



Natalia ISD
District of Innovation Plan (HB 1842)
2022-2027

Approved by School Board on March 28, 2022

On Monday, January 24, 2022, the Natalia ISD Board of Trustees approved a resolution for NISD to become a District of Innovation (DOI). This is an exciting opportunity for our school district to consider flexibilities that would best serve our students and their educational needs.

A District of Innovation is a concept passed by the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, effective immediately, that gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in the Texas Education Code chapter 12A.

Committee Members:

Bridget Heckman Employee	Marisa Saldana Employee, Business Owner, Parent of a student	Leticia Buenrostro Employee	Roceli Ramon Employee	Gabriella Ayala NISD Student
Amanda Lopez Employee	Bridget Ayala Employee, Parent of a student	Ruby Vera Community Member	Lee Myers Parent of a student, Community Member, Employee	Shannon Piles Parent of a student, Community Member, Employee
Jeannette Roberts Employee	Andrea Moreno-Hewitt Employee	Tracy Myers Parent of a student, Business Owner, Community Member	Tiffany Rodriguez Community Member	Harry Piles Parent of a student, Community Member, Employee

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain an exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. On January 24, 2022, the Natalia Independent School District's Board of Trustees passed a Resolution to adopt a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and our community.

On January 24, 2022, the Board appointed a District of Innovation District Committee comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders representing NISD. The Committee met on February 7, 2022, and on February 10, 2022, to discuss and vote on the Local Innovation Plan. On March 21, 2022, a Public Hearing was held, and the committee approved the District of Innovation Plan. Natalia ISD School Board approved the District of Innovation Plan on March 28, 2022.

II. TERM

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning July 1, 2022, and ending June 30, 2027, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board will nominate a committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment. Any amendment adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan.

III. A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Plan's comprehensive educational program is guided by and aligned with the Board's Vision and Mission for the District.

A. Vision

The BLUE Way: Challenging and empowering students for global success.

B. Mission

Natalia Independent School District, in partnership with the community, is committed to providing a safe and challenging environment that promotes productive and successful life-long learners.

C. Theory of Action

If Natalia ISD creates a "**Team**" culture of support in which every child can succeed regardless of existing challenges and grants varying levels of autonomy to its campuses then the campuses will be able to accomplish the Board's student outcome goals while honoring the Board's constraints.

IV. INNOVATIONS

The District proposes flexibility in the following areas:

District and Campus Level Planning and Decision-Making

Exemption from: TEC §11.251, TEC §11.252, TEC §11.253

Relevant Board Policies BQ (LEGAL)/(LOCAL), BQA (LEGAL)/(LOCAL), BQB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current Status: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Requirements and Configuration of the District/Site-Based Management Committee Site-based decision-making is a process for improving the educational outcomes at the campus and district level. Through a collaborative effort of a team of principals, teachers, campus staff, district staff, parents, and community representatives, educational outcomes are reviewed and evaluated to determine goals, strategies, and interventions to ensure improvement in student achievement. The education code and board policy require members to address areas of planning, budgeting, curriculum, staffing patterns, staff development, school organization as well as a host of other responsibilities identified in additional sections of the education code.

Innovation Strategies

Natalia ISD shall determine the processes and memberships of its site-based management committees. Natalia ISD acknowledges the importance of developing district and campus improvement plans based upon a comprehensive needs assessment. The district feels that claiming exemption from the specific mandates of these sections is a local issue and not a state mandate. The district also feels that it will provide for greater parental involvement and better-informed parents.

District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plan

Exemption from: TEC §11.252; TEC §7.065

Relevant Board Policies: BQA, BQB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Each school district and campus shall use the results from the teaching and learning conditions survey required by Education Code 7.065(a) to review and revise, as appropriate, the district-level or campus-level improvement plan, and for other purposes, as appropriate to enhance the district and campus learning environments. *Education Code 7.065(e)*

Each school district and campus shall use the results from the teaching and learning conditions survey required by Education Code 7.065(a) to review and revise, as appropriate, the district-level or campus-level improvement plans, and for other purposes, as appropriate to enhance the district and campus learning environments. *Education Code 7.065(e)*

Innovation Strategies

For the sake of efficiency and economy, the District will continue to provide the District Improvement Plan and Campus Improvement Plan, to include all required components under Title I and as required under Federal law, and combine the plans into one Plan for the District.

Teacher Certification

Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.057

Relevant Board Policies: DBA (LEGAL)/(LOCAL); DK (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

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 for 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 §21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation Strategies

The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where 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 position in question.

The campus principal may submit to the Superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. 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.

An individual with experience and appropriate certifications and/or licensure in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective 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.

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 teacher mentoring and may be subject to increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.

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.

The Superintendent will notify the Board annually of the District’s exercise of this flexibility.

School Start and End Date

Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812
Related Board Policies: EB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC §25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. Several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Innovation Strategies

Increased local control of the instructional calendar will allow the District to be responsive to community needs.

Relief from the statute will allow Natalia ISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development.

Alignment of the District calendar with local universities, local districts with shared services arrangements, etc. will be possible.

This will allow the first and second semesters to be somewhat equal in the number of days of instruction.

90 Percent Attendance Rule

Exemption from: TEC §25.092
Relevant Board Policies: FEC (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.092 requires students to attend class 90 percent of the school days on a district calendar to earn credit. The law requires districts to award class credit to students based on the time a student is present in a classroom for instruction, rather than mastery of content and subject proficiency.

Innovation Strategies

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Flexibility in abstaining from the requirement means the district won't have to penalize students who miss class due to enriching activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances that support Natalia ISD's goal to educate the whole child.

To meet the needs of 21st-century learners, Natalia High School would like to investigate the option to provide students credit for courses based on content mastery, not the amount of time the student spends in the classroom.

This exemption would allow the district to provide innovative options to promote student engagement in course material in flexible ways, ultimately allowing learning to happen anytime, anyplace apart from the traditional way of delivering instruction.

Additionally, flexibility in this area directly supports Natalia ISD's goal of educating the whole child. Our students attain valuable and meaningful learning from extra/co-curricular activities and experiences that currently count against the student's 90% attendance availability if a student has to miss part of the traditional school day.

Relief from Section 25.092 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 in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28,0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

Kindergarten – Grade 4 Class Size Reporting Requirement

Exemption from: TEC §25.111; TEC §25.112; TEC §25.113

Related Board Policies: EEB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.111 requires school districts to 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.

TEC §25.112 requires school districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten through 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.

TEC §25.113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student-to-teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved, negating the need for this notice.

Innovation Strategies

Natalia ISD believes in a low student-to-teacher ratio in all of its classrooms and will begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 or less in each K-4 homeroom class, with a goal of starting school at a maximum 20:1 ratio.

In the event that any class size exceeds a 25:1 ratio during the school year for longer than 30 days, the Superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees and the campus will send a notification to the parents of students in that class. Decisions regarding the appropriate student-to-teacher ratios will be made at the local level, taking into consideration the age and grade level of the students, the subject matter of the class, the needs of individual teachers and student groups, and the availability of additional instructional staff members. In addition, the time of year should be considered.

Due to this exception, a TEA waiver request will not be required to be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

Campus Behavior Coordinator Provisions

Exemption from: TEC §37.0012

Relevant Board Policies: FO (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

The Education Code requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

Innovation Strategies

The proposal is for the District to abstain from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. Natalia ISD’s approach to discipline is more collaborative, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person through our efforts with PBIS and restorative discipline. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration in regard to student discipline.

School District Depository Contract

Exemption from: TEC §45.205 and TEC §45.206

Relevant Board Policies: BDAE (Legal) and BDAE Local)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

The depository bank for the District shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected. A District and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for two additional two-year terms. Per SB 754, passed by the 85th Texas Legislature, effective September 1, 2017, TEC Section 45.205 will allow the District to extend a depository contract for three additional two-year terms. The contract term and any extension must coincide with the District's fiscal year. Therefore, an extension of the contract is not subject to the rebidding requirements of Education Code 45.206, Education Code 45.205, and Education Code 45.204.

Innovation Strategies

In a District within a small town, the District's choices for its depository bank are limited to local banks. Natalia ISD uses services provided by the local bank on a daily basis. With exemption from these statutes, Natalia ISD would be able to allow the District's existing bank contract to be extended 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.

At the end of each two-year term, the District and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for multiple two additional year periods. The District must review the contract to ensure the best value and support for the District and obtain Board approval for each of the two-year periods. Nothing in the process would hinder the District's ability to undertake bidding the District depository bank at the end of any of the two-year periods. Further, this entire Innovation Plan must be reviewed and renewed at the end of five years, including this provision. The District believes it can operate most optimally if it is not limited to two or even three additional two-year extensions of its depository contract and continue its strong relations with the one bank in Natalia.

Local School Health Advisory Council And Health Education Instruction

Exemption from: TEC §28.004

Relevant Board Policies: BDF (LEGAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Sec. 28.004 of this code requires The Board of Trustees of each school district shall establish a local School Health Advisory Council to assist the District in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the District's health education instruction. This section requires the establishment of a School Health Advisory Council and outlines the duties of this council.

Innovation Strategies

The District takes exemption from the requirement to establish a School Health Advisory Council and the subsequent duties of that council.

The District will appoint a District Health Coordinator. The District Health Coordinator will collaborate with the District and campus improvement committees to seek feedback regarding health-related curriculum, food service, budget, and other related items as needed.

DAEP Teacher Certification Requirement Exemption

Exemption from: TEC §37.008

Relevant Board Policies: FOCA (LEGAL)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Each school district shall provide a disciplinary alternative education program that: (7) employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subchapter B, Chapter 21.

Innovation Strategies

Natalia ISD has a very limited number of students assigned to DAEP, and often classes will be provided using computer-based instruction and or a blended model; it is not necessary to have certified teachers on site. Natalia ISD often does not have certified teachers available when DAEP is needed. The DAEP administrator will ensure that the staff of the DAEP has the support necessary to properly supervise the students assigned to the program and will lend the assistance of teachers with specific certifications as needed.

Removal of Individuals from District Property/Facilities

Exemption from: TEC §37.105

Relevant Board Policies: GKA (LOCAL)/(Legal)

Current statute: Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

According to TEC §37.105, the District must maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from district property/facilities, including the name of the person to whom the warning was issued and the date of the issuance. At the time a person is refused entry or removed from district property/facilities, the District is also required to provide the person with written information explaining the appeal process.

Innovation Strategies

To better ensure the safety and security of students and staff in Natalia ISD, the District would not be required to maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from district property/facilities, nor be required to provide written information explaining the appeal process to those who have been refused entry to district property/facilities or removed from district property/facilities.

The District currently attempts to provide written notice to persons who are subject to potential refusal for entry or for removal from district property/facilities. Under this exemption from TEC §37.105, the District shall continue to provide written notice to persons who are subject to potential refusal for entry or for removal from district property/facilities in situations where the administrator on site feels it is reasonable and safe to do so. Also, the District would continue to allow parental rights as provided under the law, to access children of those excluded who are current students, such as to visit their children's schools or other district facilities to discuss educational needs upon scheduling appointments with the campus principal or other appropriate administrators.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

This Innovation Plan is designed to create parameters within which the District will operate, in order to provide additional student opportunities. Specific implementation plans will be developed by the appropriate campuses and departments. Adjustments to Board Policy will be researched and adopted where appropriate.