



Memphis Independent School

District of Innovation Plan

November 2025 – November 2030

District of Innovation Committee Members:

Victoria Davis	Chair – Federal Program Director
Kitsy Pepper	Technology Director
Leigh Ann Hawthorne	Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Dick Hutcherson	High School Principal
Wes Hardin	Middle School Principal
Trisha Smith	Austin Elementary Principal
Wayne Ross	Parent
Melody Matthews	Parent
Audrie Maddox	Community Member
Camilla Maddox	Community Member
Mark Lance	Community Member
Cindy Banner	Business Owner

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.

June 06, 2016, the Memphis Independent School District's 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. 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 in May 2020 via phone in order to observe social distancing as required due to Covid-19, 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.

January 11, 2021, Memphis Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") passed a resolution to start the renewal process of the District of Innovation Plan. January 12, 2021, the commissioner of education was notified of the intention to vote on the renewal of the DOI. January 26, 2021 the DOI Committee met to review and approve the edited DOI for renewal, and the edited version of the DOI was posted on MISD's website. February 22, 2021 the public meeting notice was published in the Memphis newspaper. March 11, 2021 the DOI renewal public meeting was held. March 11, 2021 the Board voted to adopt the DOI renewal. March 12, 2021, the commissioner of education was notified of the finalized adoption of the DOI renewal. March 12, 2021, the adopted DOI was sent to Texas Education Agency to be posted on the TEA website.

September 2025, the Memphis District of Innovation Committee began the step-by-step process to renew the Memphis District of Innovation Plan. September 5, 2025 the Memphis District of Innovation Committee discussed the current plan, edited the plan, and voted to move to the next step. September 6, 2025, the proposed plan for renewal was sent to MISD lawyer for review. September 7, 2025, the Memphis District of Innovation Committee met virtually on the proposed plan for renewal with the MISD lawyer edits and voted to move forward in the renewal process. September 9, 2025 the Memphis District of Innovation Plan Proposed Draft was uploaded to Memphis ISD website for 30 days. October 14, 2025 Memphis ISD had the Public Comment meeting for the Memphis District of Innovation Plan Proposed Draft. The Memphis ISD District of Innovation Committee voted to move forward with the proposed draft presented on Memphis ISD website and Public Comment meeting. October 31, 2025 the Memphis district of Innovation Committee voted to send the proposed draft to the School Board. November 11, 2025 the Memphis ISD School Board approved and adopted the Memphis District of Innovation proposed plan to the renewed plan. This renewed plan will be effective for 5 years, November 11, 2030.

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

TERM

The term of the Plan will go into effect upon adoption by the Board and will last 5 years. 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 and seeks an exemption in the following areas:

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

In order to best serve Memphis ISD students, decisions on whether certification will be required for a position 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. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses that qualify this individual to teach this subject.
- b. A teacher holding a secondary or all-level certificate may teach a 6th, 7th or 8th grade class if the teacher has at least 18 semester credit hours in the subject area they would teach.
- c. The District may hire teachers who are in an approved Texas alternative certification program such as iteach, Teachworthy, Texas Teachers to teach hard-to fill courses, including, but not limited to high demand dual-credit courses, career and technical/STEM (applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts and Mathematics) courses, and any other courses for which the District is unable to hire a certified candidate. The District is not exempt from the certification requirements for SPED, ESL, or Bilingual positions.
- d. The District will not employ as a teacher of record for a course in the foundation curriculum (mathematics, science, English language arts, and social studies) a person who does not hold an appropriate certificate or permit required by the State Board for Educator Certification under Subchapter B.
- e. This exemption will allow more flexibility in our scheduling and more options for our students in class offerings.

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." The certification requirements of TEC Section 21.003 make it difficult for the District to fill certain teaching positions. Relief from Section 21.003 would give the District greater flexibility to hire otherwise qualified candidates for teaching positions. 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. Class Size Ratio (EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.111) (TEC 25.112) (TEC 25.113)

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. Accordingly, the District will not be required to notify parents of a waiver as required by Section 25.113 of the Texas Education Code
- d. This gives Memphis ISD the flexibility without having the bureaucracy of waivers within the Texas Education Agency.

TEC 25.112 states that “Except as otherwise authorized by this section, a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a prekindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class.” 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.

C. Contract Service Days (DC LEGAL, DCB LEGAL, DCB LOCAL, DEA LEGAL) (TEC 21.401)

TEC 21.401 (b) states “that an educator under a 10-month contract must provide 187 days of service.” TEC 21.401(c-1) further states “If a school district anticipates providing less than 180 days of instruction for students during a school year, as indicated by the district's academic calendar, the district may reduce the number of days of service required by this section proportionately. A reduction by the district does not reduce an educator's salary.” The plan would reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries allowing flexibility in the contractual days for certified personnel and to attempt to better align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of the students.

To allow flexibility in the contractual days for certified personnel, MISD will:

- a. Maintain the current salary schedule for all certified employees.
- b. Consider annually the certified salary schedules as part of the regular budgeting process by the board.
- c. Evaluate the number of contract days needed for certified staff in that school year and shall set the number of calendar work days, with the objective of reducing the days from 187 to district discretion to better align the teacher days with the student minutes. The administrative staff will also annually determine the number of professional development days required and when or where they will be fulfilled on the calendar.
- d. Not reduce the annual salary of certified staff, except in accordance with TEC§21.4021 (Furloughs) which the district is not seeking exemption.

D. Uniform School Start Date (EB LEGAL) (TEC 25.0811)

TEC 25.0811 states “that a school district may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday in August.” 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.

E. Group Health Benefits (TEC 22.004(i))

TEC 22.004(i) 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 of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code.” In order to have the option to offer additional benefits options to employees and to increase local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs, the district proposes that the District of Innovation Plan exempt the district from the health insurance requirements in TEC 22.004(i).

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.

