

# Ezzell Independent School District

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## District of Innovation Plan

Lavaca County, Texas

Proposed Term: 2026–2031

### I. Introduction

Ezzell Independent School District seeks to operate as a District of Innovation in order to increase local control and provide flexibility in meeting the educational needs of its students. Ezzell ISD is a small rural district serving students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 on a single campus. Flexibility from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code will allow the district to recruit and retain high-quality staff, provide innovative instructional opportunities, and maximize limited resources.

### II. Comprehensive Educational Program

The innovation plan supports the district mission of providing a high-quality comprehensive education through efficient use of available resources. The following goals guide the implementation of this plan:

- Provide better instructional opportunities for all students.
- Provide the small school setting with opportunities to operate efficiently.
- Improve teacher recruitment and retention.

### III. Innovation Strategies and Exemptions from Texas Education Code

#### 1. First Day of Instruction (TEC §25.0811)

**Current Requirement:** Districts may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday in August.

**Innovation:** Ezzell ISD may begin the school year earlier in August if determined beneficial by the Board of Trustees.

**Rationale:** Flexibility in the school start date allows the district to align with nearby districts and college schedules, complete the first semester before winter break, and provide additional instructional time before state assessments.

#### 2. Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003 and §21.057)

**Current Requirement:** Teachers must hold state certification for assigned subject areas.

**Innovation:** The Superintendent may authorize qualified individuals who do not hold traditional certification to teach specific courses when appropriate.

**Rationale:** This flexibility assists the district in addressing teacher shortages in rural areas and allows the district to employ professionals with relevant subject matter expertise, particularly in Career and Technical Education and specialized electives.

### 3. Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers (TEC §21.102)

**Current Requirement:** Experienced teachers hired from other districts may only be placed on a one-year probationary contract.

**Innovation:** Ezzell ISD may issue probationary contracts for up to two years for experienced teachers newly employed by the district.

**Rationale:** This flexibility provides the District additional time to evaluate performance and determine long-term compatibility.

### 4. Flexible Scheduling (TEC §25.081)

**Current Requirement:** A school district must operate at least 75,600 minutes per school year. These minutes include instruction, intermissions, and recess. The law no longer requires a fixed number of days (like 180 days); instead, minutes are the controlling standard.

**Innovation:** While this is not an exemption from the 75,600 minutes requirement, the District has determined that “Flexible Scheduling” allows the District to lengthen or shorten the school day and/or use a 4-day week or alternative calendars. Additionally, the District may build in intersessions, enrichment days, or staff days. The District will continue to meet the 75,600 minutes requirement.

**Rationale:** Flexible scheduling allows a small district to maximize shared staffing, coordinate extracurricular travel, and provide meaningful professional development.

### 5. Class Size Flexibility (TEC §25.112)

**Current Requirement:** Kindergarten through fourth grade classes are limited to 22 students per teacher.

**Innovation:** Ezzell ISD may locally manage class size limits when necessary without seeking a state waiver.

**Rationale:** In a small rural district with multi-grade instructional settings, flexibility allows the district to utilize staff efficiently while still maintaining quality instruction.

### 6. Student Transfers (TEC §25.036)

**Current Requirement:** Texas Education Code Section 25.036 states that a student, “...may transfer annually from the child’s school district of residence to another district in this state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian or person having lawful control of the child jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer.” This provision has been interpreted to require a school transfer to be for a period of one year.

**Innovation:** Allows the District to revoke a transfer at any time of the year when the school superintendent determines that the student has violated the terms of the transfer agreement, is not meeting disciplinary expectations by being assigned discipline consequences, has excessive absence issues, whose behavior repeatedly interferes with the school district's ability to educate the student body, or the availability of space and staff is impacted by the enrollment of new resident students. The decision to revoke a transfer student's enrollment can be made at any time of the instructional calendar. Students are permitted to reapply for transfer readmission after one full school year following the revocation of their transfer.

**Rationale:** This allows the District to maintain high standards for students and allows in-district students to be educated in classroom settings with minimal disruptions to their learning environment. Students will be held to high expectations for appropriate behavior and conduct on school campus. An unexpected increase in non-transfer enrollment will not put the District in a need for additional staff or programs; and Transfer students will not add a hardship to the campus or District.

#### **7. Planning and Decision-Making Process (TEC §11.251)**

**Current Requirement:** TEC requires District/campus-level planning and decision-making committee to include representative professional staff, including, if practicable, at least one representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities, parents of students enrolled in the district, business representatives, and community members. The committee shall include a business representative without regard to whether the representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is located in the district. Community members must reside in the district and must be at least 18 years of age. A parent who is an employee of the district is not considered a parent representative on the committee. A parent is not considered a representative of community members on the committee.

**Innovation:** The District will have flexibility in determining the composition and membership of district- and campus-level planning and decision-making committees.

**Rationale:** The district will continue to ensure that all required stakeholders are represented. Due to the size of the community, it is often a challenging task to secure appropriate representation on all committees. The required committee membership limits the degree of parent involvement in the decision-making process. The limited number of professional staff-members available to serve makes it unnecessary to nominate and elect members. Flexibility will allow the district/campus to establish membership that ensures the most effective decisions are made.

#### **8. School District Depositories (TEC §45.205 & TEC §45.206)**

**Current Requirement:** Currently, the district must renew its depository contract every two years. The two-year contract term begins and ends in odd-numbered years. In accordance with the Texas Education Code, the District must use a uniform bid or proposal in the form prescribed by the State Board of Education.

**Innovation:** The District may extend depository agreements beyond the eight-year period with mutual agreement.

**Rationale:** By gaining exemption from this statute, Ezzell ISD would be able to allow the district's existing bank contract to be extended beyond the total eight-year allowable contract term if the district determines contract pricing remains competitive and there is no operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out to bid. This exemption would lessen the administrative and financial burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP). In addition, this would afford the district flexibility with respect to local banking relationships. At the end of each two-year term, the district and the depository bank may agree to extend the contract for an additional two-year period. The district must review the contract to ensure the best value and support for the district and obtain Board approval for each extension and contract renewal. This exemption does not hinder the district's ability to release a formal procurement for depository contract services, in lieu of negotiating an extension to the existing bank contract, if deemed necessary based on operational or financial reasons.

#### 9. Counselor time and effort (TEC §33.006)

**Current Requirement:** Requires that counselors spend no more than 20% of their time on non-counseling duties and maintain documentation of time use.

**Innovation:** The District will maintain local control to determine the appropriate allocation of school counselor duties based on campus needs, student services priorities, and operational considerations.

**Rationale:** The District seeks this exemption to increase local control and flexibility in the use of a school counselor. The requirement to document and limit time spent on non-counseling duties can restrict the District from responding efficiently to student and operational needs. By removing these constraints, the District can better align counselor responsibilities with campus priorities while continuing to support students' academic, career, and social-emotional development.

#### 10. Grievance Pathways (TEC §11.1511(b)(13))

**Current Requirement:** The new law requires the adoption and implementation of a uniform grievance process.

**Innovation:** The District will maintain local control over the development, adoption, and administration of grievance procedures for students, parents, and employees. The Board retains the authority to establish and revise grievance policies and processes in a manner that best serves the needs of the District and its stakeholders.

The statewide requirements for grievance procedures impose a uniform structure that may limit the District's ability to efficiently and effectively address local concerns. This exemption allows the District to design and implement grievance processes that are responsive, timely, and aligned with community expectations.

**Rationale:** By maintaining local flexibility, the District can streamline procedures, reduce administrative burden, and ensure that concerns are resolved at the most appropriate level while preserving fairness and due process for all parties involved.

#### **11. Library Advisory Councils and Library Procurement (TEC §33.025 and TEC §33.026)**

**Current Requirement:** The new laws require that library materials must be approved by the Board and that materials must be posted publicly for 30 days before approval.

**Innovation:** The District shall be exempt from any state law provisions governing the procurement, review, and approval of library materials, including requirements related to vendor restrictions, material approval processes, and mandated procedures for acquisition.

**Rationale:** The District will retain local control over the selection, purchase, and management of library materials and resources. The Board authorizes the Superintendent or designee to establish procedures that align with the instructional goals, community values, and operational needs of the District.

State-imposed requirements regarding library material procurement may create additional administrative burdens, delay access to instructional resources, and limit the District's ability to respond efficiently to campus needs.

This exemption allows the District to maintain a streamlined and locally responsive process for selecting and acquiring library materials. Local control ensures that decisions are made by individuals familiar with the District's students, curriculum, and community expectations, while promoting timely access to appropriate educational resources.

The District remains committed to ensuring that library materials are age-appropriate, educationally relevant, and aligned with community standards, and will continue to provide a process for addressing concerns related to library resources.

#### **12. Instructional Plans / Course Syllabi (TEC §26.062)**

**Current Requirement:** The law requires districts to post instructional plans and course syllabi on the district website each semester and provide them to parents and administration before the semester begins.

**Innovation:** The District shall be exempt from any state law or rule requiring the development, posting, or maintenance of a detailed instructional plan, scope and sequence, or syllabus for each course offered in the District.

The District will retain local control over curriculum documentation and instructional planning processes. The Superintendent or designee is authorized to determine the format, level of detail, and method of communication regarding course content in a manner that supports instructional effectiveness and operational efficiency.

**Rationale:** State requirements mandating detailed instructional plans or syllabi for every course may create an unnecessary administrative burden and limit instructional flexibility.

### 13. 90% Attendance Rule (TEC §25.092)

**Current Requirement:** Texas Education Code §25.092 requires that a student must attend at least 90% of the days a class is offered in order to receive credit or a final grade for the course.

**Innovation:** The District may develop and implement local guidelines for awarding credit or a final grade to students who attend fewer than 90% of the days a class is offered. The District may establish alternative methods for students to demonstrate mastery of course content.

**Rationale:** The 90% attendance requirement may limit the District's ability to address individual student circumstances. This exemption allows the District to consider extenuating circumstances such as illness, family needs, or participation in extracurricular and enrichment activities. Local flexibility ensures that students are evaluated based on mastery of content rather than solely on seat time, while still maintaining high academic expectations.

Such requirements can reduce teachers' ability to adapt instruction to meet the diverse and evolving needs of students.

This exemption allows the District to streamline curriculum processes, reduce duplicative documentation, and empower educators to focus on high-quality instruction. Local control ensures that curriculum guidance is provided in a manner that is practical, relevant, and responsive to student needs while maintaining alignment with state standards.

The District will continue to ensure that all instruction is aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and that parents and students have appropriate access to information regarding course expectations and learning objectives.

### 14. Teacher Contract Days (TEC §21.401)

**Current Requirement:** Texas Education Code §21.401 requires that teacher contracts provide for a minimum of 187 days of service.

**Innovation:** The District may establish teacher contracts with a number of days that differ from the 187-day requirement, as determined appropriate by the Board of Trustees.

**Rationale:** Flexibility in teacher contract days allows the District to align staff schedules with the instructional calendar and operational needs of the district. This exemption supports efficient use of resources, particularly in a small rural district, and enhances the District's ability to recruit and retain high-quality educators by offering more flexible work arrangements.

### 15. Teacher Appraisal System Flexibility (TEC §21.351 and §21.352)

**Current Requirement:** Texas Education Code §§21.351 and 21.352 require school districts to use a state-approved teacher appraisal system, such as the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), or a locally adopted system that meets state criteria.

**Innovation:** The District may modify the state-approved teacher appraisal system or develop a local appraisal process that aligns with district priorities and instructional goals, while maintaining compliance with any applicable state or federal requirements.

**Rationale:** A locally developed or modified appraisal system allows the District to focus on instructional practices and performance measures that are most relevant to its students and staff. This flexibility supports professional growth, reduces unnecessary administrative requirements, and promotes meaningful feedback tailored to the District's unique educational environment.

#### **16. Minimum Minutes for Staff Development (TEC §25.0815)**

**Current Requirement:** Texas Education Code §25.0815 allows districts to apply for waivers to reduce instructional minutes for staff development, with limitations on the number of minutes that may be waived.

**Innovation:** The District may locally determine the amount and scheduling of staff development without seeking a waiver from the state, including the ability to adjust instructional minutes for professional development purposes.

**Rationale:** This exemption provides flexibility in scheduling high-quality professional development that is responsive to district and campus needs. By removing the waiver process, the District can more efficiently plan training opportunities, improve instructional practices, and better utilize time for staff growth while maintaining a focus on student achievement.

### **IV. Accountability and Evaluation**

The district will monitor the effectiveness of the innovation plan through review of student performance data, graduation rates, college and career readiness indicators, teacher retention data, and community feedback. The Board of Trustees will review the plan annually.

### **V. Term of the Plan**

This District of Innovation Plan will remain in effect for five years (2026–2031) unless amended, rescinded, or renewed by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas law.

### **VI. Plan Development Process**

1. Board of Trustees adopts a resolution or receives a petition to consider becoming a District of Innovation.
2. A public hearing is held to discuss the potential development of a local innovation plan. (Public Hearing – Tuesday, April 14 at 4 p.m.)
3. A committee develops the proposed innovation plan. (Meeting – Tuesday, April 14 at 4:15 p.m.)
4. The proposed plan is posted publicly for at least 30 days. (Wednesday, April 15 – May 15)

5. The District Advisory Committee approves the plan by majority vote. (Tuesday, May 19 at 4 p.m.)
6. The Board of Trustees adopts the plan by a two-thirds vote. (Monday, June 8)
7. The adopted plan is submitted to the Texas Education Agency. (Tuesday, June 9)

#### **VII. Amendment of the Plan**

The Board of Trustees may amend the District of Innovation Plan during the term of the plan in accordance with the procedures established in Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.