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# DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

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## **Mission Statement**

Athens ISD will create an environment where all students are given the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive, successful citizens.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the district is to graduate every student on time, college and work ready.

## **Vision Statement**

Igniting Potential – Inspiring Success

## **Theme**

‘Make Your Mark’

### **Our Core Beliefs:**

- Our business is teaching and learning.
- We believe that all children can learn at or above grade level.
- We believe that it is important to have high expectations so that all children reach their learning potential.
- We believe that our schools have an important and profound impact of every child’s life.
- We believe that the school’s involvement is one that should demonstrate and promote respect for students, parents, teachers and all school stakeholders.
- We believe that all children should be taught in facilities that are wholesome, pleasant and safe.
- We believe that we have the responsibility to build good citizens for Athens, Henderson County and our state.

### **Board of Trustees**

Current board members as of May 2017

- Robert Risko, President
- Eric Smith, Vice President
- Robert Spears, Secretary
  - Eugene Buford
  - Alicea Elliott
  - Renda Garner
- Jennie Mahmoud

### **Our Board of Trustees Goals:**

- Expect and achieve academic excellence at every campus for all students
- Attract, retain and develop exemplary employees for all jobs in the district.
- Develop/expand programs and services that promote parent/community satisfaction.
- Promote participation in school-sponsored extra/co-curricular activities.
- Provide for all operations in the most cost effective and efficient manner possible.

## District of Innovation Overview

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

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **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
  - Use of planning and preparation periods
  - Instructional minutes
  - Professional development
  - Some financial requirements
  - Assessments
  - Site-based decision making processes (to the extent required by state law)

The Athens Independent School District believes this level of local control will add flexibility and empower our district to think and act in innovative ways.

### Strategic Plan

Objective 1 – Teaching and Learning: All students will achieve profound learning in a safe and caring environment.

Objective 2 – Human Resources: All staff will actively contribute to organizational excellence leading to student success.

Objective 3 – Funding and Finance: Stakeholders will optimize resources to enhance student success.

Objective 4 – Facilities: Develop a plan to transform facilities into state-of-the-art learning environments.

Objective 5 – Technology: Create an environment where technologies are used on a daily basis to enhance learning.

Objective 6 – Communications/Parent Involvement: Through community involvement, maximize public pride in being a member of Hornet Nation.

## **District of Innovation – Areas of Focus**

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### Calendar (EB Legal, Ed. Code 25.0811):

Currently, students may not begin school before the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of August. For 2017 – 18, the school year will begin on August 28<sup>th</sup>. The proposal would look at options for allowing an earlier start date and a calendar that best fits the needs of the Athens ISD community.

### Teacher Contract Days (DCB Legal, DCB Local, TEC 21.401):

Current education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract equivalent to 187 days. The proposal would reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. This would better align the teacher days to 75, 600 minutes required of students.

- Will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers
- Will enhance teacher recruitment
- Will improve teacher morale

### Probationary Contracts (Subchapter C; TEC 21.102):

Current education law moves experienced teachers who are new to employment with a district to a term contract in year two, following a one-year probationary period. The proposal would consider options to allow an extended period of probationary employment with the new district before moving to a term contract.

### Teacher Certification (DK Legal, DK Local, TEC 21.003, 21.053):

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 submit a request to TEA. TEA then approves or denies this request. The proposal would look at options to allow a certified teacher to teach one subject out of their certified field as well as options for individuals with industry experience in a CTE field to be eligible to teach vocational courses, and would exempt the district from seeking a waiver from TEA.

### Minimum Attendance for Class Credit (TEC 25.092):

Currently, state law requires students to attend class 90% of the school days in order to earn credit. The law requires districts to award class credit to students based on 'seat time' rather than based on content mastery. The proposal would allow flexibility so the district will not be required to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances.

### District-Level and Site-Based Decision-Making (TEC 11.252, 11.253):

Currently, state law requires the establishment of both district-level and campus-level site-based decision-making committees for the purpose of guiding staff in the improvement of student performance in order to attain state standards. Over a period of years, a growing list of compliance measures has caused district/campus plans to lose relevance, removing the freedom of local stakeholders to develop plans to address the uniqueness of each campus and each district. The proposal would allow the district to establish campus strategic planning committees to work in conjunction with the district's already established strategic planning committee, thereby eliminating the need to conduct two separate processes.

## **District of Innovation Timeline**

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August 1, 2016

Initial meeting with administrative staff to discuss preliminary thoughts and discuss possible members of the District of Innovation team

September 26, 2016

Board of Trustees approve resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of using HB 1842 to become a District of Innovation

October 7, 2016

Administrative staff discuss timeline

October 20, 2016

Public hearing to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation

October 20, 2016

Board of Trustees approves a motion to pursue local District of Innovation plan;  
Board of Trustees approves the members of the District of Innovation committee;  
Board of Trustees provides input on priority areas of focus

November 2, 2016

Administrative staff discuss priority areas of focus

November 10, 2016

Initial meeting of the District of Innovation committee

November 15, 2016

Second meeting of the District of Innovation committee

November 28, 2016

Presentation of District of Innovation plan to the School Board to consider recommendations

December 8 – 12, 2016

District of Innovation committee final approval

December 15, 2016

Post the District of Innovation plan on the district website for 30 days

February 16, 2017

District of Innovation committee holds public meeting, passes plan by a unanimous vote;  
Notify Commissioner of Education of the board's intention to vote on adoption of proposed plan

February 27, 2017

Board of Trustees approves the District of Innovation plan

February 28, 2017

Begin the process of updating all policy changes with TASB;  
Begin the process of communicating with students, parents, teachers, community

**TERM OF APPROVED PLAN: Five Years (February 27, 2017 – February 27, 2022)**

## **Resolution to Adopt a District of Innovation Plan**

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### RESOLUTION TO ADOPT A DISTRICT OF INNOVATION

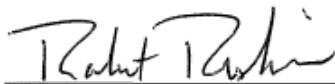
WHEREAS Education Code 12A.001 provides that a district is eligible for designation as a district of innovation if the district's most recent performance rating under Section 39.054 reflects at least acceptable performance, and that consideration of designation as a district of innovation may be initiated by a resolution adopted by the board of trustees of the district; and

WHEREAS the Athens Independent School District's most recent performance rating under Education Code 39.054 reflects at least acceptable performance.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of Athens Independent School District by adoption of this resolution initiates the process under Education Code Chapter 12A to become a district of innovation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that after this resolution is signed by the Board, a public hearing shall be held to consider whether the District should develop a local innovation plan for the designation of the District as a district of innovation and that after the public hearing the Board of Trustees of Athens Independent School District shall appoint a committee to develop a local innovation plan or decline to pursue designation as a district of innovation.

Adopted this 26<sup>th</sup> (date) day of September (month), 2016 (year),  
by the Board of Trustees.



Robert Risko, Board President



Bob Spears, Board Secretary

## **District of Innovation Committee Members**

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### **Bel Air Elementary**

Lisa Howell, principal  
Juan Moreno, teacher  
Keishia Garrett, teacher

### **South Athens Elementary**

Claudia Stiles, principal  
Viky Miranda, teacher  
Sandy Carter, instructional coach

### **Central Athens Elementary**

Jennifer Risinger, principal  
Amelia Hernandez, teacher  
Heather Davis, teacher

### **Athens Middle School**

Ginger Morrison, principal  
Elizabeth Sillavan, teacher  
Samantha Strickland, teacher  
Sanetta Johnson, teacher

### **Athens High School**

Jami Ivey, principal  
Robert Becker, teacher  
Leiann Weston, paraprofessional  
Luz Dunaway, teacher

### **District Support Center**

Dr. Janie Sims, assistant superintendent  
Toni Clay, communications coordinator

### **Business Representatives**

Jessica Richardson, executive with Hope Springs Water  
Lange Svehlak, Athens Daily Review publisher

### **Community Members**

Stephanie Rincon  
Jaime Cortez

### **AISD Parents**

DeShawn Rodriguez  
Denise Swartwood

## District of Innovation – Proposed Guidelines

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### I. First Day of Instruction

**Exemption from: TEC Section 25.0811** – A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Manner in which the law inhibits:

This law restricts flexibility in the design of annual instructional calendars to fit the needs of the school district and community.

Benefit of exemption:

- The flexibility to begin instruction earlier in the month of August will enable the district to develop a calendar that best meets the needs of the students in Athens ISD.
- Decreases regression in learning by shortening the time students are out of school in the summer.
- Provides continuous learning and maximizes student performance by providing shorter breaks throughout the school year.
- Balances the lengths of fall and spring semesters.
- Creates more instructional time before mandatory testing.
- Provides a school end date prior to the month of June that will enable the district to support students who need remediation.
- Balanced semesters will align with college semesters, allowing more opportunities for summer school, internships, and industrial certification opportunities.

### II. Teacher Contract Days

**Exemption from: TEC Section 21.401** – Current education law defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract equivalent to 187 days.

Manner in which the law inhibits:

A recent change in school law has converted required student instructional and attendance days to 75,600 minutes. This change has resulted in the possibility of decreasing the number of days students must attend school, but does not address a similar need to decrease the number of days required for teachers *if* a district deems it appropriate to do so.

Benefit of exemption:

- The proposal would better align the number of teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students.
- Reduces teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries.
- The proposal would increase the daily rate the district pays teachers.
- Enhances teacher recruitment.
- Improves teacher morale.



## District of Innovation – Proposed Guidelines

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### III. Probationary Contracts

**Exemption from: TEC Section 21.102** – Probationary periods for newly hired teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one year.

Manner in which the law inhibits:

This limited time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. The time restriction may, also, negatively impact a newly hired teacher who may struggle with circumstances beyond his/her control, and who needs an additional year to demonstrate capabilities.

Benefit of exemption:

- The flexibility to extend the time period will permit the district the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two years for experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years.
- Currently, contracts for Athens ISD teachers are extended in either March or April which demands that employment decisions must be made without the benefit of an entire school year for evaluating teacher effectiveness.
- Provides sufficient time for teacher mentoring.
- Increases retention rates by allowing campus administrators sufficient time to observe teacher effectiveness.

### IV. Teacher Certification

**Exemption from: TEC Section 21.003, 21.053** – Requires that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a district unless the person holds an appropriate certification or permit issued by the appropriate state agency.

Manner in which the law inhibits:

The statutory certification requirements limit the ability of the district to hire teachers in highly specialized or hard-to-fill areas. Through an exemption from existing teacher certification requirements for dual and career/technical teachers, Athens ISD will be granted the flexibility to hire professionals in specialized trades and vocations to teach identified career and technical courses, and non-core electives if certified teachers are not available.

Benefit of exemption:

- Local qualifications will allow the district to:
  - Hire experienced teachers to pick up an elective in an area in which they are qualified
  - Hire community college instructors
  - Offer dual credit opportunities in CTE courses

## **District of Innovation – Proposed Guidelines**

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- Recruit teachers from the field, including individuals from certain trades and/or vocations with industry knowledge and real world experience
- Flexibility will afford more students the opportunity to take dual credit courses if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses.

The district's first and preferred option would be to hire a qualified applicant with a TEA certification. If no qualified or appropriate candidates are available the following procedures would be implemented:

- Principals may submit to the superintendent, or designee, a request to allow a certified teacher to teach one class period out of their certified field.
- An individual with college teaching or industry experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certificate. The campus principal would make a request to the superintendent, or designee, and make all credentials available. The superintendent would have the capability to hire the person on a local certification and the individual would be employed on an at-will basis with the district.

The individual qualifications would include demonstrated subject matter expertise, such as:

- Professional work experience
- Formal training and education
- Relevant industry license, certification, registration
- Any combination of work experience, training and education or industry credential related to the subject matter he or she will be teaching

All candidates would be carefully considered to ensure the individual has sufficient education and expertise to provide instruction necessary to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the course(s) to be taught.

Before issuing a school district teaching permit to an individual, the district would ensure that the individual completed the criminal background check in compliance with the State Board of Education (SBEC) rules.

## **District of Innovation – Proposed Guidelines**

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### **V. Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade (90 Percent Attendance Rule)**

**Exemption from: TEC Section 25.092** – State law currently requires students attend class 90 percent of the school days in order to earn credit. The law requires districts to award class credit to students based on *seat* time rather than based on mastery of the content.

Manner in which the law inhibits:

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts must award credit based on seat time rather than based on actual content mastery. Students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances are penalized by having to make up absences in the evenings or on Saturdays. The rule discourages some students to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Benefit of exemption:

- The flexibility removes penalties from students who may miss class due to participation in extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances, but who demonstrate an understanding of concepts and mastery of content.
- Allows the district to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities.
- Allows counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum.
- Provides educational advantages to students of the district by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropout rates, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates.

Relief from Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. It will in no way limit or modify a teacher's right to assign grades or to determine final grades.

### **VI. District-Level and Site-Based Decision-Making**

**Exemption from: TEC Sections 11.252 and 11.253** - **TEC 11.252** states each school district shall have a district improvement plan that is developed, evaluated, and revised annually, in accordance with district policy, by the superintendent with the assistance of the district-level committee established under Section 11.251. The purpose of the district improvement plan is to guide district and campus staff in the improvement of student performance for all student groups in order to attain state standards in respect to the achievement indicators adopted under Sections 39.053©(1)-(4).

**TEC 11.253** states that each school district shall maintain current policies and procedures to ensure that effective planning and site-based decision-making occur at each campus to direct and support the improvement of student performance for all students.

## **District of Innovation – Proposed Guidelines**

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### **Manner in which the law inhibits:**

Currently, a list of compliance measures outlined in TEC 11.252 and TEC 11.253 has become burdensome and has caused the campus and district plans to lose relevance. As the list of requirements has grown over the years the process has become bureaucratic in nature, and more a matter of compliance than a practical and meaningful exercise that should involve thoughtful planning.

### **Benefit of exemption:**

- Athens ISD will replace the former district/campus level site-based decision-making committees and processes with a strategic planning process. The district already has established a strategic planning committee to develop goals and action plans for a variety of initiatives. Athens ISD will expand this concept to include campus level strategic planning committees.
- The campus level committees will meet at least two times per year to generate a strategic plan for campus resources and efforts, and to review progress.
- The district level committee will meet at least one time per year to review progress, and once every three years to review and update both short-term and long-term goals and action steps.
- Under the District of Innovation plan, the list of requirements in the district and campus improvement plans will be replaced with a strategic planning process. Compliance items included in TEC 11.252 and 11.253 will be replaced by relevant strategic plan components that will directly address the unique needs, talents, and interests of the community and staff of Athens ISD. The targeted focus will be directed by the vision and mission statements of the district, as well as specific goals developed by the Board of Trustees.
- A major benefit will be the consolidation of two separate processes currently in place in Athens ISD into one meaningful, relevant, and practical plan that will be tailored specifically for each campus and the district with the purpose of empowering and impacting student achievement, and developing partnerships between the school district and our community.