

# AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



## **Austin Independent School District Local Innovation Plan**

**First Adopted by the Austin ISD Board of Trustees on March 27, 2017**

Revision of Plan January 24, 2024

Revised October 30, 2025

Adopted by the Austin ISD Board of Trustees on October 30, 2025



House Bill 1842, Section 4, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts to 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.

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.

This five-year District of Innovation Plan was in effect from March 27, 2017 – March 27, 2022

The IDAC committee was reestablished for the purpose of reviewing, revising and adding exemptions to the District of Innovation Plan. The committee consisted of thirty members, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. During the month of February 2022 the IDAC hosted a meeting to discuss and seek feedback on updating our plan. The plan was posted online from February 24 – March 24 for public comment and feedback.

After the approval of the Board on March 24, the committee was called into session to review and vote on new revision to the plan.

The IDAC Committee was reestablished for the purpose of reviewing, revising and adding an exemption to the District of Innovation Plan. The committee consisted of thirty members, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. During the month of December 2023, the IDAC hosted a meeting to discuss and seek feedback on updating our plan. The plan was also discussed at the January 16, 2024 District Advisory Committee meeting. The plan was posted online from January 24 , 2024– February 22 , 2024 for public comment and feedback. The DOI updated plan was approved By the Board of Trustees at the February 22<sup>nd</sup> school board voting meeting.

The IDAC committee was reestablished for the purpose of reviewing, revising and adding an exemption to the District of Innovation Plan based on legislation passed by the 89<sup>th</sup> Legislature. The IDAC met on September 29, 2025 and on October 23, 2025 to discuss recommended revisions to the District of Innovation Plan. The IDAC voted to recommend the revisions to the Board of Trustees. The DOI updated plan was approved by the Board of Trustees at the October 30, 2025 board voting meeting

## **Timeline for Updating DOI Plan**

- December 20, 2023– Reconvened the committee to review proposed revisions to the plan and vote to approve.
- January 16, 2024 – Presented for input to the District Advisory Committee.
- January 24, 2024 -Proposed revision of the plan is posted online for 30 days.
- February 22, 2024 -The Board of Trustees approved the revised plan.
- September 29, 2025 and October 23, 2025 – Reconvened the committee to review proposed revisions to the plan The IDAC approved the revised plan.
- October 30, 2025 – The Board of Trustees approved the revised plan.

## **Committee Members IDAC-2025**

### **Non-Staff:**

Jessica Bazan, O'Connell Robertson  
Genevieve Dell, Community Member  
Alberto Gonzalez, Community Member  
Nevin Hall, Student - LASA  
Nicole Hepburn, Parent - Ann Richards MS  
Richard Kelly, Parent - Austin HS  
Helen Miller, Community Member  
Heather Shaw, Community Member  
Amanda Stocks, ACPTA  
Sharon Vigil, Communities in Schools  
Snow White, Intel  
Trassell Underwood, Education Austin  
Lean Harrell, Becker ES Parent

### **Staff:**

Edna Ramon Butts, Director, Intergovernmental Relations & Policy Oversight  
Jiae Kim-Batra, Executive Director, Board Services, Policy & Compliance  
Stephanie McGraw, Director, Teaching, Learning and Leading  
Debra Austrum, Counselor – Bailey MS  
Alasin DeVeney, Teacher, SPED, Joslin ES  
Amanda Bradley, Teacher, Overton ES  
Patricia Bernal, Teacher, Reilly ES  
Dustin Rollins, Teacher, Navarro ECHS  
Nora Irvin, Teacher, Kocurek ES  
Faye Holland, Teacher, Mathews ES  
Oscar Rodriguez, Chief Officer of Technology  
Cedric Mattox, Principal, Covington MS  
Carla De La Rosa, Director of Student Attendance

# **AISD Strategic Plan Framework**

AISD: Every Child, Every Day

## **Vision**

We are Austin's home for inclusive learning; high expectations for all children, high outcomes for every student.

## **Mission**

We prepare every student with the knowledge and skills to thrive in college, career and life.

## **Values**

- Caring for every child to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.
- Educational equity, to ensure every child receives what is needed to develop to their full potential.
- Innovation and academic excellence to inspire the next generation of leaders, civically engaged citizens, creative and critical thinkers, and lifelong learners.
- Valuing diversity, inclusion and meaningful engagement of all voices as we collaborate to improve the common good.
- A culture of respect, transparency, and data-informed decision making to build trusting relationships with each other and those we serve.
- Engaging our employees and inviting their collaboration to make AISD a great place to work.
- Aligning resources to student needs, to be strategic stewards of financial and human capacities to achieve our vision and mission.

## **Exemptions**

### **Educator Certifications (1)**

#### **Current Challenges**

- A lack of highly qualified staff for innovative and Languages Other Than English Courses
- A lack of highly qualified staff for Secondary (7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> Grade) Math, Science, English and Social Studies Courses
- A lack of teachers with specialized certifications
- Lack of highly qualified staff for Early Childhood – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 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 Math, Science, CTE, Tech Apps, Languages Other Than English)
- § 21.0031 Failure to Obtain Certification; Contract Void
- § 21.053 Presentation and Recording of Certificates
- §21.052 Certification of Educators from Outside the State

## **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 certificate or permit issued by the State Board for Educator Certification.

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 is issuance of a valid certificate.

The board may issue a certificate to an educator who applies for a certification and (1) holds: (A) a degree issued by an institution accredited by a regional accrediting agency or group that is recognized by a nationally recognized accreditation board or (B) a degree issued by an institution located in a foreign country, if the degree is equivalent to a degree described by Paragraph (A);(2), (3)(A), (B), (a-1).

The district is committed for any teachers hired under this exemption without an existing Texas teacher certification or out-of-state certification to enroll, or require the individual to enroll, in an alternative education certification program whenever possible.

## **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 required the expertise of field experts. In some instances, field-based experts are more qualified to teach career & technology (CTE) and Technology Applications 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 need access to courses that promote college and career readiness including the ability to communicate in 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 teaching positions left vacant due to the lack of certified teachers.

Students also need access to courses that promote college and career readiness including the areas of secondary (7-12) Math, Science, English and Social Studies. The district needs the discretion to hire the most qualified individuals to teach secondary (7 – 12) Math, Science, English and Social Studies courses. Having the ability to recruit expert Math, Science, English and Social Studies teachers will help fill teaching positions left vacant due to the lack of certified teachers.

Students need access to educators in the area of EC – 6 for positions that are difficult to fill due to the lack of a certified teacher candidate pool. This flexibility would allow the district to expand the pool of

qualified candidates and employ highly qualified educators that might not ordinarily meet the requirements under the traditional teacher certification pathways.

Section 21.003, 21.0031, and 21.053 of the TEC limit the district's ability to hire educators to teach Secondary (7-12) Math, Science, CTE & Technology Applications and LOTE courses along with EC – 6 core subjects when quality certified teachers are not available.

In a highly competitive market, delays in hiring out of state teachers does not allow us to support our campuses and students. Having the ability to hire out of state teachers with certifications from other states will help expedite the immediate need to fill teacher vacancies.

### **Guiding Principles**

Current expectations for employee certification should be maintained and a dedicated effort should be made to hire individual with appropriate certification for CTE and Technology Application, LOTE, Secondary (7 – 12) Math, Science, English, Social Studies and EC - 6 teaching positions. However, when that is not reasonably possible, an out of state certified 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, Math and Science areas should be considered for CTE and Tech Application, Math and Science courses. Individuals who demonstrate superior or distinguished language proficiency on an exam recognized by the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages should be considered for LOTE courses. For, CTE the non-certified instructors should hold an industry certification in the field being hired to teach in. Local qualifications and training procedures, as well as an approval process 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 is a non-certified teacher is employed for their child's class.

### **Alignment to Strategic Plan**

#### **Academic Excellence**

- Strategy 1: Implement consistent and culturally relevant instruction that is rigorous and rooted in relationship and the community for every child, every day.
- Strategy 3: Improve access to quality college and career programs for students from marginalized communities, including connections with higher education institutions and industry partners, and prepare every student with the knowledge and skills to thrive.
- Strategy 4: Prioritize improvement of program opportunities, communication, and facility planning for campuses in communities that are marginalized.

### **Minutes of Instruction (2)**

#### **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 Texas 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 increases graduation rates through credit recovery, such as 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 Districts 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 Strategic Plan**

### **Academic Excellence**

- Strategy 1: Implement consistent and culturally relevant instruction that is rigorous and rooted in relationship and the community for every child, every day.
- Strategy 3: Improve access to quality college and career programs for students from marginalized communities, including connections with higher education institutions and industry partners, and prepare every student with the knowledge and skills to thrive.

### **Culture and Climate**

- Strategy 7: Build a culture of respect and inclusion by increasing the culture competence and diversity of our teaching staff to support the students we serve and foster growth and well-being for all employees.

### **Reflective and Inspirational Leadership**

- Strategy 8: Provide teachers and principals with ongoing coaching to foster reflection, analyze, disaggregated student data, and continuously improve culturally-responsive, rigorous, and relationship-centered instruction.

## **First & Last Day of Instruction (3)**

### **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 semester

- Unable to begin the year before the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 Texas 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**

#### **Academic Excellence**

- Strategy 1: Implement consistent and culturally relevant instruction that is rigorous and rooted in relationship and the community for every child, every day.
- Strategy 3: Improve access to quality college and career programs for students from marginalized communities, including connections with higher education institutions and industry partners, and prepare every student with the knowledge and skills to thrive.

### **Culture and Climate**

- Strategy 7: Build a culture of respect and inclusion by increasing the culture competence and diversity of our teaching staff to support the students we serve and foster growth and well-being for all employees.

### **Reflective and Inspirational Leadership**

- Strategy 8: Provide teachers and principals with ongoing coaching to foster reflection, analyze disaggregated student data and continuously improve culturally-responsive, rigorous, and relationship-centered instruction.

### **Minimum Attendance Required (4)**

#### **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 Texas 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, 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 partnership and internships, that will increase student engagement in innovative learning opportunities. While attendance committees play a vital role 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 be in place for all campuses. Campuses should continue to have a comprehensive attendance plan to account for truancy, appeals for credit, and chronic absenteeism.

### **Alignment to AISD Strategic Plan**

#### **Culture and Climate**

- Strategy 6: Expand access to enrichment opportunities for students from communities that are marginalized.

#### **Reflective and Inspirational Leadership**

- Strategy 9: Build trusting relationships with our families and community by engaging with them to listen and improve AISD environments, process and experience.

### **Class Size Waiver (5)**

#### **Current Challenges**

Staffing based on the total number of students per grade level with a maximum of 22 per teacher, regardless of instructional program, may result in classrooms with a mix of students in a bilingual/dual language program and students not in a bilingual/dual language program. Although AISD has worked to

staff elementary classrooms based on language in recent years, certain ratios beyond the 22 student maximum may be necessary to prevent mixed-language classrooms.

Mixed language classroom have many negative effects:

- Mixed-language classrooms negatively impact student performance, on average, on academic outcomes in reading, both for Emergent Bilingual students (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 and negatively impact social-emotional development.
- Prevents Dual Language teachers from meeting the required minimum of 50% of the day taught in their target language (Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese.)
- Creates challenges for teachers to instruct students in their native language to read specifically in grades Pre K, 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/dual language program when they are placed in bilingual classrooms.
- Prevents teachers from instructing Emergent Bilingual students in the target language without translating when English-only students are placed in bilingual/dual language classrooms.

### **Exemptions**

- 25.112 Class Size
- 25.113 Notice of Class Size (a) A campus or district that 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.

### **Rationale for Innovation**

Students required to receive dual language instruction need to do so in a classroom environment that allows for fidelity to the best practices of the one-way or two-way dual language instructional model.

Students required to receive instruction in English should do so in a classroom environment that allows for fidelity to the best practices of a general education instructional model with English language supports.

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

### **AISD Strategic Plan**

#### **Academic Excellence**

- Strategy 1: Implement consistent and culturally relevant instruction that is rigorous and rooted in relationships and the community for every child, every day.
- Strategy 2: Serve more young learners from communities that are marginalized in quality early childhood instruction.

#### **Culture and Climate**

- Strategy 5: Improve systems for students who access special education, dyslexia, and bilingual

services to ensure high expectations and high outcome for every child.

- Strategy 6: Expand access to enrichment opportunities for students from communities that are marginalized.

### **Reflective and Inspirational Leadership**

- Strategy 8: Provide teachers and principals with ongoing coaching to foster reflection, analyze disaggregated student data, and continuously improve culturally-responsive, rigorous and relationship-centered instruction.

## **HB 4545 (6)**

### **Current Challenges**

- The new statute is effective, as of June 16, 2021.
- Meeting the requirement of 30 hours of supplemental instruction outside the normal instructional day.
- Need to expand the available personnel pool to support student learning as tutors and interventionists.

### **Exemptions**

21.003, 21.0031, 21.053 Certification required to serve as a temporary tutor (Math, Science, English and Social Studies)

### **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 certificate or permit issued by the State Board for Educators Certification.

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**

Allow the District to hire current student teachers as tutors in order to meet the requirements of HB 4545.

Accelerated instruction as defined by TEA entails either 1) assigning a classroom teacher who is a certified master, exemplary, or recognized teacher.

## **Guiding Principles**

Current expectations for employee's certification should be maintained and a dedicated effort should be made to utilize current certified teachers in the areas of Math, English, Social Studies, and Science to tutor students according to HB 4545. If certified teachers are not available, then AISD will hire a student teacher who is under the direction of a certified teacher to be allowed to tutor students in a content area of need.

## **Alignment to AISD Strategic Plan**

### **Academic Excellence**

Strategy 1: Implement consistent and culturally relevant instruction that is rigorous and rooted in relationships and the community for every child, every day.

Strategy 2: Serve more young learners from communities that are marginalized in quality early childhood instruction.

Strategy 4: Prioritize improvements of program opportunities, communication and facility planning for campuses in communities that are marginalized.

## **Grievance Policies**

### **Current Challenges:**

- Resolving complaints in a prompt and efficient manner
- Allowing the Superintendent and the Board of Trustees to focus on student outcomes by resolving complaints at the earliest possible time

### **Exemptions:**

Texas Education Code §§ 26A.001(a)-(c) and (e)--(i), 26A.002, 26A.003, and 26A.004

Note: This exemption does not include exemptions from requirements or authority of the Texas Commissioner of Education or the Texas Education Agency such as those in § 26A.001(f), § 26A.001(h), and § 26A.001(i).

### **Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code that Inhibit the District's Goals**

- Section 26A.001 allows complainants to amend their complaints and supplement the record at any point in the grievance process, thereby extending the grievance process and interfering with the administration's efforts to investigate and resolve the entire complaint at the lowest level possible.
- Section 26A.002 allows complainants up to 90 days to file a Level One complaint and up to 20 days to file each appeal, thereby delaying the administration's opportunity to resolve a complaint close to the time of the event or decision about which the person is complaining.

### **Rationale for Innovations**

The District has established strong policies and procedures for resolving grievances, and the District is committed to allowing complainants to seek redress for their grievances, within prompt and appropriate timelines. Through the exemption to this chapter, (1) complainants will submit their grievances in a timely manner, (2) administrative efforts will be allocated most efficiently, and (3) the District may hear and respond to complaints more effectively.

The exemption to § 26A.001(i) is limited to the following language in Section 26.011(a) which requires the board of trustees to adopt a grievance procedure “that complies with Chapter 26A”. To effectuate the exemption discussed above for Texas Education Code §§ 26A.001 – 26A.004, the District should also be exempt from the language in Section 26.011(a) “that complies with Chapter 26A”. This exemption allows the District to maintain local control over its grievance policies, procedures, and process.

## **Local School Library Advisory Council**

### **Current Challenges**

The District relies on the expertise of its certified librarians and other professional library staff trained in library collection development policies and procedures to review and select library materials in a timely fashion. The District values the engagement of Austin ISD parents, community members, and staff in providing input and feedback on campus library collections and participating on challenge committees if needed.

### **Exemptions:**

#### **Texas Education Code § 33.025**

### **Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code that Inhibit the District’s Goals**

The new Education Code provision allows school boards to establish a Local School Library Advisory Council (SLAC) and requires the establishment of a SLAC if the parents of at least 10% of the students enrolled in the district, or 50 or more parents, whichever is fewer, present a petition to the school board.

A school district that established a SLAC would be required to consider the recommendations of the council before:

- adding library materials to a school library catalog;
- removing library materials from a school library catalog following a challenge from a parent or guardian, district employee, or district resident; or
- making changes to policies or guidelines related to a school library catalog.

The SLAC would be required to meet at least twice each year and at other times as necessary to fulfill its duties. For each meeting, the SLAC would be required to:

- at least 72 hours before the meeting, post notice of the time, place, and subject on a bulletin board in the central administrative office of each district campus and ensure that the notice was posted on the district’s website, if applicable;
- prepare and maintain minutes of the meeting that stated the subject and content of each deliberation and each vote, order, decision, or other action taken by the council during the meeting;
- make an audio or video recording of the meeting; and
- within 10 days after the date of the meeting, submit the minutes and audio or video recording of the meeting to the district.

As soon as practicable the school district would have to post the minutes and audio or video recording on its website, if it had one.

### **Rationale for Innovation**



A SLAC places a disproportionate amount of influence over access to library materials for all of the students in a large district in the hands of a very small number of parents. The requirements imposed on the SLAC and the district are burdensome and not necessary for meaningful community engagement.

## **Acquisition of Library Materials**

### **Current Challenges**

Timely acquisition of library materials that are vetted by certified librarians and professional library staff trained in library collection development policies and procedures.

Last year, 56,651 new items were added to AISD library collections. The requirement that the board of trustees review each list of library materials that have been donated to or that are proposed to be procured by a school library in the District is overly burdensome, delays the acquisition of library materials, and is unnecessary given the current process for review and acquisition.

### **Exemptions**

Texas Education Code § 33.026

### **Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code that Inhibit the District's Goals**

Texas Education Code § 33.026 requires the board of trustees to approve all library materials procured for or donated to a school library. However, the board of trustees is made of unpaid elected officials, many of whom have families and full-time jobs separate from their unpaid work for the District. It is not reasonable to expect them to be familiar with every title on every campus in the District. Rather, library acquisitions should be made by the full-time educators and professionals hired to do this work, many of whom have graduate degrees in library science, education, or literature. Exemption from this statute allows the board of trustees to rely on the District's professional staff, in consultation with the Local School Library Advisory Council, to make these decisions on behalf of the District.

### **Rationale for Innovations**

Austin ISD's current methodology for acquisition of and donation of library materials provides for the expeditious selection and vetting of materials by certified librarians and other professional library staff trained in library collection development policies and procedures. These educators use their professional training and experience as well as authoritative review sources to confirm age and grade level appropriateness, student appeal, accuracy, timeliness, relevance, literary quality, compliance with District standards and state law, and alignment with the specific needs and interests of the students, staff, and families at their individual campuses.

Exemption from this statute allows the board of trustees to rely on the District's professional staff to make these decisions on behalf of the District. The District's EFB(LOCAL) sets standards for library collection development, evaluation of materials, and a request for reconsideration of library material.

## **Challenge of Library Materials**

### **Current Challenges**

Challenges that are unresolved for a long period of time frustrate parents and others challenging the library material and keep the material out of circulation and unavailable for students.

### **Exemptions**

Texas Education Code § 33.027

### **Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code that Inhibit the District's Goals**

Texas Education Code § 33.027 creates a process for a person residing in the District to challenge library materials. The statutory process requires the board of trustees to consider a challenge to library materials within 90 days after the challenge is submitted. The statute requires that, immediately after a challenge is filed, all students must be prohibited from accessing the challenged material while the challenge is pending, regardless of where the library materials were housed or the intended age and maturity level of the students prohibited from accessing them. The District values community input, but the statutory framework for resolving challenges is unduly restrictive.

### **Rationale for Innovations**

The District can more effectively consider challenges through its own framework, tailored to meet the needs of its community. Exemption from this statute allows AISD to implement its own challenge procedures, set out in EFB(LOCAL), which provides informal challenges and formal challenges

## **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