PANHANDLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Local Innovation Plan

2017-2022

Purpose

HB 1842 was passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in 2015, and permits eligible Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code (“TEC”). To become a District of Innovation and to access the flexibilities provided by such a designation, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in TEC Chapter 12A.

Districts of Innovation may exempt themselves from a number of state statutes in an effort to provide themselves with the following:

- Greater local control over the educational and instructional model for students;
- Increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

Term

The term of the plan is for five (5) years, beginning on August 22, 2017 and ending July 31, 2022, unless terminated, renewed, or amended by the Panhandle Independent School District (“PISD” or the “District”) Board of Trustees (the “Board”) in accordance with law. If, within the term of this plan, the District determines that additional innovations should be considered, the Board will use the Panhandle Improvement Group (“PIG”) (the District-level Advisory Committee) to consider and propose additional innovations in the form of amendments to the plan. Amendments adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

PISD District of Innovation Timeline

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, May 23, 2017</td>
<td>Board adopts Resolution initiating the process for PISD to become District of Innovation and appoints innovation committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, May 24, 2017</td>
<td>Submitted letter of intent to commissioner</td>
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<td>Wednesday, May 31, 2017</td>
<td>PISD receives letter back from commissioner’s office acknowledging PISD’s intent to go forward with DOI plan</td>
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<td>Monday, June 12, 2017</td>
<td>PIG holds public meeting and approves the Innovation Plan</td>
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Monday, June 26, 2017  Community wide public hearing
Monday, July 10, 2017  Innovation Plan posted on PISD website
Tuesday August 22, 2017  Board adopts Innovation Plan
Wednesday, August 23, 2017  Commissioner of Education notified of adoption of the Innovation Plan

**Panhandle Improvement Group**

Blair Brown Superintendent
John Strother, Federal Programs Director
Callie Land Parent
Kelly Haney Parent
Nichole Kuehler Parent
Maria Brinkley, Business Representative
Shawn Wink Business Representative
Marva Roselius Elementary Teacher
Kristi Cameron Elementary Teacher
Jana Kennedy Elementary Teacher
Debbie Jones Junior High Teacher
Jessica Cates Junior High Teacher
Dane Ashley High School Teacher
Chris McKeown High School Teacher
Maria Walker High School Teacher

**Exemptions**

I. Teacher Certification
II. School Start Date/Last Day of School
III. Student/Teacher Ratio and Class Size
IV. Teacher Contract Days of Service
V. Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers
VI. Bank Depository Contracts
EXEMPTIONS

By adopting this plan, PISD has exempted itself from the requirements of the TEC in the following areas:

1. **Teacher Certification** - (TEC § 21.003)

   *Board Policies Affected: (DK Legal) (DK Exhibit) (DBA Legal) (DBA Local)*

**Current Law**

TEC § 21.003 states that “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.”

In the event the District cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or where a teacher will teach a subject outside of his or her field of certification, the District must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency (“TEA”). TEA then approves or denies this request.

**Plan**

In order to better serve the students of PISD, decisions on certification will be made at the local level. This exemption will allow the District to establish local qualifications and training requirements for hiring teachers for hard to fill teaching positions. This exemption directly supports the move from “highly qualified” requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Decisions regarding certification will be made locally as follows:

- PISD is committed to hiring certified applicants; however, under this plan the District will have the flexibility to hire both external and internal applicants that do not have proper certification in the relevant subject area(s). This will enrich applicant pools in specific content areas if properly 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 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 principal may submit to the Superintendent a request to allow a teacher to teach a subject(s) outside of his or her field of certification, without seeking approval from TEA. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and provide written documentation of the credentials the teacher possesses, which qualify him or her to teach the relevant subject(s).

- An individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the Superintendent with all the individual’s credentials. In a situation where the Superintendent is authorized to make a final hiring decision, the Superintendent will approve the request if he or she feels that the individual could be an asset to students. The
Superintendent will then report this action to the Board prior to the individual beginning employment. Final hiring decisions will be made by either the Superintendent or the Board, as specified in Board Policy.

2. School Start Date/Last Day of School - (TEC § 25.0811) (TEC § 25.0812)

Board Policies Affected: (EB Legal) (EB Local)

Current Law

TEC § 25.0811 states that “a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.” TEC § 25.0812 states that “a school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15.” Waivers to alter the start date are no longer available. These changes occurred through the lobby of the tourism groups that argued the loss of business due to local control of school calendars.

Plan

Under the plan, student instruction will not begin before the second Monday of August. Additionally, the District will have the ability to schedule the last day of school before May 15. This will help the District meet local community needs and offer a more balanced calendar by providing the District with more local control of the start and end dates. Specifically, this innovation will permit PISD to:

- Balance six-weeks grading periods and semester schedules;
- Allow the first semester to end before holiday break;
- Align its calendar with the calendar of colleges, which the District uses for dual credit courses; and
- Create a more efficient calendar that aligns with Advanced Placement Exams and STAAR/EOC timelines

*Board Policies Affected: (BF Legal) (EEB Legal)*

**Current law**

TEC § 25.111 states that “each school district must employ a sufficient number of teachers certified under Subchapter B, Chapter 21, to maintain an average ratio of not less than one teacher for each 20 students in average daily attendance.” TEC § 25.112 states that “a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class.” When a class size will exceed this number, the District must request a waiver from this requirement from TEA. These waivers must be requested at the start of the school year as well as any time a child enrolls in an elementary school at a grade level where the ratio is already maintained according to staff projections from the previous year.

**Plan**

PISD will strive to both maintain an average student/teacher ratio of 20:1 and to not enroll more than 22 students in a K-4 class. However, under this plan, the District is no longer required to maintain an average 20:1 student/teacher ratio. Further, the District is no longer prohibited from enrolling more than 22 students in a K-4 class. Additionally, in the event a K-4 class size exceeds 22 students, the District will not be required to seek a class size waiver from TEA. By granting the District local control over student/teacher ratios and class sizes in K-4 classes, this innovation gives PISD the ability to staff campuses with the most effective teachers and prevents the District from being forced to hastily hire potentially less effective teachers just to maintain student/teacher ratios and class sizes in accordance with TEC §§ 25.111 and 25.112. Under this plan, the District will be able to take its time to select the most effective and highly qualified teachers available, since PISD will no longer be bound by the time constraints set forth in TEC § 25.112. The District’s vision is to have the time and latitude to hire the right teacher for its students and not just any teacher to fulfill a state mandate.

4. Teacher Contract Days of Service – (TEC § 21.401)

*Board Policies Affected: (DC Legal) (DC Local)*

**Current Law**

TEC § 21.401 defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract requiring 187 days of service.

**Plan**

Decisions regarding the number of days of service required for District teachers will be made locally. Teachers will be required to provide a minimum of 7 days of service beyond scheduled student instructional days. Staff development will include professional development and workdays for teachers. This innovation will provide the District with the following advantages:

- It may increase the daily rate on the professional salary scale (for teachers only);
• It should enhance teacher recruitment and retention; and
• It may improve teacher morale.

5. Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers - (TEC § 21.102(b))

Board Policies Affected: (DCA Legal)

Current Law

TEC § 21.102(b) provides as follows:

(b) 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.

Plan

To provide flexibility in the length of the probationary period for experienced teachers new to the District, this plan exempts the District from the statutory provision above that limits the probationary period to one year for persons who have been employed as teachers in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the District. This plan does not exempt the District from the other provisions of TEC § 21.102. This innovation will be implemented by the District as follows:

• The District, in its discretion, may extend the length of the probationary period to three years, instead of just one year, for experienced teachers (those who have taught for five of the last eight years) who are new to the District. This will allow the District sufficient time to adequately evaluate the teacher’s classroom performance and provide the teacher with sufficient time to acclimate to the District’s educational environment.
• This extension will not be mandatory, but may be utilized when deemed appropriate by the District.

6. Bank Depository Contracts - (TEC § 45.205)

Board Policies Affected: (BDAE Legal)

Current Law

TEC § 45.205(a) states that “the depository bank when selected shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified.” TEC § 45.205(b) states, “A school district and the district’s depository bank may agree to extend a depository contract for two additional two-year terms.”
Plan

This plan provides the District with local control of the length of its depository contracts, such that the District may designate the length of the initial term and any renewal terms for its depository contracts. This exemption allows the District to lengthen the term and any renewal terms of its depository contracts, if the District determines that it is in the best interest of PISD to do so.