emotional supports to students. By obtaining exemption from Section 37.0012, the District will be better able to focus on establishing classroom protocols and utilizing school culture to foster the development of individual responsibility, positive behavioral interventions and supports while encouraging the social and emotional development of each student and his or her responsibility toward the community.

#### **G. Teacher Probationary Contracts**

The current legal policy under the Texas Education Code Section 21.102 (b) allows experienced teachers new to the district to have a probationary period that 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. 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. Exemption from this requirement will allow ample time for campus administrators to determine the effectiveness of employees who have been a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years thus providing a more stable and effective learning environment for students. Mineola ISD would like to have the ability to renew the probationary contract two additional school years, for a maximum of three school years, for all teachers who are new to the district who have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the District.

#### **H. Inter-District Transfer Students**

Mineola ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer into the district file a transfer application each school year. Currently, under Texas Education Code Section 25.036, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, and is interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of

space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules, and regulations of the district. The district is seeking exemption from the one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants by allowing the district to rescind a transfer at any time during the school year. This will also require rewording of FDA Local in our Board Policy.

#### **I. Local School Health Advisory Council**

Under the guidelines of Texas Education Code 28.004 a district is required to convene School Health Advisory Committee meetings four times annually. In a small district such as Mineola ISD, many of the same staff members and community members are asked to sit on multiple committees thus limiting their ability to effectively serve on those that meet at the same time, or require several meetings throughout the year. 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 in order to ensure that student health needs are met. By gaining exemption from this requirement, the Mineola ISD SHAC shall meet at least once per year and only schedule additional meetings as the need arises.

#### **IV. Terms of District of Innovation Plan**

The term of the renewed District of Innovation Plan is for five years, beginning at the start of the 2021-2022 school year and ending at the end of the 2025-2026 school year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with statute. The Committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications to the Plan.

Activation of the exemptions from the TEC will most likely require the revision and/or addition of Mineola ISD local policies. Any exemptions from TEC or amendments to the District of Innovation Plan will be reflected in Policy AF (LOCAL) – INNOVATION DISTRICTS following board action pursuant to law.

#### **V. Strategic Planning / Innovation Process Timeline (Original Plan)**

September 18, 2015 Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting  
October 28, 2015 Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting  
December 3, 2015 Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting  
January 13, 2016 Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting  
January 15, 2016 Strategic Planning Committee established  
January 29, 2016 Strategic Planning Committee meeting  
February 5, 2016 Strategic Planning Committee meeting  
February 8, 2016 Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting  
February 22, 2016 Design Teams established (5 teams)  
"What We Value" Community Survey released

February 29, 2016 Design Team meetings  
March 14, 2016 Design Team meetings  
March 17, 2016 Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting  
March 21, 2016 Design Team meetings  
March 21, 2016 Public Hearing on District of Innovation  
School Board passed Resolution to pursue DOI  
Strategic Planning Committee set as DOI Committee  
March 24, 2016 Design Team meetings  
March 28, 2016 Design Team meetings  
April 1, 2016 Strategic Planning / DOI Committee meeting April 14, 2016  
Superintendent Learning and Listening Tour public meeting May 22, 2016 Student  
Survey (6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades) released May 31, 2016 Strategic Planning / DOI  
Committee meeting June 9, 2016 Strategic Planning / DOI Committee meeting  
June 20, 2016 School Board Meeting to Review District of Innovation Plan July 1,  
2016 Draft Innovation Plan released for 30-day public comment August 11, 2016  
District Advisory Council approval of District of Innovation Plan  
August 15, 2016 School Board Meeting approval of District of Innovation Plan

#### **VI. Strategic Planning Timeline (Revised For Plan Renewal)**

April 26, 2021 District Letter of Intent emailed to Commissioner Morath  
April 27, 2021 District Leadership Team review and planning for DOI  
May 4, 2021 Board of Trustees voted to renew DOI for five years  
May 5, 2021 District Planning Committee meeting to review and revise plan  
June 21, 2021 Board of Trustees votes to adopt and submit revised plan for  
renewal  
June 25, 2021 Superintendent notified the Commissioner of the approval of the  
plan along with list of approved TEC exemptions



**Mineola Independent School District  
Strategic Planning Committee Members**

Kevin Clevenger - Teacher  
Patty Hawkins - Teacher  
Annette Pecorino - Teacher  
Kelly VanDover - Teacher  
Alyson Overall - Teacher  
Sheila Cash - Teacher  
Syntha Pierce - Teacher  
Kara Ellerbee - Teacher  
Julie Conner - Teacher  
Tammy Turner - Teacher  
Sylvia Harris - Teacher  
Samantha Bowker - Teacher  
Janae Holland - High School Parent  
Robin Averett - Business Representative  
Nohemi Vega - Primary Parent  
Kendall Banks - Middle School Parent  
Nicole Ballard - Elementary Parent  
Cody Castleberry - Chief of Police  
Joseph Armstrong - Technology Coordinator  
Linda Smith - Elementary Parent  
Vanessa Blackwell - High School Parent  
Michelle Fischer - High School Parent  
David Sauer - Assistant Superintendent  
William Bjork - Assistant Superintendent  
Mike Sorenson - Principal  
Kendall Gould - Principal  
Brittany Thompson - Principal  
Jole Ray - Principal  
Cody Mize - Superintendent

Approved by Mineola ISD School Board June 21, 2021