

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, provides the opportunity for Texas public school districts to pursue the designation of District of Innovation. This allows local school districts to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code to allow more flexibility and local control for innovative programming. On December 12, 2016, the Mount Pleasant Independent School District passed a Resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation in order to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students in the community.

On January 17, 2017, the MPISD School Board held a Public Hearing to allow the public to learn more about the designation and provide feedback. The School Board appointed a Local Innovation Committee comprised of campus and district level administrators to prepare a Local Innovation Plan to address the needs of the District on January 23, 2017.

This Local Innovation Committee met to develop an initial draft of the Local Innovation Plan. The plan was posted online for public viewing and feedback on February 9, 2017, and remained online until March 10, 2017. MPISD held a public meeting for anyone that wanted to contribute their opinion on March 6, 2017. The Local Innovation Committee met to consider feedback received and finalize the plan on March 9, 2017. The plan was presented to the MPISD Site Base Committee (EIC) and it was recommended by the committee that the plan be presented to the School Board for consideration.

II. Term

The term of the Local Innovation Plan will begin at the start of the 2017-2018 school year and end at the end of the 2021-2022 School Year, 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, the MPISD Site Base Committee and the School Board.

III. Continual Improvement

The Local Innovation Plan is guided by and aligned with the Board's Vision, Mission, Strategic Priorities, and Strategic Plan for the District as follows:

Mission Statement

To graduate students with the ability to read, think, and communicate

Vision Statement

Every child has every chance to learn.

MPISD Goals

- Goal I Improve the academic performance for all students
- Goal II Provide creative and innovative professional development in instruction and administration based on student performance
- Goal III Provide technological hardware and software to increase effectiveness of student learning, instructional management, staff development, and administration
- Goal IV Provide safe and disciplined environment on all campuses along with appropriate behavior management programs
- Goal V Prepare all students for campus and career/college transitions
- Goal VI Recruit, employ, and retain a well-qualified, professional staff

Innovations Recommended:

The MPISD School Board and the MPISD Leadership Team considered all area available for local innovation and recommended a plan that centers around the following areas:

Class Size in Kindergarten through 4th Grade

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

Sec. 25.111. requires that districts employ a sufficient number of teachers certified to maintain an average ration of not less than one teacher for each 20 students in average daily attendance except as provided by 25.112

Sec. 25.112. requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten – 4th grade classes.

Sec 25.113 requires district to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits.

Explanation:

- Schools begin the school year with staff based on projections of student enrollment. Often, enrollment will exceed projections for one school while under projections for another school. As a result, teachers and/or students must be moved from class to class or school to school to meet the 22-to-1 requirement. As a result, students leave behind friends and teacher relationships that have already formed.
- Being exempt from the inflexible 22-to-1 requirement will allow students to remain with the teacher and classmates that they began the year with, fostering continuity and stability which will support increased student achievement.
- Incoming students can remain in their preferred neighborhood school rather than have to be transported to a different campus.
- Districts will not be forced to hire new teachers not accounted for in the Local Board's adopted Budget.

Innovation Plan:

- The District will strive to keep class sizes at 22:1 or less, with the flexibility to go above 22:1 if needed without adversely affecting instruction and learning.
- Before the student/teacher ratio average across a grade level exceeds 22:1, it must have administrator preapproval. Campus principal will notify the Superintendent in writing when this happens.
- Should the student/teacher ratio average across a grade level need to exceed 24:1, parents of all students in each affected class, and the School Board will be notified.
- The District will employ enough staff to satisfy the ratio of 20 to 1 in average daily attendance; however, this shall include those staff members with the Innovative Permit.

First Day of Instruction

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC § 25.0811: A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Explanation:

- District Improvement Committee will have the flexibility to start school no earlier than the second Monday in August, for either the entire District or individual campuses.
- Starting earlier than the fourth Monday in August will balance the two semesters, keeping exams prior to Christmas Break, and provide more instructional time before STAAR/EOC/AP exams.
- The balanced semesters will align with college semesters as well, allowing more opportunities for summer school, internships, and industrial certification opportunities and better fitting dual credit classes.
- This change will also allow time for periodic staff development to plan and improve instruction, review district assessment data and adjust instructional needs accordingly.

Innovation Plan:

The District Site-Based Committee will receive parent and staff input, then decide, subject to School Board approval, on an approved calendar.

Teacher Contracts

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21.102 (b): A probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period 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 by the district.

Explanation:

- MPISD desires a period of time longer than one year but less than 4 years to evaluate a new-to-MPISD certified employee eligible for a Chapter 21 contract under the 5-of-8 rule.

Innovation Plan:

- Qualifying certified professionals new to MPISD but not new to education; will be notified in writing of the local plan of innovation prior to signing their contract.
- Campus principals will evaluate certified professionals under their supervision and submit to Human Resources the recommendation for a subsequent contract prior to March 20th.

School District Teaching Permit

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21.003(a) states that a person may not be employed as a teacher 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.

Explanation:

- Rural, high poverty districts have the hardest time filling positions with quality instructors, especially in subjects where state-wide shortages exist. 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/local certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification. TEA then approves or denies this request. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district. Furthermore, there have been instances when persons meeting the criteria outlined in TEC§21.057 have been denied local certification because they were actively, yet unnecessarily, pursuing an alternative certification. Additionally, highly qualified standards/notifications have been removed from federal requirements under ESSA Act.

Innovation Plan:

Mount Pleasant ISD will continue its quest for highly effective educators.

1. In order to best serve MPISD students, all decisions on teacher certification and assignments will be handled locally.
2. All teacher hired will have at minimum a baccalaureate degree (except for permitted career and technical subjects).
3. Parental notification of Local Innovative Permits shall not be necessary. Nor will a teacher certification waiver, state permit application, notifications or other paperwork be submitted to the Texas Education Agency or other district stakeholders.
4. The campus principal may submit to the Superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach one subject in which he/she is not certified.
 - i. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the subject/field of study.
 - ii. Emergency or financial situations creating the need for this assignment should also be noted.
5. When possible, lesson plans will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field
6. MPISD will allow Local Innovative Permits based on skills and experiences outside the traditional teacher certification pathway.
 - i. An individual with certain qualifications who is not certified as a teacher will be eligible to teach in hard-to-fill positions including, but not limited to, TEA approved shortage areas such as special education, mathematics, science, Languages Other than English (LOTE), Career & Technical Education (CTE), Bilingual Education, etc.

- ii. The principal will submit to the superintendent and/or the superintendent's designee, a request for District Teaching Permit (local certification) outlining all the individual's credentials/qualifications.
- iii. Qualifications that may be considered include but are not limited to:
 - i. Professional work experience
 - ii. Formal training and education
 - iii. Active professional relevant industry certification or registration
 - iv. Combination of work experience, training, and education
 - v. Demonstration of successful experience working with students.
 - vi. Enrollment in a training program or ACP
7. The superintendent or his/her designee will then approve the request if it is believed the individual possesses the knowledge, skills and/or experience required of the position and has the potential to be an asset to students.
8. An employee working under a Local Innovative Permit will not receive a contract but will work on an at-will basis. At the district's discretion, an Employment Agreement may be utilized.
9. Determinations shall be made on a case-by-case basis.
10. An employee working under a Local Innovative Permit will adhere to the same professional standards, ethics, and requirements of all certified teachers.
11. An employee working under a Local Innovative Permit will be appraised under the same teacher appraisal system as required of all certified teachers.
12. A Local Innovative Permit will meet the necessary qualification requirements to allow funding for CTE courses.

Campus Behavior Coordinator

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §37.0012 requires that a person be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator (CBC) who is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementation of Chapter 37 and allows duties imposed on a campus principal or other campus administrator to be performed by the campus behavior coordinator.

Explanation:

- MPISD will be able to put the control of the discipline plan back in the hands of the principal and allows for delegation of this plan's requirements to be enforced and overseen by other administrators on the campus.
- Allows for delegation of duties to be assigned to an administrator who already has a relationship with the student and will be better equipped to serve the best interest of each individual student.

Innovation Plan:

- The Campus Principal will divide and/or delegate duties to campus administrators as needed. Examples: parent notification of disciplinary action, notice of law enforcement action, restraint reports, corporal punishment, video recordings, etc.

Local Role in Teacher & Principal Evaluations

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC 21.203, 21.352 & 21.3541 The State of Texas has used the PDAS teacher appraisal system and this year began using the T-TESS and P-TESS system for evaluating teachers and principals.

Explanation:

- This would allow local flexibility to evaluate various performance measures, including classroom observations, goal setting and tracking, and collective (not individual) student growth progress toward identified learning objectives.

Innovation Plan:

- MPISD leadership team will develop and implement a teacher and administrative appraisal system that seeks to meet the needs of Mount Pleasant students and faculty and review and adapt this plan annually as needed for student success.
- The confidentiality of evaluations will be maintained and will not be breached.

Inter-district Transfers

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC § 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

Explanation:

- In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules, and regulations of the District.
- On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. By eliminating the one-year provision, we can work towards keeping our campuses safe and providing an appropriate instructional setting to all.

Innovation Plan:

Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

90% Attendance Rule

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC § 25.092 Students must attend class 90% of the school days in order to receive credit.

Explanation:

- This statutory provision requires district to award credit based on seat time and content mastery.
- Students who attend extra-curricular events are not exempt from this requirement. Abstaining from this requirement means the district won't have to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances such as hospitalization.
- The provision allows the district to promote students' engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities.

Innovation Plan:

The district will set the rules applicable to our student's needs and if necessary determine on a case by case basis the earned credit received by a student.

Relief from this statute does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. This provision also in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code §28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code §28.0216

Student Discipline

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §37.007(c) and TEC §37.010(b) Students may be expelled or removed from the DAEP setting for the following reasons:

- (1) Deliberate violent behavior that poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others;
- (2) Extortion, meaning the gaining of money or other property by force or threat;
- (3) Conduct that constitutes coercion, as defined by Penal Code 1.07; or
- (4) Conduct that constitutes the offense of:
 - a. Public lewdness under Penal Code 21.07;
 - b. Indecent exposure under Penal Code 21.08;
 - c. Criminal mischief under Penal Code 28.03;
 - d. Personal hazing under Penal Code 37.152; or
 - e. Harassment, under Penal Code 42.07(a)(1), of a student or district employee.

Explanation:

The Mount Pleasant ISD DAEP has a structured system of discipline. The Texas Education Code makes no allowance for expulsion of students whose persistent misbehavior disrupts instruction and is detrimental to the educational environment.

Innovation Plan:

A student placed in a District Alternative Educational Program (DAEP) who engages in documented serious misbehavior that disrupts instruction and is detrimental to the educational environment while on the DAEP campus, despite documented behavioral interventions, may be removed from class and expelled.

A student placed in a DAEP who engages in documented persistent misbehavior that disrupts instruction and is detrimental to the educational environment while on the DAEP campus, despite documented behavioral interventions, may be removed from class and expelled.