

Mount Pleasant Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

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 insert date, 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 insert date, 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 insert date.

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 insert date, and remained online until insert date. MPISD held a public meeting for anyone that wanted to contribute their opinion on insert date. The Local Innovation Committee met and based on the feedback received, finalized the plan on insert date. The final 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. The Local Innovation Committee presented the plan to the School Board, and the Board adopted the plan on insert date.

II. Term

The term of the Local Innovation Plan will begin August 1, 2022 and end July 31, 2027, 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 Based 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

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| 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 ratio 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.

TEC § 25.0812: A school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15th.

Explanation:

- Starting earlier than the fourth Monday in August and ending prior to May 15th 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 or returning to MPISD but not new to education; will be notified 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.

Local Innovative 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. 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.
3. 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.
4. When possible, lesson plans will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field
5. 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 Local Innovative 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
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. Determinations shall be made on a case-by-case basis.
9. An employee working under a Local Innovative Permit will adhere to the same professional standards, ethics, and requirements of all certified teachers.
10. An employee working under a Local Innovative Permit will be appraised under the same teacher appraisal system as required of all certified teachers.
11. 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.

TEC § 21.354 (C) and TEC §21.3541 (g) Each school district shall appraise each administrator annually.

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.

Student Discipline

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §37.006 (a) Subject to the requirements of Section 37.009(a) A student shall be removed from class and placed in disciplinary alternative education program as provided by Section 37.008 if the student: (2) commits the following on or within 300 feet of school property, as measured from any point on the school's real property boundary line, or while attending a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off of school property; (C-2) possesses, uses, sells, gives, or delivers to another person an e-cigarette, as defined by Section 161.081, Health and Safety Code.

Explanation:

- Mount Pleasant ISD will make discipline decisions based on local policy and district administrators will have the flexibility to assign disciplinary consequences as needed.

Innovation Plan:

- Any student in violation of this statute will receive the following consequences for their action.
 - 1st Offense-3 days of ISS
 - 2nd Offense-3-6 days of ISS
 - 3rd Offense DAEP placement.

School Health Advisory Committee

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §28.004 (d-1), (m) (1) (2) (3) (4) This law implements strict meeting (at least 4 times per year) and reporting guidelines for the School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC).

Explanation:

Reporting guidelines conflict with confidentiality concerns in most situations. Flexibility in scheduling meetings will be help address needs and concerns throughout the year.

Innovation Plan:

The members of the SHAC will determine how often the committee should meet and how it should make a formal report to the Board of Trustees. Guidelines will include the requirement of meeting at least once per year. The SHAC shall also determine its own formal reporting guidelines.

Mentors

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21 458 This law requires that the mentor teacher must complete a state approved training program prior to the start of school.

Explanation:

- A training plan focused on local needs is a better service to our instructional staff. Flexibility of the schedule will allow additions, revisions to curriculum to be made when necessary. Appropriate training will occur throughout the year when needed.

Innovation Plan:

- Mount Pleasant ISD will create a local training program that is tailored to the needs of the district. The program will be ongoing throughout the year.

Service Record

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21 4031 A school district that previously employed an individual shall provide, upon request, a copy of the individual's service record to the school district employing the individual no later the 30th day after the later of:

- 1 – the date the request is made; or
- 2 – the date of the last day of the individual's service to the district.

Explanation:

- Mount Pleasant ISD desires a period of time longer than 30 days for record retrieval, processing, verification, and delivery of service records to ensure accuracy, especially for those still completing contracts.

Innovation Plan:

- Mount Pleasant ISD will adopt a period of 60 days for a copy of service records to be sent to the requested school district.

Contract Renewal or Nonrenewal

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21 103 The board of trustees must give notice of its decision to terminate the employment to the teacher not later than the 10th day of instruction.

TEC §21 206 Not later than the 10th day before the last day of instruction in a school year, the board of trustees shall notify in writing each teacher whose contract is about to expire whether the board proposes to renew or not renew the contract.

Explanation:

- End of school year events often create instances that the district would like to utilize in its evaluation of teachers and its employment needs.

Innovation Plan:

- Mount Pleasant ISD board of trustees must give notice of its decision to renew, not renew or terminate the employment to the teacher not later than the 5th day before the last day of instruction.

Planning and Preparation Time

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21 404 and §21 405 Each classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for planning. This time may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day. The definition of instructional day in this statute is while students are in classes.

Explanation:

- Mount Pleasant ISD teachers begin their day prior to students arrival and after students leave. By allowing planning time to include this time frame teachers will have more flexibility for planning time and extra instructional time with students.

Innovation Plan:

- Mount Pleasant ISD teachers will receive 450 minutes within each two-week period for planning. This time may not be less than 45 minutes with the work day.

Teacher Contract Days

TEC Code Requiring Exemption:

TEC §21 401 A contract between a school district and an educator must be a minimum of 10 months service and at least 187 days.

Explanation:

- When TEC §25 081 was changed from 180 instructional days to 75,600 minutes of instruction for students; the 10-month contracts were not adjusted.

Innovation Plan:

- Mount Pleasant ISD will determine the number of days teachers work based on the needs of the students which is determined by the annual district needs assessment. MPISD would like to have

the flexibility to determine the number of days teachers work at the local level. The number of days would be based on the student calendar. The plan will have no effect on a teacher's salary.