

# Thrall Independent School District



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Ratified on June 7, 2017 by Thrall ISD Board of Trustees by a unanimous vote of 7-0

## Local Innovation Plan 2017-2022

(Revision May 23, 2018)

HB 1842, of the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session,  
allows Texas districts to qualify as a District of Innovation.  
Districts of Innovation are able to gain local control of certain operations  
that are currently under the control of the Texas Education Agency.

# Thrall ISD INNOVATION PLAN

## I. INTRODUCTION

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

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates including the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On March 22, 2017, the Thrall Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") passed a Resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. On March 22, 2017, the Board appointed a District of Innovation Committee ("Committee") comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of the District's stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators. The Committee met on April 13, 2017, to discuss and draft the Local Innovation Plan ("Plan"). The DOI Plan will be posted on April 18, 2017 and the Committee will meet again on May 10, to conduct a public forum and accept input on the proposed District of Innovation Plan. Based on the input received from the community, the Committee will make adjustments to the plan, and then present the plan to the board. The TISD Board of Trustees will consider the Plan at its meeting on May 24, 2017.

## II. DISTRICT OF INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Tommy Hooker	Superintendent
Shaun Karch	Business Manager
Travis Dube	High School Principal
Kimberly Luton	Middle School Principal
Jolena Pokorny	Elementary School Principal
Joan Sladek	Director of Operations
Paige Morris	Teacher – Elementary
Holly Porter	Teacher – Middle School
Jennifer O'Neill	Teacher – Elementary
Gina Vrana	Teacher – Elementary
Hannah Kettelman	Teacher – High School
Susan Burkhardt	District Technology Director
Ed Lindner	District Safety Coordinator
Lindsey Lillard	District College Readiness Coordinator
Casey Sledge	Business Member
Troy Marks	Community Member
Ryan Collett	Community Member
Carrie O'Connor	Parent
Holly Poling	Parent

### III. DISTRICT OF INNOVATION TIMELINE

- March 22, 2017 – Board Approves Resolution
- March 22, 2017 – Board votes to pursue designation
- March 22, 2017 – Board appoints DOI Committee
- March 28 – April 13 – DOI Plan Development
- April 18, 2017 – Plan to be posted to web for 30 days
- May 10, 2017 – DOI Committee holds public hearing/approves plan (majority vote)
- Board notifies TEA Commissioner of intent to adopt plan (missed deadline so was ratified at June 7, 2017 Board Meeting)
- May 24, 2017 – Board approves plan by 2/3 majority
- Board notifies Commissioner of plan adoption
- Ratification on June 7, 2017, suggested by TEA (Commissioner Morath's Office)
- Plan Effective Date June 2017 to June 2022

### IV. INNOVATION PLAN EXEMPTIONS

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

#### **1. First day of instruction**

Exemption from Texas Education Code §25.0811(a) Other: Board policy EB(LEGAL), EB(LOCAL)

#### ***Current Statute:***

*TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC 25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.*

*Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. The 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.*

**Innovation Strategies**

- a. Relief from the statute will allow TISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.
  
- b. Alignment of the district calendar with neighboring districts, advanced placement exams, and STAAR timelines.
  
- c. Provide for increased local control of the instructional calendar in order to be responsive to community needs.

**2. Kindergarten – Grade 4 Class Size Reporting Requirement**

*Exemption from: TEC 25.112; TEC 25.113*

*Related Board Policies: EEB LEGAL/LOCAL*

**Current Statute:**

*TEC 25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.*

*TEC 25.113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this notice.*

**Innovation Strategies:**

- a. TISD believes in a low student to teacher ratio in all of its classrooms. Thrall will begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student to teacher ratio of at least 22:1 or less in each K-4 homeroom class. In the event that any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees. Decisions regarding appropriate student to teacher ratios will be made at the local level, taking into consideration the age and grade level of the students, the subject matter of the class, the needs of individual teachers and student groups, and the availability of additional instructional staff members.
  
- b. A TEA waiver request will not be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.
  
- c. Parents of students in K-4 classrooms that exceed a ratio of 22:1 will continue to be notified as per TEC 25.113.

### **3. Teacher Certification**

*Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.055; TEC §21.057*

*Relevant Board Policies: DBA LEGAL/LOCAL; DK LEGAL/LOCAL*

#### **Current Statute:**

*TEC 21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency.*

*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 request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board for Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.*

*TEC 21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the District from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.*

*TEC 21.055 states that if a teacher is not certified, the District may issue a teaching permit to employ the individual. This process requires notice to the Commissioner and its usefulness is extremely limited. Additionally, the language of this section could be construed to prohibit the issuance of a local teaching certificate.*

*TEC 21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.*

#### **Innovation Strategies:**

a. The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District is committed to hiring individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

b. For grades 5-12, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. In core classes, the applicant must have a bachelor's degree with a minimum of 12 college hours in the subject that they will teach. If the teacher is performing on T-TESS at a level that is acceptable to the District, the District may consider retaining the services of this employee with the expectation that the employee show that they are working towards obtaining the appropriate teacher certification through workshops, college classes, and/or other venues to prepare them for the certification examination. In

addition, the employee will remain on a probationary contract until full certification is acquired. The District will maintain the documents at the local level.

c. An individual with experience in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.

d. Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.

e. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.

f. Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

#### **4. Probationary Contracts**

*Exemption from: TEC 21.102(b)*

*Relevant Board Policies: DCA LEGAL*

##### **Current Statute:**

*For experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period 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. A one year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior to District receipt of state assessment results.*

##### **Innovation Strategies:**

For experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years. All other teachers hired in the District may remain on probationary status for three years, and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC 21.102(c).

## **5. Length of School Day**

Relevant Board Policies: (EC Legal) (Ed. Code 25.082)

### ***Current Statute:***

State law currently requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day in order to count for ADA calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.

### **Innovation Strategies:**

Exempting from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Thrall ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements.

## **6. Contract Service Days**

(Ed. Code 21.401)

### ***Current Statute:***

State law currently requires educators employed on a 10-month contract to provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

### **Innovation Strategies:**

The passage of Ed. Code 25.081 changed the required days of instruction to minutes. However, the law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees. The determination of how many days that are required to fulfill and employee's contract should be a local decision.

## **7. Inter-District Transfers**

(FDA LOCAL) (TEC 25.036)

### ***Current Statute:***

Under TEC 25.036, a District may choose to accept, as transfers, students who do not reside within the boundaries of the TISD School District. However, TEC 25.036 requires that the length of the transfer period must be the entirety of one school year.

### **Innovation Strategies:**

To allow TISD to revoke transfer agreements at any time that a student is not meeting the terms of the transfer agreement. a. Thrall ISD maintains a transfer

policy under FDA (LOCAL), requiring nonresident students to file a transfer application each school year. In considering transfer requests, the availability of space, instructional staff, the student's disciplinary history, academic performance, mandatory state testing results, and attendance are evaluated prior to granting a transfer. b. Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time if the student has any of the following issues: 1. Poor attendance 2. Poor academic performance 3. Not meeting standard on State Mandated Tests 4. Disciplinary behavior that results in suspension, expulsion or DAEP

## **V. TERM**

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning June 2017 and ending June 2022, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board will appoint a new committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.