Austin Independent School District
Local Innovation Plan

Drafted February 22, 2017
Posted February 24, 2017
Adopted by the Austin ISD Board of Trustees on March 27, 2017
Revised June 18, 2018

Reinventing the Urban School Experience Together
House Bill 1842, Section 4, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts be designated as Districts of Innovation, thereby allowing them the flexibility to be exempt from or modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of the students and personalize learning.

Districts of Innovation provide opportunities for:

- Greater local control;
- Increased flexibility governing education programming; and
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

Districts are not exempt from statutes related to curriculum, graduation requirements, nor academic and financial accountability.

This innovation plan was initially developed by a diverse group of thirty-six members, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, representing all AISD vertical teams, all Austin Independent School District (AISD) Board of Trustees, and 21 different schools, and it was shaped by additional input from principals, teachers, district staff, parents, and community members in an effort to reinvent the urban school experience. The advisory committee was focused on exploring innovations to give additional time for teachers for planning, preparation, and professional development. The committee also wanted to affirm the commitment to high quality teachers and instruction for AISD students.

On September 26, 2016, the AISD School Board approved a resolution to initiate the process of becoming a District of Innovation. On October 25, 2016, The Board of Trustees held a public hearing on Districts of Innovation and requested an ad hoc committee be formed to develop an innovation plan. On November 7, 2016, the board of trustees instructed the superintendent to move forward and create an Innovation District Advisory Committee (IDAC) to develop the plan.

On December 7, 2016 the District of Innovation process was shared with all campus principals and AISD expanded cabinet members at the Urban Education 2.0 Meeting. Participants brainstormed possible exemptions and innovations to better meet the needs of our students and diverse communities. On December 8, 2016 the IDAC Charter was developed. From January 11 - February 22, 2017 IDAC meetings were held to provide input on the development of an innovation plan and processes for campuses to request exemptions.

This five-year District of Innovation Plan will be in effect from March 27, 2017 – March 27, 2022.
Timeline

**June 19, 2015:** HB 1842 allows for districts to be designated as Districts of Innovation.

**September 26, 2016:** The Austin ISD School Board unanimously approved a resolution to initiate the process of becoming a District of Innovation.

**October 25, 2016:** The board of trustees held a public hearing on Districts of Innovation and requested an ad hoc committee be formed to develop an innovation plan.

**November 7, 2016:** The board of trustees instructs the superintendent to move forward and create the IDAC to develop a plan.

**December 7, 2016:** District of Innovation process and possible exemption information was shared with all campus principals at the AISD expanded cabinet UE 2.0 Meeting.

**December 8, 2016:** The IDAC Charter was developed.

**January 18, 2017:** The IDAC met to review its charge, HB 1842, feedback from district staff on innovations to address challenges.

**January 25, 2017:** The IDAC met to identify exemptions that inhibit strategic plan goals and align to proposed innovations.

**February 1, 2017:** The IDAC met to identify exemptions that inhibit strategic plan goals and align to proposed innovations.

**February 8, 2017:** The IDAC met to review proposed exemptions, discuss concerns, and vote on which exemptions to include in the innovation plan.

**February 15, 2017:** The IDAC met to review proposed exemptions, discuss concerns, and vote on which exemptions to include in the innovation plan.

**February 21, 2017:** The IDAC chairs share information about the innovation plan development with the DAC.

**February 22, 2017:** The IDAC met to review and revise the draft innovation plan and provide input on processes for campuses to apply for exemptions.

**February 24, 2017:** The draft innovation plan is posted online for 30 days and shared with organizations including, The Austin Council Parent Teacher Association (ACPTA), The Austin Association of Public School Administrators (AAPSA), and Education Austin, as well as with the Board of Trustees and the DAC.

**February 24, 2017:** The Board of Trustees notifies The Commissioner of its intent to adopt the innovation plan.

**March 21, 2017:** The DAC will vote on the Innovation Plan.

**March 27, 2017:** A public meeting will be held to consider and approve the final version of the innovation plan.

**March 27, 2017:** The board of trustees will vote on the adoption of the innovation plan.

**March 28, 2017:** The Commissioner will be notified by the district if the plan is adopted.
Committee Members

Becky Cardenas-Salinas: Counselor, Linder ES
Mike Cranor: Business, Apple
Edward Doan: Business, Google
Katie Duffy: Parent, Baranoff ES
Amir Emamian: City of Austin
Mary Ghazinezhadiansh: Teacher, McCallum HS (Art)
Erica Gordon: Parent, Brentwood ES
Choni Hajibashi: ACPTA
Taylor Hawkins: Teacher, Lanier HS (Math)
Angela Iglehart-Woods: School, Family, and Community
Gerard Jimenez: Parent, Austin HS
Betty Johnson: Parent, LBJ HS, DAC, LBJ CAC
Anthony LeClair: Community
Monica Lopez Magee: Parent, Pease ES
Alex Mancevski: Student, LASA
Juan Pablo Martinez: Community
Amelia Monzon: Student, Reagan HS
Beth Newton: Principal, Hill ES
Edmund Oropez: Central Administration

Rosa Peña: AAPSA
Mario Piña: Teacher, Perez ES (5th Grade), DAC
Danny Ramos: Librarian, Padron ES
Josephine Rubio: Teacher, Blanton ES (Literacy Coach)
Angela Salas: Teacher, Zavala ES (1st Grade)
Monica Sanchez: Parent, Bedichek MS, DAC
Kevin Schwartz: Central Administration
David Segura: Teacher, Sunset Valley ES (5th Grade)
Lauren Sicarelli: Parent, Oak Hill ES
Hal Speed: Business, Dell
Amy Taylor: Principal, Austin HS
Arthur Thompson: Teacher, Bailey MS (CTE), DAC
Claudia Torres: Teacher, Webb MS (Spanish), DAC
Jarrad Toussant: Business
Enrique Trejo: Parent, Fulmore MS
James Valadez: Community
Ken Zarafis: Education Austin
AISD Strategic Plan Framework

Reinventing the urban school experience together

Vision

AISD will reinvent the urban school experience.

Mission

AISD exists to fulfill the mission put forth by the State of Texas, which is to “ensure that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities of our state and nation.” [Texas Education Code §4.0Dl(a)J]

Core Belief One

All students will graduate college-, career-, and life-ready.

As part of this, we commit ourselves to:

1. Achieve excellence by delivering a high-quality education to every student.
2. Implement the transformative use of technology.
3. Ensure all students perform at or above grade level in math and reading.
4. Prepare all students to graduate on time.
5. Develop civically engaged students.

Core Belief Two

We will create an effective, agile, and responsive organization.

As part of this, we commit ourselves to:

6. Create a positive organizational culture that values customer service and every employee.
7. Develop effective organizational structures.
8. Generate, leverage, and utilize strategically all resources.

Core Belief Three

We will create vibrant relationships critical for successful students and schools.

As part of this, we commit ourselves to:

9. Engage authentically with students, parents/guardians, teachers, and community.
10. Build ownership in AISD among internal and external stakeholders.
11. Develop and maintain community partnerships.
Values
Whole Child, Every Child
Physical, social, and emotional health, and safety
Equity, diversity, and inclusion
High expectations for all students, employees, parents/guardians, and community members
Creativity, collaboration, and innovation
Community schools
Life-long learning

Innovations
To achieve the district’s vision, mission, core beliefs and values and to align the District’s strategic commitments, the district needs the flexibility to exert local control, at both the district and campus levels, to:

- Provide innovative curriculum
- Provide innovative instructional methods
- Provide specialized subject-matter expertise
- Provide high-quality professional development
- Provide a collaborative community experience
- Provide flexibility to adjust schedules to better meet the needs of students

Exemptions

Educator Certification

Current Challenges

- A lack of highly qualified staff for innovative and Languages Other Than English courses
- A lack of teachers with specialized certifications
- Inability to hire subject-matter experts for specialized courses
- Lack of opportunities for authentic, field-based experiences
- Competition from charter schools already utilizing this exemption offering specialized courses

Exemptions

- § 21.003 Certification Required (for CTE, Tech Apps, and Languages Other Than English in high school credit courses only)
- § 21.0031 Failure to Obtain Certification; Contract Void
- § 21.053 Presentation and Recording of Certificates

Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code That Inhibit the District’s Goals

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.

An employee’s probationary, continuing, or term contract is void if the employee does not hold a valid
A person who desires to teach in a public school shall present the person’s certificate for filing with the employing district before the person’s contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding.

An educator who does not hold a valid certificate may not be paid for teaching or work done before the effective date of issuance of a valid certificate.

Rationale for Innovations

Students receiving high school credit need access to specific areas of study that promote career & technical educational pathways and technology application pathways. Some of these specialized courses require the expertise of field experts. In some instances, field-based experts are more qualified to teach career & technology (CTE) and Technology Application courses than certified educators, and the district needs the discretion to hire the most qualified individuals to teach these courses. Having the ability to recruit experts from the field will enhance community partnerships and increase field-based opportunities for students. Furthermore, the ability to hire subject matter experts from the field for specialized courses will reduce costs by eliminating the need to have a certified teacher of record in addition to the CTE or Tech Apps course instructor.

Students also need access to courses that promote college and career readiness including the ability to communicate in a language other than English. The district needs the discretion to hire the most qualified individuals to teach Languages Other Than English (LOTE) high school credit courses. Having the ability to recruit language experts will help fill teachings position left vacant due to the lack of certified teachers.

Sections 21.003, 21.0031, and 21.053 of the TEC limit the district’s ability to hire educators to teach CTE & Technology Applications and LOTE courses when quality certified teachers are not available.

Guiding Principles

Current expectations for employee certification should be maintained and a dedicated effort should be made to hire individuals with appropriate certifications for CTE & Technology Application, and LOTE teaching positions. However, when that is not reasonably possible, or a non-certified individual or industry/language expert is more highly qualified, flexibility to hire other individuals should be exercised. Those who are knowledgeable in CTE and Tech Apps areas should be considered for CTE and Tech Application Courses. Individuals who demonstrate superior or distinguished language proficiency on an exam recognized by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages should be considered for LOTE courses. Local qualification and training procedures, as well as an approval processes for non-certified instructors should be maintained, to include background checks and classroom management skill building. A policy should remain in place to notify parents if a non-certified teacher is employed for their child’s class.

Alignment to AISD Strategic Plan

Commitment 1: Achieve excellence by delivering a high-quality education to every student.

- 1.1 We will individualize teaching and learning
- 1.2 We will provide our students a variety of unique opportunities for unlimited learning.
- Commitment 5: Develop civically engaged students.
- 5.1 We will provide opportunities for civic engagement to all students.

Commitment 8: Generate, leverage, and utilize strategically all resources.

- 8.1 We will acquire necessary resources.
Commitment 11: Develop and maintain community partnerships.

- 11.1 We will build relationships with the City of Austin and other public, private, and nonprofit entities.

**Minutes of Instruction**

**Current Challenges**

- Competition from charter schools already utilizing this exemption for innovative scheduling
- Insufficient professional learning time
- Texas Education Agency will require innovation plans instead of waivers for late start days
- No late start days at the elementary and middle school levels for teacher planning and preparation and/or staff development
- Insufficient planning and preparation time
- Insufficient time for teacher collaboration
- Insufficient time to complete grade reporting tasks at the end of grading periods
- Insufficient time for planning at the prior to each grading period or instructional unit
- Mental and physical fatigue and stress due to insufficient time to plan and prepare for instruction
- Increased student and staff absenteeism due to burnout
- Lack of teacher preparedness

**Exemptions**

- §25.081(d)(e) Operation of Schools (Minutes of Instruction)
- §25.082 Length of School Day

**Requirements Imposed by the Education Code That Inhibit the District’s Goals**

For each school year each school district must operate so that the district provides for at least 75,600 minutes of instruction, including intermissions and recesses, for students.

The commissioner may approve the instruction of students for fewer than the number of minutes required if a calamity causes the closing of schools. If the commissioner does not approve reduced instruction time a school district may add additional minutes to the end of the district’s normal school hours as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to a calamity.

The commissioner may adopt rules, on the basis of the minimum minutes of instruction required, that refer to a minimum number of days of instruction.

A day of instruction means 420 minutes of instruction. A school day shall be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

**Rationale for Innovations**

The district is not seeking an exemption from the 75,600 minutes of instruction for the school year. However, the district seeks the flexibility to occasionally shorten the school day to provide more time for teachers to plan, collaborate, and prepare for instruction that better meets the needs of students. Flexibility to the length of the school day promotes innovative programs that increase graduation rates through credit recovery, such as the Twilight program. Teachers need more time to analyze and evaluate student work and adapt instruction to meet student needs. Shortened days, scheduled strategically throughout the school year, such as monthly or after grading periods, will result in teachers being better prepared. This will also
allow for embedded professional learning time. Strategically placed late start or early release days will reduce staff and student fatigue, stress, anxiety, and absenteeism. Austin ISD believes the local community should decide what is best for its students and staff. Sections 25.081(d)(e) and 25.082 of the TEC limit the District’s ability to provide sufficient time for teachers to plan, collaborate, and prepare for innovative and high quality instruction and to provide ongoing, high-quality professional development.

**Guiding Principles**

Changes or modifications to the instructional day should not be made without specific purpose and should be planned for the purpose of improving the quality of instruction. Shortened days should not be excessive. Length of school day changes should be developed with stakeholders and advisory bodies, planned ahead of time, and noted in the district calendar, so that families can plan and be prepared. Calendars should be published and distributed to stakeholders well in advance of the school year. Instructional time should be maximized to maintain 75,600 minutes for the school year.

**Alignment to AISD Strategic Plan**

Commitment 1: Achieve excellence by delivering a high-quality education to every student.

- 1.1 We will individualize teaching and learning
- 1.3 We will provide services and supports for every student on every campus.

Commitment 2: Implement the transformative use of technology.

- 2.1 We will integrate technology into curriculum and instruction.

Commitment 3: Ensure all students perform at or above grade level in math and reading.

- 3.1 We will improve the reading and writing of all students.
- 3.2 We will improve the numerical fluency and problem solving skills of all students.

Commitment 4: Prepare all students to graduate on time.

- 4.1 We will provide high quality interventions and resources to support all students.

Commitment 7: Develop effective organizational structures.

- 7.1 We will ensure organizational capacity.

**First & Last Day of Instruction**

**Current Challenges**

- Competition from charter schools already utilizing this exemption for innovative scheduling
- Insufficient professional learning time
- Texas Education Agency will require innovation plans instead of waivers for adjustments to the first and last day of school
- Insufficient planning and preparation time before the first day of instruction and throughout the school year
- Insufficient time to complete grade reporting tasks at the end of the grading period
- Insufficient time for planning at the beginning of each grading period or instructional unit
- Mental and physical fatigue and stress due to long blocks of time without breaks
- Increased student and staff absenteeism due to burnout and fatigue
• Lack of teacher preparedness
• Unequal instructional time in the fall and spring semesters
• Unable to begin the year before the 4th Monday in August (especially when it falls late in the year, i.e. 8/28/17)
• Unable to end the year before Memorial Day
• Traditional calendars result in lost instructional time
• District and college calendars are not aligned for dual credit / dual enrollment courses

**Exemptions**

• §25.0811 First Day of Instruction
• §25.0812 Last Day of School

**Requirements Imposed by the Education Code That Inhibit the District’s Goals**

A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

A school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15.

**Rationale for Innovations**

The district needs the flexibility to begin the instructional year before the 4th Monday in August to prevent the loss of instructional time and to provide more days of uninterrupted time for teachers to plan and prepare for instruction. This would also allow for more creative scheduling for extra-curricular activities, such as athletics and band. Adjusting the first and last day of instruction will allow flexibility in scheduling holidays, as well as scheduling periodic breaks for staff and students to re-energize and refocus after grading cycles. Strategically planned breaks will reduce stress, anxiety, fatigue, and absenteeism. Having the flexibility to adjust the first and last day of instruction will allow the district to better balance instructional days during the first and second semester. Adjustments to the first and last day of school will allow the district to strategically embed professional learning days and additional opportunities for teacher planning and preparation. This flexibility would also allow the district to end the school year prior to Memorial Day. Austin ISD believes the local community should decide what is best for its students and staff when developing its calendar. Sections 25.0811 and 25.0812 of the TEC limit the District’s ability to adjust the first and last day of school to create a calendar that best meets the diverse needs of stakeholders.

**Guiding Principles**

Changes or modifications to the calendar should not be made without specific purpose and should only be made for the purpose of improving the quality of instruction, maximizing instructional time, and meeting the diverse needs of stakeholders. Changes to the calendar should be developed with stakeholders and advisory bodies and planned ahead of time so that families can plan and be prepared. Calendars should be published and distributed to stakeholders well in advance of the school year.

**Alignment to AISD Strategic Plan**

Commitment 1: Achieve excellence by delivering a high-quality education to every student.

• 1.1 We will individualize teaching and learning
• 1.3 We will provide services and supports for every student on every campus.

Commitment 2: Implement the transformative use of technology.
• 2.1 We will integrate technology into curriculum and instruction.
• 2.3 We will promote technology through our organizational structure.

Commitment 3: Ensure all students perform at or above grade level in math and reading.
• 3.1 We will improve the reading and writing of all students.

Commitment 4: Prepare all students to graduate on time.
• 4.1 We will provide high quality interventions and resources to support all students.

**Minimum Attendance Required**

**Current Challenges**
• Students are penalized for illness
• Attendance committees required to convene for credit determination even when absences are excused and work has been completed
• Limited student access to extracurricular events
• Limited student access to field-based experiences and enrichment opportunities
• Limited student access to internships
• Lack of individualized learning plans and student schedule flexibility
• Lack of blended learning and distance learning opportunities
• Lack of opportunity to complete online coursework away from the campus
• Attendance make-up time options are not rigorous and authentic
• Seat time is prioritized over content mastery
• Prevents focusing on learning and results
• Promotes focusing on time spent at desk
• Inhibits student acquisition of self-monitoring skills

**Exemptions**
• §25.092 Minimum Attendance Required for Class Credit

**Requirements Imposed by the Education Code That Inhibit the District’s Goals**

A student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered. A student who is in attendance for at least 75 percent but less than 90 percent of the days a class is offered may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the school’s principal that provides for the student to meet the instructional requirements of the class.

The board of trustees of each school district shall appoint one or more attendance committees to hear petitions for class credit or a final grade by students who are in attendance fewer than the number of days and have not earned class credit or a final grade. Classroom teachers shall comprise a majority of the membership of the committee.

**Rationale for Innovations**

The district needs the flexibility to award class credit to students based on content mastery rather than seat time. The district does not wish to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities.
activities, academic activities, field-based experiences, distance learning activities, or other extenuating circumstances. Freedom from the minimum attendance required rule will allow the district to implement blended learning, problem-based learning, and community partnerships and internships, that will increase student engagement in innovative learning opportunities. While attendance committees play a vital role in addressing chronic absenteeism, they should not be required to convene to award credit for excused absences when work is completed. It is an inefficient and costly use of time. Students need opportunities to engage in individualized learning pathways that incorporate classroom instruction, online instruction on and off campus, and field-based learning at a pace suited to their specific learning needs. Students should not be penalized for attending extracurricular events, participating in field-based activities and internships, or completing work in less time than what is provided. Austin ISD believes the local campus community should decide what constitutes sufficient attendance. Section §25.084 of the TEC limits flexible seat time, blended and distance learning opportunities, field-based learning opportunities, and extracurricular activities.

Guiding Principles

High expectations for attendance should continue to be maintained and dropout prevention measures should in place for all campuses. Campuses should continue to have a comprehensive attendance plan to account for truancy, appeals for credit, and chronic absenteeism.

Commitment 1: Achieve excellence by delivering a high-quality education to every student.

- 1.1 We will individualize teaching and learning
- 1.2 We will provide our students a variety of unique opportunities for unlimited learning.
- 1.3 We will provide services and supports for every student on every campus.

Commitment 2: Implement the transformative use of technology.

- 2.1 We will integrate technology into curriculum and instruction.
- 2.2 We will provide flexible learning environments.

Commitment 4: Prepare all students to graduate on time.

- 4.1 We will provide high quality interventions and resources to support all students.

Commitment 5: Develop civically engaged students.

- 5.1 We will provide opportunities for civic engagement to all students.

Commitment 11: Develop and maintain community partnerships.

- 11.1 We will build relationships with the City of Austin and other public, private, and nonprofit entities.

Class Size Waiver

Current Challenges

- Staffing based on the total number of students per grade level with a maximum of 22 per teacher, regardless of instructional program, results in classrooms with a mix of students in a bilingual program and students not in a bilingual program. Mixed-language classrooms have many negative effects:
  - Prevents Dual Language teachers from meeting the required minimum of 50% of the day taught in the target language (Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese).
• Creates challenges for teachers to instruct students in their native language to read specifically in grades PreK, Kinder, 1st when their classrooms are mixed with monolingual and bilingual student groups

• Prevents teachers from providing English instruction to students not in a bilingual program when they are placed in bilingual classrooms

• Prevents teachers from instructing Spanish-speaking students in the target language without translating when English-only students are placed in bilingual classrooms

• Mixed-language classrooms negatively impact student performance, on average, on STAAR reading, on average, both for English Learners (students classified as LEP) in bilingual programs and native English speakers not in bilingual programs.

• Other campus leveling that takes place early in the school year is disruptive to both teachers and students

Exemptions

• § 25.112. Class Size

• § 25.113. NOTICE OF CLASS SIZE. (a) A campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112(d) from class size limits shall provide written notice of the exception to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception.

Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code That Inhibit the District’s Goals

A school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class.

Rationale for Innovations

Students required to receive bilingual education need to do so in a classroom environment that allows for fidelity to the best practices of the bilingual instructional model.

Students required to receive an English only education need to do so need to do so in a classroom environment that allows for fidelity to the best practices of the a general education instructional model.

Student and teacher disruption should be minimal during the leveling process.

Guiding Principles

The goal of all bilingual education programs shall be to enable English language learners to become competent in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the English language through the development of literacy and academic skills in the primary language and English.

Dual Language Specific:
*Minimum of 50% to a maximum of 9-% of instruction in the target language
*Strategic separation of languages for instruction (no translation)
*K-12 commitment

Alignment to AISD Strategic Plan

Commitment 1: Achieve excellence by delivering a high-quality education to every student.

Commitment 5: Develop civically engaged students.
Glossary

AAPSA: Austin Association of Public School Administrators

ACPTA: Austin Council of PTAs (Parent Teacher Associations)

Blended Learning: An instructional method that combines in-person direct teach with online learning opportunities

Chronic Absenteeism: A student has fifteen or more absences from school for both excused and unexcused reasons

Education Austin: Teachers’ and employees’ union for Austin ISD

Twilight: AISD evening school program allowing high school students the ability to regain lost credits

Urban Education 2.0: A district meeting of all campus principals and central office directors and executive directors to learn about district initiatives and sharing of best practices.