

Memphis Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

August 29, 2016

District of Innovation Committee Members:

Bill Alexander	Chair – Federal Program Director
Jennifer Lindsey	Technology Director
Dick Hutcherson	High School Principal
Wes Hardin	Middle School Principal
Leigh Ann Hawthorne	Austin Elementary Principal
Victoria Davis	Travis Elementary Principal
Mark Lance	Parent
Debbie Cook	Community Member/Retired Educator
Carol Deaver	Community Member/Business Owner
Margaret Cope	Community Member
Audrie Maddox	Business Owner
Judy Stewart	Business Owner/Retired Educator
Jo Ella Pate	Community Member
Camilla Maddox	Community Member
Orvilla Evans	Community Member
Larry Wiginton	Community Member/Retired Educator
Jackie Owens	Community Member/Retired Educator

INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB) 1842 passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become a District of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Codes.

On June 20, 2016, the Memphis Independent School Districts' Board of Trustees ("Board") passed a Resolution to Adopt a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. On July 21, 2016, the board held a Public hearing and appointed a District of Innovation Committee representing various stakeholders across the district, including parents, campus administration, local business owners, and community members. The committee met on August 29, 2016, to discuss and draft this Local Innovation Plan. Based on direction provided by the Board and input from various district stakeholders, the Committee proposes this Plan of Innovation. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of the students and the community.

The District is not exempt from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements, and academic and financial accountability.

TERM

The term of the Plan will be in effect for the 2016-2017 school year through the 2020-2021 school year. This plan may be amended at any time by the committee with approval of the Memphis Independent School Districts' Board of Trustees ("Board")

INNOVATIONS

The District proposes flexibility in the following areas:

A. Teacher Certification (TEC 21.003)(DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT)

Currently

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 submit a request to the Texas Education Agency. TEA then approves or denies this request.

Proposed

In order to best serve Memphis ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally.

- a. The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach out of their certified field, and the teacher will have until April 1st, of the current school year to obtain the proper teaching certification. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which qualify this individual to teach this subject.
- b. This will allow more flexibility in our scheduling and more options for our students in class offerings.

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 (applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts & Mathematics) courses. 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 industry certified and/or trade professionals to teach specialized certification courses as well as internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area.

B. Uniform School Start Date (EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.0811)

Currently

Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August. For many years this was the rule: however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to start earlier. The vast majority of districts applied for the waiver and would begin the 3rd Monday, some even going as early as the 2nd Monday. Texas tourism groups lobbied to have this stopped because they believed it was hurting their tourism business. Therefore, several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Proposed

This 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. This empowers us to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, and balance the amount of instructional time per semester. In addition, by having the flexibility in the start and end of the school year, students will be able to enroll in college courses that start in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Removing the uniform start date could also let Memphis ISD start classes as a short week, easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school. This will also allow for more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff.

C. Class Size Ratio (EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.111) (ED> Code 25.112) (Ed. Code 25.113)

Currently

Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes are to be kept at a 22 student to 1 teacher ratio according to state law. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. Along with the waiver, it is required that a letter is sent home to each parent in the section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted. Many times soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of the district and we are below the 22:1 ratio.

Proposed

While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff, and the best teacher to student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. We do not believe it has a negative effect when a district adds only one or two more students. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influence the learning environment.

- a. Memphis ISD will attempt to keep all K-4th core classrooms to a 22:1 ratio. However, in the event the class size exceeds the ratio, the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees for approval.
- b. In the event a K-4th core classroom reaches 25:1, the campus will notify the parents of the students in the classroom and inform them of the situation.
- c. A TEA waiver will not be necessary when a K-4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

- d. This gives Memphis ISD the flexibility without having the bureaucracy of waivers within the Texas Education Agency.

This exemption only allows Memphis ISD local control over class size ratios, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size.

This plan also emphasizes the importance of flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passions and needs. This grants flexibility in class size at all times-regrouping for success, small groups, large groups, etc. It also works to minimize paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place additional focus on student success. An exemption in meeting Texas Education Code (TEC), 25.112, will allow the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waivers when the need arises.

Summary:

The District of Innovation Plan is an important step forward to ensure Memphis ISD develops and supports our students, employees and families in a more personalized, more effective and strategically aligned way. Moving our system toward the more personalized environment our students deserve will enable us to better prepare them according to their individualized needs and their unique passions, gifts, and talents. Through HB 1842, Memphis ISD will be positioned to leverage increased flexibility to make the best decisions for our children because we will be able to make them locally.