

# FORT HANCOCK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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*Success for ALL*



# 2018 - 2023

# District of Innovation Plan

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## District of Innovation Overview

The District of Innovation concept, passed by 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, gives traditional independent school districts like Fort Hancock Independent School District most of the flexibilities available to Texas open-enrollment charter schools.

Some of the benefits of becoming a District of Innovation:

- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Customization:** Districts can create an innovation plan for a level of school (e.g., only high schools), grade level, or a single campus.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.
- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from mandates such as:
  - School start date
  - 90% attendance rule
  - Class-size ratios
  - Site-based decision-making processes
  - Certain student discipline provisions
  - Use of planning and preparation periods
  - Teacher appraisal requirements

This innovation plan was developed by twenty-one members that included teachers, administrators, parents, and community members in an effort to improve the academic and programmatic systems influencing student growth. The DOI Committee focused on exploring PK-12 innovative pathways and identifying which benefits of this house bill would provide the district the flexibilities to give additional time to teachers for planning, preparation, and professional development to fulfill the needs of identified pathways within a five-year plan.

On April 12, 2018, the Fort Hancock ISD Board of Trustees approved a resolution to initiate the process of becoming a District of Innovation (DOI). On March 28, 2018 during Leadership Meeting, the District of Innovation process was shared with all campus principals and district personnel. On May 1, 2018 the DOI Committee met to review and brainstorm the possible exemptions and innovations to meet the needs of our students and learning community. Plan drafting began May 1, 2018. From May 1, 2018-June 14, 2018 the DOI plan was finalized for approval with input from the DOI Committee and district personnel. This five-year District of Innovation Plan, beginning with the 2018-2019 school year and concluding at the end of the 2022-2023 school year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of

Trustees in accordance with law. The District of Innovation Committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the plan and make recommendations to the board accordingly.

## District of Innovation Committee

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| District               | <p>Susana Estrada, Dual Language Elementary Teacher<br/>         Jose G. Franco, Superintendent<br/>         Gloria Galindo, Director of Curriculum &amp; Instruction<br/>         Victoria Gonzalez, Executive Director of Finance<br/>         Teresa Gonzalez, Elementary Guidance Counselor<br/>         Adan Lopez, High School Guidance Counselor<br/>         Danny Medina, Middle School Principal<br/>         Lorena Molinar, High School Principal<br/>         Amber Moseley, Secondary ELAR Teacher<br/>         Yadira Munoz, Elementary Principal<br/>         Ysela Ortega, CTE Teacher<br/>         Christine Robeldo, District Reading Coach<br/>         Yvonne Samaniego, Director of Curriculum &amp; Instruction<br/>         Jess Schultz, Middle School Guidance Counselor</p> |
| Parents /<br>Community | <p>Patricia Hernandez, Parent<br/>         Elisa Rodriguez, Parent<br/>         Analy Velador, Parent</p>  |

## District of Innovation Timeline

- April 12, 2018:  
Board of Trustees approved the resolution to consider designation of Fort Hancock ISD as a District of Innovation.
- April 12, 2018:  
Board of Trustees approved the District of Innovation Committee
- May 1, 2018:  
Held initial District of Innovation (DOI) meeting to discuss what options were available as a District of Innovation
- May 7, 2018:  
Held second DOI meeting to review and discuss draft of DOI plan.
- May 10, 2018:  
DOIC presents plan to campus personnel for feedback.
- May 11, 2018:  
Post the DOI plan on the district website for 30 days & Inform TEA Commissioner.
- May 21, 2018:  
Hold third DOI meeting to complete plan to be presented at the Public Hearing.
- May 29, 2018:  
Public Hearing with DIOC.
- June 14, 2018:  
Present to Board of Trustees for approval.
- June 15, 2018  
Fort Hancock ISD will submit DOI Plan to Commissioner of Education  
Update all policy changes with TASB based on legal counsel recommendation.

## Areas of Innovation

### 1. First and Last Day of Instruction/Early Release

(Exemption from TEC §25.0811)

**Current:** TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August.

**Proposal:** These laws restrict flexibility in the design of academic calendars to fit the instructional needs of the school district. The flexibility to begin instruction earlier in August will enable the district to develop a calendar that best meets the needs of the students in Fort Hancock ISD. An earlier start date allows a better balance between semesters, more instructional days prior to mandatory state testing. An earlier school start date allows these students to register for summer classes and attend new student orientation meetings without missing instructional time.

### 2. Teacher Certification

(Exemption From: TEC §21.003(a) TEC §21.053, TEC §21.102)

**Current Law:** 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.

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 teacher if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC §21.102 Under current Texas Chapter 21 professional employee employment guidelines, probationary periods for newly hired teachers, counselors, and nurses who have been employed within public education for at least five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one year.

**Proposal:** Fort Hancock ISD will continue to seek traditionally certified candidates for all teaching positions. A waiver would allow a certified teacher to teach one subject outside his/her certified field. This would require the submission of credentials and superintendent approval. However,

for Dual Credit and/or CTE courses for which a traditionally certified candidate is not identified, the District will recruit instructors with an appropriate Master's degree (dual credit) or industry certifications/experience in the field of need (CTE). Fort Hancock ISD can extend the employee a one year local certificate approved by the superintendent. The District will develop minimum required qualifications for persons hired for such positions and will also identify required professional development in the areas of student management, instructional strategies, curriculum and more.

After thoroughly vetting candidates for hire, Fort Hancock ISD will consider the instructors hired for these positions to be appropriately qualified. This innovation will allow Fort Hancock ISD to consider broader applicant pools and to broaden the district's course offerings or fill hard-to-staff positions while maintaining a high quality of instruction.

Fort Hancock ISD believes this limited probationary contract time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the professional employee's effectiveness. Relief from Texas Education Code 21.102 will permit the Fort Hancock ISD the option to issue a probationary contract for a period in length of up to two years for experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses newly hired by the district. This will allow the district additional time to evaluate professional performance. Regardless of whether any adjustments or changes are made to Texas Education Code employment laws, Fort Hancock ISD believes this issue is best served as a local decision as opposed to a state mandate.

**Local Guidelines:** FHISD will continue to comply with TEC §21.003(a), TEC §21.053, TEC §21.057 by allowing non-certified instructors to provide instruction for Dual Credit and/or CTE courses.