

# FOLLETT INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN



March 21st, 2024-March 21st, 2029

## **Purpose**

HB 1842 was passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session in 2015 and permits eligible Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. On November 6, 2018, the Follett Independent School Districts' board of Trustees passed a Resolution to adopt a District of Innovation Plan to increase control over district operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibilities in order to improve educational outcomes to benefit our students and community. To become a District of Innovation and access flexibilities provided by such a designation, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in TEC Chapter 12A.

## **Term**

The term of the Local Innovation Plan will begin on March 21, 2024 and end at the end of the March 21, 2029, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The committee will revisit the plan annually to ensure that the recommendations are still in line with the needs of the district. Any changes recommended would be on the website for 30 days and require approval of the Innovation Committee and the School Board.

## **Members of Committee**

Ashley Meeks	Kindergarten Teacher
Angie Slater	1 <sup>st</sup> grade Teacher
Leah Terrell	Secondary RLA Teacher
Carrie Weidner	Secondary Science Teacher
Conni Nelson	Special Education Teacher
Valerie Williamson	Paraprofessional
Kassidy Baker	Counselor
Zach Wynn	Community
David Meeks	Business
Catherine Davis	Parent
Liz Stinson	Parent
Ashley Wilson	Principal
Megan Robertson	Superintendent

## Innovations

### 1. School Start Date/ Last Day of School

**Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.0811, §25.0812**

*Board Policies Affected: (EB Legal) (EB Local)*

TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of August. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community. Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, but the Texas tourism lobbied to have this revoked because they believed it was hurting their business. Therefore, several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday with no exceptions. TEC 25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Innovation Strategies**

1. Follett ISD will have the flexibility to begin school before the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of August (as decided by the Site Based Decision Making Committee.) This will better balance the days in the fall and spring semesters and provide more educational days prior to scheduled state assessments.
2. Relief from the statute will allow Follett ISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.
3. Alignment of the district calendar with dual credit classes to increase our college and career readiness.
4. Provide for increased local control of the instructional calendar in order to be responsive to community needs.

2. **Teacher Certification**

**Exemption from: Texas Education Code §21.003, §21.053, §21.055, §21.057**

*Board Policies Affected: (DK Legal) (DK Exhibit) (DBA Legal) (DBA Local)*

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 of 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 appropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

**Innovation Strategies**

1. The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the available position; however, when 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 open position. In core subjects, K-12k individuals must have a Bachelor's Degree. By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of employment with the District, the individual must have completed certification requirements if the individual is teaching core subjects.

2. The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher (including those with out-of-state certifications) to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified.
  
3. An individual with experience in the content of a course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or 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.
  
4. 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 with teacher mentoring, increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources and/or other supports.
  
5. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.
  
6. 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.
  
7. All teachers will still be required to complete the criminal background check in compliance with State Board of Education rules.

**3. Teacher Contracts Days of Service**  
**Exemption from: Texas Education Code §21.401**  
*Board Policies Affected: (DC Legal) (DC Local)*

TEC 21.401 states that a teacher must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

**Innovation Strategies**

1. FISD seeks to align 10-month contract employees with the “minutes of instruction” requirement of 75, 600 minutes for students.
2. During those 10-months, teachers will be expected to meet the 75, 600 minutes of daily instruction as well as serve in his/her professional capacity during staff development days and teacher workdays.
3. Teacher contracts will more closely align with the 75,600 instructional minutes required for students and will also include staff development/workdays. This flexibility will afford FISD opportunities to create a culture/climate that empower us to leverage time based on student outcomes.
4. Professional employees will not receive a reduction in pay for any reduction in service realized by this change.
5. The determination of days required to fulfill an employee’s contract should be a local decision.
6. It may increase the daily rate on the professional salary scale (for teachers only).
7. It will enhance teacher recruitment, therefore putting the District on a more level playing field with neighboring districts.

#### 4. **Instructional Minutes/Length of Instructional Day**

**Exempt from: Texas Education Code §25.0811, §25.0812**

*Board Policies Affected: (EB Legal) (EC Legal)*

House Bill (HB) 2610, passed by the 84 Texas Legislature, amends the Texas Education Code §25.081, by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this with language requiring districts to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess). The bill also allows school districts to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disaster, flood, extreme weather conditions, etc. 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 toward the 75,600 minutes required annually.

#### **Innovation Strategies**

1. **Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement would allow the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders.**
2. This flexibility would allow, for example, a later start/early release time which would accommodate additional professional development/collaboration opportunities.

## 5. Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers

**Exemption from: Texas Education Code §21.102 (b)**  
*Board Policies Affected: (DCA Legal)*

TEC 21.102 (b) states that a probationary contract may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment with the district.

### **Innovation Strategies**

- a. Exemption would include the option of extending the probationary period to three years, instead of one year, for experienced teachers that are new to the district. This will allow the district sufficient time to adequately evaluate the teacher's classroom performance and provide the teacher with sufficient time to acclimate to the district's educational environment.
  
- b. This extension will not be mandatory, but may be utilized when deemed appropriate by the District.



**6. School Health Advisory Committee**

**Exemption from: Texas Education Code §28.004**

*Board Policies Affected: (BDF Legal) (EHAA Legal)*

TEC 28.004 states that a district establish a health advisory committee to ensure that local values are reflected in the district's health education instruction.

**Innovation Strategies**

1. As a small school district, committee members are aware of the needs of the district and the students. Therefore, the site based decision making committee will address the district's health education needs as well.
2. This will consolidate the number of meetings and the number of committees required by law and better serve this community.
3. The SBDM committee will convene at least 2 times per year and address a multitude of needs as opposed to having one meeting after another throughout the year.

**7. Number of College Days Attendance Rule  
Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.087 (b-2)**

*Board Policies Affected: (FEC Legal)*

TEC 25.087 (b-2) allows a school district to excuse a student from attending school to visit an institution of higher education during the student's junior and senior years of high school for the purpose of determining the student's interest in attending the institution of higher education, provided that: (1) the district may not excuse for this purpose more than two days during the student's junior year and two days during the student's senior year; and (2) the district adopts: (A) a policy to determine when an absence will be excused for this purpose; and (B) a procedure to verify the student's visit at the institution of high education.

**Innovation Strategies**

1. Follett ISD is in a very remote location in relation to a number of schools that FISD students are interested in attending. Limiting students to only 2 days does not allow for students to travel round-trip as well as visit a campus.
2. FISD will waive the 2-day limit per year and adopt a policy allowing seniors to miss 4 days per year, juniors to miss 3 days per year, sophomores to miss 2 days per year and freshman to miss 1 day per year.
3. FISD will expand its college and career readiness emphasis by allowing students 9-12 to visit colleges of interest. This will allow students to gain a greater understanding of the steps needed to achieve their college/career goals at an earlier age.

## **8. 90% Attendance Rule**

### **Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.092**

*Board Policies Affected: (FEC Legal)*

TEC 25.092 currently requires students attend class 90 percent of the school days in order to earn credit. The law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on “seat time” rather than based on content mastery.

## **Innovation Strategies**

1. The 90% rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. It will also allow FISD administrators to award credit to students because they can show they understand the concepts, rather than because they’ve attended a certain number of school days.
2. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the District by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, location and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts and reducing dropouts. This exemption supports personalized learning for both students and parents.
3. Relief from Section 15.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher’s right to determine the finality of a grade nor does it restrict or alter a teacher’s right to assign grades in accordance with TEC Section 28.0216.

## **9. Optional Health Benefits [TEC 22.004(i) & Related Board Policies: CR(LEGAL) and CRD(LEGAL)]**

- Current: 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 coverage provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all District employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. This provision does not give the District the flexibility needed to acquired benefits packages that would allow potentially more attractive to prospective employees.

### **Innovation Strategies**

1. In order to seek or have an option to offer additional benefits options to employees, the District proposes that the District of Innovation Plan be amended to exempt the District from the health insurance requirements in Texas Education Code 22.004(i).