

FORT HANCOCK INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Success for ALL



2023-2028 District of Innovation Plan

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District of Innovation Overview

The District of Innovation concept, passed by 84th 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
 - Teacher certification
 - Probationary Status
 - Student/Teacher Ratios and Class Size

The renewal of the District of Innovation Plan would validate it starting with school year 2023-2024 and finishing with school year 2027-2028. The renewal plan was presented to the District of Innovation Committee in a District Advisory meeting on February 14 and March 1, 2023. The Board of Trustees were informed about the renewal plan on March 9, 2023. The plan will be posted on our district website for at least 30 days before it is taken to the Board of Trustees for final approval on May 11, 2023. If approved, the renewed Ft Hancock ISD local innovation plan will be in effect for five years, beginning the 2023-2024 school year and ending the 2027-2028 school year. The local innovation plan may be terminated or amended by the Ft Hancock ISD Board of Trustees at any time in accordance with the law. The District Innovation Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the local innovation plan and provide updates and/or necessary modifications to the Board of Trustees on a regular basis as needed.

District of Innovation Committee

<p style="text-align: center; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District</p>	<p>Jose G. Franco, Superintendent Yvonne Samaniego, Associate Superintendent of Federal Programs Gloria Galindo, HR Officer Yadira Munoz, Director of Finance Rebecca Serrano, Elementary Assistant Principal Josie Lopez, Dual Language Elementary Teacher Teresa Gonzalez, Elementary Guidance Counselor Refugio Grajeda, Elementary Instructional Aide Francisco Retamoza, Elementary Science Teacher Danny Medina, Middle School Principal Zenia Quijas, Secondary Math Teacher Jenna Aguilar, Secondary Instructional Aide Lorena Molinar, High School Principal Amber Moseley, Secondary ELAR Teacher Ysela Ortega, CTE Teacher Cynthia Moreno, Secondary Instructional Aide Christine Robeldo, District Reading Coach</p>
<p style="text-align: center; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Parents / Community</p>	<p>Patricia Hernandez, GED Teacher Marina Rubio, Parent Analy Velador, Parent Erica Molina, Community Health Representative (Project Vida)</p>

Areas of Innovation

1. First Day of Instruction

(Exemption from TEC §25.0811)

Current: TEC §25.0811 states except as provided by this section, a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth 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 and more instructional days prior to mandatory state testing.

2. Teacher Certification

(Exemption From: TEC §21.003(a) and TEC §21.053 (a &b))

Current Law: TEC §21.003(a) states a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B.

Current Law: TEC §21.053 (a) states a person who desires to teach in a public school shall present the person's certificate for filing with the employing district before the person's contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding. (b) states an educator who does not hold a valid certificate may not be paid for teaching or work done before the effective date of issuance of a valid certificate.

Proposal: Fort Hancock ISD will continue to seek traditionally certified candidates for all teaching positions. A waiver would allow a certified teacher to teach a subject outside his/her certified field. Locally developed criteria will ensure these teachers have the appropriate qualifications in their field of expertise and, in the case of dual credit, college level teaching credentials. Furthermore, detailed job descriptions for hard to fill areas will outline preferred certification and experience based on the needs of the specific discipline. Teachers who do not possess a Texas Teacher Certificate will be hired as full or part time employees with at-will contracts. These teachers will be supported through ongoing quality staff development and evaluated for high quality instruction. Teachers will be required to obtain Texas Teaching Certification within two years of hiring date. That date will only be extended if no certified replacement can be found. This will allow Fort Hancock ISD to remain competitive when recruiting instructors and expand course offerings for students. This exemption will not change current teacher contracts or displace current employees. 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. Our prekindergarten, special education and bilingual/ESL teachers must and will continue to be SBEC certified.

3. Probationary Status

(Exemption From: TEC §21.102(b))

Current Law: TEC §21.102 states 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.

Proposal: Fort Hancock ISD believes this limited probationary contract time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the professional employee's effectiveness. Upon exemption from TEC §21.102(b), all new contract employees will be subject to the probationary period set out in TEC §21.102(c), in order to allow more time for the district to fairly and thoroughly assess an employee's performance. We propose to provide probationary contracts for any teacher new to the district for up to three years.

4. Student/Teacher Ratios and Class Size

(Exemption from TEC §25.111 and §25.112)

Current Law: TEC §25.111 requires districts to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers to maintain an average ratio of not less than 1 teacher for each 20 students in average daily attendance.

Current Law: TEC §25.112 states a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a prekindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class and must complete and file a waiver with the agency if a class exceeds this limit.

Proposal: While we acknowledge that the student-teacher ratio influences the classroom and student achievement, the mobility rate and financial standing of Fort Hancock ISD must be considered, along with the challenge of hiring quality staff in a timely manner to comply. Also, the addition of one or two students beyond the recommended ratio may not hinder the learning environment; however, moving students can be detrimental to the continuity and stability of their academic and emotional growth. Fort Hancock ISD strives to adhere to the current Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112 of the 22:1 ratio in grades K-4. In the event that class sizes exceed the 22:1 ratio, in Kindergarten – 4th grade, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, but the Superintendent will instead submit a request to the Board of Trustees for approval. Additionally, parents would be informed of all efforts relative to class size if the request becomes necessary. This exemption provides local control over class size ratios, without the unnecessary step of seeking a waiver from the Texas Education Agency.