



Gregory-Portland Independent School District District of Innovation Plan

Board Adopted Resolution to Become District of Innovation: May 2, 2022
District Site-Based Decision Making (DSBDM) Committee Meeting for DOI: May 5, 2022
Board of Trustees Notify Commissioner of Intent to Become a DOI: May 16, 2022
District Site-Based Decision-Making Committee Approval of Final Plan: June 2, 2022
Board of Trustees Considers Adoption of Plan: July 25, 2022
Board of Trustees Notifies Commissioner of Education of Plan Adoption: July 26, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The District of Innovation (DOI) is a concept passed by the 84th Texas Legislature through House Bill (HB) 1842 that gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to open-enrollment charter schools, including exemption from many requirements mandated in the Texas Education Code.

As a District of Innovation, Gregory-Portland ISD will have:

- Greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students;
- Increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Power to innovate and think differently.

HB 1842 does not allow for exemptions from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements or academic and financial accountability.

Gregory-Portland ISD's first DOI Plan was a five-year plan starting February 16, 2017. This is a new Gregory-Portland ISD DOI Plan.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On November 12, 2019, the Board of Trustees was informed that the Gregory-Portland ISD District of Innovation (DOI) Plan would be reviewed and revised. Items to be considered by the DSBDM committee to include in the DOI Plan included: 1) School Start Date; 2) Educator Certification; 3) Probationary Contracts; 4) Class Size Ratios; 5) Student Transfers; 6) Alternate Group Health Coverage; 7) 90 Percent Attendance Rule; 8) Minimum Minutes of Instruction and School Day Length; 9) Discipline; 10) Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator. On January 16, 2020, the DSBDM committee reviewed plan additions and revisions for consideration to submit to Board of Trustees. Board of Trustees consider amendments recommended by DSBDM committee on January 20, 2020. Proposed amendment posted on the Gregory-Portland ISD website for community input for at least 30 days. On March 23, 2020, Board of Trustees consider approving amendments to current Gregory-Portland ISD DOI Plan. On May 2, 2022, Board of Trustees approved resolution to become a District of Innovation. On May 16, 2022, Board of Trustees notified the Commissioner of Education of its plans to become a District of Innovation with a new DOI plan. The new DOI Plan includes innovations in the following areas: 1) School Start Date; 2) Educator Certification; 3) Probationary Contracts; 4) Counselor Duties; 5) Inter-District Student Transfers; 6) Ninety Percent Attendance Rule; 7) Minimum Minutes of Instruction and Length of School Day; 8) Three Day Limitation on Suspensions; 9) Campus Behavior Coordinator; 10) Class-Size Ratios and Notice; 11) Teacher Appraisals (Student Learning Objectives); 12) Ejection of Individuals from Facilities; 13) Depository Contracts; 14) Exemption from Future TEC Mandates was posted on the Gregory-Portland ISD website for community input for at least 30 days. The DSBDM Committee met on May 5, 2022 and again on June 2, 2022 to make final recommendations to the DOI Plan and submit to Board of Trustees for final approval. On July 25, 2022, Board of Trustees consider approving the DOI plan to become a District of Innovation.

TERM

The term of the plan is for five years, beginning with the 2022-2023 academic year, and ending at the end of the 5th calendar year, 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 District Site Based Decision Making Committee will 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. G-PISD may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

AMENDMENTS

The proposed amended DOI was presented to the Gregory Portland ISD Education Improvement Committee for consideration on **October 5, 2023**, and it was approved by a majority of the committee. The G-P ISD Board of Trustees reviewed and approved the amended DOI Plan at the action meeting held on **November 13, 2023**. The amended plan retains the expiration date of **July 26, 2027**.

INNOVATIONS

The original Gregory-Portland ISD DOI Plan exempts the District from compliance with Texas Education Code (TEC) § 25.0811(a) governing school start dates. In addition to this original exemption, the Gregory-Portland ISD proposes flexibility and seeks an exemption in the following additional areas:

School Start Date

(TEC §25.0811a)

Currently

TEC Section 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Innovative Plan

Benefit of Exemption for G-PISD: 1) Allow for balance in instructional days between first and second semester and to create more instructional time to prepare for STAAR/EOC/AP exams; 2) UIL activities, including academic, fine arts, and athletic, will benefit from an earlier start date by allowing practice to coincide with the school days and not during summer break; 3) Additional days to recover students before “drop-out/no show” date; 4) To maximize student performance and combat student regression over the summer; 5) Allow flexibility in planning Professional Development days throughout the school year as opposed to placing all days prior to the beginning of instructional days

Educator Certification

(TEC §21.003, §21.053, §21.057) (DBA LEGAL, DBA LOCAL, DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT)

Currently

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 submit a request to the Texas Education Agency. TEA then approves or denies this request for a limited period of time. These laws limit the district’s ability to hire teachers to fill hard-to-fill core content areas, high demand dual credit and career and technical /STEAM (applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts & Mathematics) courses when high quality certified teachers are not available.

TEC § 21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate before employment with a school district, and prohibits the district from paying an educator without a valid certificate.

TEC § 21.057 requires a school district to provide notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation Plan

Gregory-Portland ISD will continue its quest for highly effective educators in every classroom. In order to best serve the students of the district, decisions on certification will be decided locally. With an increasing number of innovative courses created after implementation of HB5, finding exceptionally qualified applicants in specific fields who are also certified teachers is increasingly difficult if not

impossible. The District specifically seeks flexibility to hire professionals who are not certified teachers but have experience and a related degree in the content area to supply the needed teachers, with the exception of special education and bilingual/ESL teaching positions. The District would like the opportunity to expand the number of candidates that will be recruited and trained for positions of need. The District will determine the areas and programs for this opportunity based on staffing needs. Gregory-Portland ISD will provide local qualifications and training requirements for professionals and experts to teach courses in lieu of traditional state requirements. All other teachers would not be exempt from TEC 21.003, and the Gregory-Portland ISD Board of Trustees would monitor the implementation of this exemption.

The district shall establish local criteria for training and locally certifying individuals under a District Teaching Certification. In doing so, parental notification of “inappropriately certified or uncertified teachers” would no longer be necessary. The exemption would also allow internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area to be considered. Non-certified teachers working under a District Teacher Certification will be employed “at-will” or under a non-certified contract. An employee working under a District Teaching Certification will adhere to the same professional standards, ethics, and requirements of all certified teachers and will be appraised under the same teacher appraisal system as required of all certified teachers.

Probationary Contracts

(TEC § 21.102(b)) (DCA LEGAL)

Currently

TEC § 21.102(b) states that a probationary contract 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 with the district. Five months is not enough time to determine evaluate effectiveness for newly hired staff (who qualify for Chapter 21 contracts) before contract recommendations are due in the Spring.

Innovative Plan

As Defined in TEC § 21.102(c) experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, administrators, or nurses (5 years of experience in last 8 years) hired in Gregory-Portland ISD after the adoption of this Amended DOI Plan shall be issued two consecutive probationary contracts. This will allow sufficient time to evaluate the employee’s effectiveness in the classroom and allow for professional development to enhance professional growth.

Counselor Duties

(TEC § 33.006) (FFEA LEGAL)

Currently

Texas Education Code § 33.006 (d)-(h) passed during the 87th legislative session, requires a school counselor to spend at least 80 percent of the school counselor' s total work time on duties that are components of a counseling program, requires the Board to adopt a related policy, and requires the

District to provide documentation relating to compliance to the Commissioner of Education. To comply with this new and ensure the ability to provide requested documentation to the Commissioner, District counselors track their daily time in 15- minute increments.

Innovation

Gregory-Portland ISD in consultation with the Director of Counseling, would be provided the opportunity to utilize counselors in a manner that best meets student and District needs, without concern as to whether there is strict compliance with § 33. 006 (d)-(h). In addition, exemption from this statute would eliminate the administrative burden of requiring counselors to track their time, daily and eliminate the administrative burden of responding to requests from the State regarding compliance with § 33. 006 (d)-h).

Inter-District Student Transfers

(TEC § 25.036) (FDA LEGAL, FDA LOCAL)

Currently

Under Texas Education Code § 25.001, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC § 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year and mid-year revocation is not permitted based on student discipline, attendance, or academic performance. Being granted a transfer to the district is a privilege and not a right; however, the district currently cannot remove transfer students based on failure to meet expected standards.

Innovative Plan

Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfers may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the school year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. Students that fail to meet the districts academic performance standards as well as meet the state's 90% attendance standard for a course may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

Ninety Percent Attendance Rule

(TEC § 25.092) (FEC LOCAL)

Currently

State law conditions course credit on a student's attendance for at least 90 percent of the days on which the class is offered. The law currently requires the district to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on content mastery. The law limits student access to internships, nontraditional extracurricular experiences, field-based experiences, and enrichment opportunities.

Innovative Plan

Gregory-Portland ISD would be able to offer innovative learning opportunities to the at-risk students to earn credits. Flexibility in this area supports the district's goal of educating the whole child. Students attain valuable learning from extra/co-curricular activities that currently count against the student's 90%

attendance availability if a student has to miss part of the traditional school day. This exemption will allow the district to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities. It will also allow G-PISD administrators to award credit to students that have demonstrated mastery of the content, rather than because they have attended a certain number of school days.

The plan would simultaneously provide rigor and relevance in the curriculum. Exemption from this requirement will provide 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 dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates. G-PISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate mastery, given this exemption.

Relief from this statute does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. This provision also in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with TEC §28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with TEC §28.0216.

Minimum Minutes of Instruction and Length of School Day

(TEC § 25.081) (EC LEGAL, EB LEGAL)

Currently

TEC §25.081 requires districts and charter schools to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction or 7 hours each day (including intermissions and recess). The law also allows school districts and charter schools to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disaster, flood, extreme weather conditions, fuel curtailment, or another calamity.

Innovative Plan

Relief from TEC §25.081 could potentially allow for individual campus flexibility, independence and creativity while adding opportunities for teacher professional development and collaboration. It will further provide the District with the flexibility it needs to consider instructions and gaining credits in ways that make sense for students, especially students with unique needs. Relief would also allow for individualized, flexible opportunities for Alternative High School Students as well as reduced number of minutes for Early Childhood students without the need for a TEA waiver. This exemption can be used to craft programs for nontraditional students, students with special needs, and even our youngest students to best meet their needs. Instruction does not always have to take place in a classroom seat, and this exemption will allow the district to explore more online options, project-based learning outside the classroom, and the structure of programming for various groups of students. The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction will assist with personalizing learning to better meet individual student needs. It also has the added benefit of allowing the possibility of an altered length of a school day, which may include, for example, a later start/early release time which will accommodate additional professional development/collaboration opportunities for teachers to perfect their craft, deepen their content knowledge and analyze student data.

Three-Day Limitation on Suspensions - Amended on November 11, 2023 to Remove this option

(TEC § 37.005) (FOB LEGAL)

Currently

TEC § 37.0012 requires a suspension may not exceed three school days. This exemption is desired to be able to change the maximum number of days of suspension allowed. The law has been interpreted to apply to both in and out of school suspensions. This limitation minimizes the options a campus has for discipline without sending a student to DAEP. Additional days on campus in suspension could provide a way for a campus to avoid excessive discretionary DAEP placements and benefit students by allowing them to stay on campus closer to their normal educators and services.

Innovative Plan

~~Because of the law's three-day limit for suspensions, campus staff is limited in the choices of discipline that can be applied to students for moderately serious offenses. Exemption from this requirement will provide campuses with the option of keeping students on campus and closer to their regular teachers during a disciplinary placement rather than always opting to send students to the disciplinary alternative educational placement. Providing a range of options for the campus is a new and innovative way of thinking about discipline and more fully meeting a student's needs while they are being disciplined.~~

Campus Behavior Coordinator

(TEC § 37.0012) (FO LEGAL, FO LOCAL)

Currently

TEC § 37.0012 requires that a person on each campus be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator (CBC) who is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementation of Chapter 37. At our secondary campuses, one individual is designated as the Campus Behavior Coordinator to manage discipline for 1,100-1,350 students. It is necessary to have additional administrators authorized to handle student discipline and provide notice to parents about disciplinary incidents

Innovative Plan

Exemption from this requirement will provide campuses the opportunity to allow multiple campus administrators to perform student discipline tasks. Campus administrators will fully understand and get to know the students in their caseload rather than sourcing all discipline matters to one employee designated as the campus behavior coordinator. While it is imperative that all employees work together and be informed as to the discipline that is occurring on a campus, it is just as crucial for students to depend on an administrator they know and trust in all facets of their education, including their discipline.

Class-Size Ratios and Notice

(TEC § 25.112, 25.113) (EEB LEGAL)

Currently

TEC § 25.112 requires a district may not enroll more than 22 students in a class, prekindergarten through fourth grade, except as allowed by the commissioner of education. The District does not seek to unilaterally create higher class sizes. Appropriate class sizes can be monitored and maintained at the local level.

While the District seeks freedom from this law, the following should be considered:

- Staff prior to the beginning of the year at 22:1 for K-4 classrooms. Consider a larger ratio of students based on a campus collaborative process.
- Notify parents when classes exceed 24:1.
- If another teacher will not be hired, consider adding paraprofessional support.
- Ensure policy language clearly sets out process that will be followed and how families and the board of trustees will be notified of class size status to ensure transparency

Innovation

Exemption from this requirement will provide campuses the freedom to make decisions that are best for their students in changing circumstances. This exemption will give campuses the ability to decide when it is best to allow students to remain with a teacher they've grown to know and work with, and when it is best to split a classroom to make two smaller classes without submitting TEA waivers.

Teacher Appraisals (Student Learning Objectives)

(TEC § 21.352, 21.353) (DNA LEGAL, DNA LOCAL)

Currently

The employment policies adopted by the board must require a written evaluation of each teacher at annual or more frequent intervals. In addition to conducting a complete appraisal as frequently as required by Education Code § 21.352(c), a district shall require that appropriate components of the appraisal process, such as classroom observations and walk-throughs, occur more frequently as necessary to ensure that a teacher receives adequate evaluation and guidance. Relief from this statute could potentially allow Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) to be removed from the TTESS process and frees up time and resources to execute on the other goal areas in the evaluation that are generally considered either more beneficial than the SLOs or repetitive of the SLOs. Student Learning Objectives would only be part of the TTESS evaluation if the teacher opts to include such a goal.

Innovation

Gregory Portland ISD will continue use of the TTESS appraisal system, yet exemption from this requirement will provide teachers the freedom to make decisions in the evaluation process that they believe will make the biggest impact on student success without spending unnecessary time on compliance pieces that do not provide a significant impact. This exemption will give campus administration and teachers the ability to align the core values of the district through the evaluation process.

Ejection of Individuals from Facilities

(TEC § 37.105) (GKA LEGAL, GKA LOCAL)

Currently

Under the new law, the District must maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from a school facility that is issued, including the name of the person to whom the warning was issued and the date of issuance. At the time a person is refused entry to or ejected from a school district's property, the District shall provide to the person written information explaining the appeal process. When an individual is so disorderly that he or she is being verbally warned that they may be removed from a building or other district facility, it will be impractical and potentially impossible to get the full name of the individual who received the warning. It is reasonable to believe that requesting that information could also escalate a situation that is already proving to be disruptive. Further, it is impractical to provide written notice of an appeal process at events like football or basketball games when the removal is only for the immediate event and there is not ready access to a computer or printer.

Innovation

Exemption from this requirement will allow the District to continue with its current processes relating to unruly individuals on campuses and at other facilities. The notice of written appeal requirement at the time of ejection is believed to be ineffective and impractical. Maintaining logs of those who receive a verbal warning may not be manageable in all instances, including athletic events. While the District rarely ejects an individual from a facility, when it does so, there is personal contact with the individual. In most instances, an ejection happens with a written letter from the campus after several warnings over a number of episodes that caused a disruption. Allowing the District to maintain its current practice that has proven to be effective is a better use of resources and allows the District to avoid potential escalation of already difficult situations.

Depository Contracts

(TEC § 45.206) (BDAE LEGAL, BDAE LOCAL)

Currently

The depository shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified. A district and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for three additional two-year terms. The contract may be modified for each two-year extension if both parties mutually agree to the terms. The contract term and any extension must coincide with the district's fiscal year.

Innovation

Exemption from this requirement will allow the District to maintain satisfactory working relationships with its depository bank without the need to re-bid for the work at the exact timelines required by law. If the District is satisfied with the service of the depository bank and is getting good rates, requiring the District to re-bid the contract is a waste of resources that can be avoided.

November 2023 Amendments

Removal from Certain Conduct - Possession and Use of Nicotine E-Cigarettes

TEC §37.006 (a)(2)(C)(C-2)

Currently

Texas Education Code § 37.006 requires districts to remove a student from class and place in a disciplinary alternative education program as provided by Section 37.008 if the student possesses, uses, sells, gives, or delivers to another person, an e-cigarette, as defined by Section 161.081, Health and Safety Code. The district seeks to prioritize student education in all subject areas and provide instruction on the harmful effects of nicotine and general wellness. Under the new provisions of the statute, students would be mandatorily placed at the DAEP for possessing or using an e-cigarette (vape) containing nicotine. However, a student possessing or using an actual cigarette containing nicotine would face other, lesser consequences under the student code of conduct. The district believes that students possessing or using a nicotine e-cigarette (vape) would be best served by providing educational support regarding nicotine's harmful effects and appropriate consequences rather than removing the student from the DAEP. The removal of students to the DAEP, a much more restrictive setting, is done cautiously. Our primary goal is to keep students at their assigned campuses with the teachers and staff who know them best and provide the necessary support.

Innovation

Gregory-Portland ISD wholly supports efforts to fight the rising use and e-cigarettes and vapes. However, we believe the District can more effectively combat these habits through proactive educational techniques and disciplinary options other than mandatory DAEP placements. The district believes students possessing or using e-cigarettes containing nicotine would be best supported by providing additional wellness education and remaining on the campus with appropriate consequences. The district is not requesting exempt provisions under Section 37.006, which require mandatory removal to DAEP for possessing controlled substances such as marijuana and THC.

Exemptions from Future TEC Mandates

To best serve our local Gregory-Portland ISD community, staff, and students, Gregory-Portland ISD includes a provision in our Local Innovation Plan for the District to maintain control over any future, eligible Texas Education Code mandates, which may be exempted by a two thirds majority vote of the Gregory-Portland ISD Board of Trustees.

Term

The term of the District of Innovation Plan, as outlined by the Texas Education Agency, is five years; therefore, the plan shall commence with the 2022-2023 academic year and conclude at the end of the 5th calendar year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The DSBDM Committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications as needed to address innovative disruptions.