

# Aransas Pass ISD

## District of Innovation Plan

### Introduction

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, provides the opportunity for Texas public school districts to pursue the designation of District of Innovation. This allows local school districts to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code to allow more flexibility and local control for innovative programming.



**CALL TO ACTION:** All APISD students are equipped to excel in an ever changing tomorrow.

**Beliefs:** Students deserve a safe environment where they are excited about learning and will achieve personal growth.

Students thrive within a supportive community.

Students receive an education that prepares them for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

On December 9, 2019, the Aransas Pass Independent School District passed a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation in order to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students in the community.

A committee comprised of 60% teachers and 40% administrators was convened in January and tasked with compiling ideas and input from students, teachers, parents and the community.

# -- DRAFT PLAN --

## Committee

Jason Mansfield	Faulk Administration
Naomi Nobbie	Faulk PK/K
Veronica Reyna	Faulk 1 <sup>st</sup>
Julissa Ruiz	Faulk 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Jeremy Saegert	Charlie Marshall Admin.
Melvin Bamburg	Charlie Marshall 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Hesper Donaghue	Charlie Marshall 4 <sup>th</sup>
Leatrice Martin	Charlie Marshall 5 <sup>th</sup>
Derick King	AC Blunt Administration
Yolanda Cribb	AC Blunt 6 <sup>th</sup>
Krystal Sammons	AC Blunt 7 <sup>th</sup>
John Mike Jones	AC Blunt 8 <sup>th</sup>
Rebecca Johnson	AC Blunt Fine Arts
Michele Hale	APHS Administration
Hannah Coulter	APHS ELA
Mandy Festervand	APHS Math
Rachael Zarosky	APHS Science
Marchelle Conway	APHS Social Studies
Sandra Viar	APHS Fine Arts
Jaymie Knostman	APHS Career Tech
Ryan Knostman	APHS Athletics
Wayne Bennett	District Administration
Shelley Dominguez	District Administration
Chris Johnson	District Administration
Jason Brou	District Administration

Facilitator: Superintendent Cara Cooke  
Human Resources Advisor: Pam Bennett  
Business Office Advisor: Cheryl Stansberry

68% Teachers  
32% Administration

## TERM

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning **[insert date]** and ending **[insert date]**, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Aransas Pass ISD 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 Texas Education Code, Subchapter 12A, the Aransas Pass ISD Board of Trustees will nominate a new 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. The District will not implement two separate plans at any one time.

Under Texas Education Code, Subchapter 12A, districts may identify certain requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) “that inhibit the goals of the plan and from which the district should be exempted on adoption of the plan. . .” Because Aransas Pass ISD objectives and its local Innovation Plan are comprehensive and impact areas in the TEC, and because Aransas Pass ISD seeks to maximize local control of educational decisions for each student, Aransas Pass ISD seeks exemption from the following provisions of the TEC:

## Innovations Recommended

### First Day of Instruction

**Exemption From Portions of:** Texas Education Code §25.0811

**Currently:** The first day of school may not be held prior to the fourth Monday of August.

Texas Education Code §25.0811:

FIRST DAY OF INSTRUCTION. (a) 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. A school district may:

(1) begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August if the district operates a year-round system under Section 25.084; or

(2) begin instruction for students for a school year on or after the first Monday in August at a campus or at not more than 20 percent of the campuses in the district if:

(A) the district has a student enrollment of 190,000 or more;

(B) the district at the beginning of the school year provides, financed with local funds, days of instruction for students at the campus or at each of the multiple campuses, in addition to the minimum number of days of instruction required under Section 25.081;

(C) the campus or each of the multiple campuses are undergoing comprehensive reform, as determined by the board of trustees of the district; and

(D) a majority of the students at the campus or at each of the multiple campuses are educationally disadvantaged.

(b) Notwithstanding Subsection (a), a school district that does not offer each grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 and whose prospective or former students generally attend school in another state for the grade levels the district does not offer may start school on any date permitted under Subsection (a) or the law of the other state.

**Proposed:** Rather than simply choosing arbitrary dates, Aransas Pass ISD seeks to build a calendar to meet the needs of teachers, students and the community. District staff and stakeholders design the APISD academic calendar based on the following criteria:

1. Satisfy legal requirements for required days and/or minutes for teachers and students (teachers will start no earlier than August 1).
2. Maximize instructional time to promote student success, allowing the first and second semesters to be close in number of days of instruction and providing more instructional days prior to state assessments;
3. Strategically allocate holidays and breaks that reinforce our community, cultural and family values;
4. Align with area college and community calendars to maximize the benefit of students and families;
5. Provide time for faculty and staff throughout the school year to develop their professional skills and plan for the highest quality of instruction;
6. Allow for greater flexibility in grading periods; and
7. Improve student attendance and student success through the flexibility in the calendar.

With an exemption from Texas Education Code §25.0811, Aransas Pass ISD will be able to choose a start date that matches the needs of Aransas Pass students, families and teachers.

#### ACTION STEPS

1.	District of Innovation (DoI) committee will consider a variety of calendar options.
2.	The “draft” calendar will be shared and communicated with District stakeholders for comment and consideration.
3.	Based upon feedback received, DoI committee will revise the draft calendar as appropriate and then submit it as “Proposed” calendar to the public, campuses and the DEIC.
4.	The DEIC may choose to approve, revise or edit as appropriate before recommending a calendar to the Board of Trustees for approval.
5.	The calendar will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval.

## Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade

**Exemption From Portions of:** Texas Education Code §25.083(b), Texas Education Code §25.092

**Currently:** State law currently requires students attend class 90% of the school days the class is offered in order to earn credit. The law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on demonstrated mastery of the learning.

Texas Education Code §25.083

SCHOOL DAY INTERRUPTIONS. (b) The board of trustees of each school district shall adopt and strictly enforce a policy limiting the removal of students from class for remedial tutoring or test preparation. A district may not remove a student from a regularly scheduled class for remedial tutoring or test preparation if, as a result of the removal, the student would miss more than 10 percent of the school days on which the class is offered, unless the student's parent or another person standing in parental relation to the student provides to the district written consent for removal from class for such purpose.

Texas Education Code §25.092

MINIMUM ATTENDANCE FOR CLASS CREDIT OR FINAL GRADE. (a) Except as provided by this section, a student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.

(a-1) A student who is in attendance for at least 75 percent but less than 90 percent of the days a class is offered may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the school's principal that provides for the student to meet the instructional requirements of the class. A student under the jurisdiction of a court in a criminal or juvenile justice proceeding may not receive credit or a final grade under this subsection without the consent of the judge presiding over the student's case.

(a-2) Subsection (a) does not apply to a student who receives credit by examination for a class as provided by Section 28.023.

(b) The board of trustees of each school district shall appoint one or more attendance committees to hear petitions for class credit or a final grade by

students who are in attendance fewer than the number of days required under Subsection (a) and have not earned class credit or a final grade under Subsection (a-1). Classroom teachers shall comprise a majority of the membership of the committee. A committee may give class credit or a final grade to a student because of extenuating circumstances. Each board of trustees shall establish guidelines to determine what constitutes extenuating circumstances and shall adopt policies establishing alternative ways for students to make up work or regain credit or a final grade lost because of absences. The alternative ways must include at least one option that does not require a student to pay a fee authorized under Section 11.158(a)(15). A certified public school employee may not be assigned additional instructional duties as a result of this section outside of the regular workday unless the employee is compensated for the duties at a reasonable rate of pay.

(c) A member of an attendance committee is not personally liable for any act or omission arising out of duties as a member of an attendance committee.

(d) If a student is denied credit or a final grade for a class by an attendance committee, the student may appeal the decision to the board of trustees. The decision of the board may be appealed by trial de novo to the district court of the county in which the school district's central administrative office is located.

(e) This section does not affect the provision of Section 25.087(b) regarding a student's excused absence from school to observe religious holy days.

(f) The availability of the option developed under Subsection (b) must be substantially the same as the availability of the educational program developed under Section 11.158(a)(15).

**Proposed:** The Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade requirement is also referred to as the 90% rule. This requirement is an arbitrary percentage, where it may appear that school districts award credit based on seat time rather than demonstrated mastery of the learning. Aransas Pass ISD believes that students will generally have more academic success when they are present for at least 90% of the instructional activities of a class.

However, Aransas Pass ISD also recognizes that there are opportunities for high quality instruction that do not rely solely on "seat time" in a physical space. The Local Innovation Plan encourages faculty and staff to explore innovative options to deliver instruction and to assess students' mastery of learning. As appropriate and in limited circumstances, the District may choose to exempt certain innovative programs of study from the 90% rule.

# -- DRAFT PLAN --

## ACTION STEPS

1.	Committees will be formed as needed to develop specific systems for innovative approaches to earning course credits.
2.	Examine different formats and instructional strategies, such as online coursework, blended coursework, dual enrollment, early college, performance tasks, community-based learning, independent study, mentorships, and credit recovery for optimum student engagement.
3.	In concert with the Curriculum Department and campus administration, make recommendation to DEIC and Superintendent for innovative courses.
4.	Provide professional learning for teachers in the implementation of personalized learning tools and strategies.
5.	Monitor student performance and make annual adjustments to improve.



## Personnel

### **Exemption From Portions of:** Texas Education Code §21.003(a)

**Currently:** TEC 21.003 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. Aransas Pass ISD affirms the standards to hold an appropriate state certification or permit in almost all cases, but there are some limited circumstances where this is not always practical or in the best interests of Aransas Pass ISD students.

**Proposed:** The district will maintain its current expectations for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certifications by the appropriate state agency for the position in question. However, when that is not reasonably possible, the district will have the flexibility to hire the most qualified individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

The creation of a local teaching certificate will provide the ability to hire professionals with industry or higher education experience to teach Career and Technical Education (CTE) and/or secondary courses to provide the opportunity for students to receive core credit. Additionally, the local teaching certificate option could be utilized when a teacher with state certification in another area is the most qualified teacher available for a high-demand position in bilingual education or languages other than English (LOTE).

### ACTION STEPS

1.	The District will establish Local Criteria, such as years of experience, qualifications, education and industry certifications, to qualify for a local (district) teaching certificate. The Local Teaching Certificate will be for one year and must be renewed annually.
2.	In cases where a Local Teaching Certificate is documented as the best option for a position, the campus principal and the Curriculum Department, along with the CTE, Bilingual Education, or other appropriate department, will submit candidates to the Superintendent with their credentials and justification. The Superintendent will determine whether it is in the best interest of the district to certify the individual.
3.	The Superintendent will recommend the candidate to the Board for approval.
4.	For each locally certified teacher approved, the campus principal will create a personal professional development plan.

## Health Care Options

**Exemption From Portions of:** Texas Education Code §22.004(i)

Preclusion from providing alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program once the program of coverage under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code is implemented.

Related Board Policies: CRD (LEGAL) and CRD (LOCAL)

**Currently:** TEC 22.004 (i) states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees pursuant to TEC 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all Aransas Pass ISD employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. This provision is in direct contradiction to the wishes of the Aransas Pass ISD Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Texas Education Code 22.004 is not in any of the prohibited exemptions that can be included in a District's local innovation plan pursuant to Texas Education Code 12A.004 and the list of the Commissioner's prohibited exemptions in Texas Administrative Code Title 19, Chapter 102, subchapter JJ, Section 102.1309.

**Proposed:** Increased local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs.

### ACTION STEPS

1.	Present to staff all health care options with an opportunity to ask questions.
2.	Provide opportunity for staff to sign up for the health care option of choice.

## Class Size Ratio

**Exemption From Portions of:** Texas Education Code (EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.111) (Ed. Code 25.112) (Ed. Code 25.113)

**Currently:** Kindergarten through 4th grade classes are required to be kept at a 22 to 1 ratio. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with TEA and parents are to be notified of the waiver by the local district.

**Proposed:** Aransas Pass ISD is seeking autonomy to address class size with innovative strategies and report class sizes greater than 22:1 to the Board of Trustees. APISD supports the concept of appropriate class size to deliver quality instruction and the district seeks to recruit and hire the number of teachers needed to meet the 22:1 requirement for grades K-4. Over the years, APISD has sought waivers for classrooms with more than 22 students being served in a single classroom. Students in the elementary grades are often served in various groupings and settings throughout the day. Teachers are trained in flexible grouping and small group instruction in order to differentiate to meet students' needs. By providing this exemption, the Board of Trustees would have local control over class size ratios.

The district will continue to plan efficiently for enrollment numbers from year to year basing projections on the previous year's numbers as well as projected retainees per grade. However, in many instances one student could trigger the need for the waiver process and parent notification which is simply a bureaucratic step and serves no useful purpose. The district seeks the provision to exceed the prescribed ratio when enrollment numbers increase or the increase occurs later into the school year.

### ACTION STEPS

1.	When the need for exceeding the 22:1 is identified, a written request will be sent to the Superintendent. The request will include the reasons for exceeding the ratio and a progress monitoring plan.
2.	Superintendent will consider the request and take to the Board of Trustees for approval.

## Transfer Student Policy

**Exemption From Portions of:** (FDA Legal & Local) (Ed. Code 25.036)

**Currently:** A district may choose to accept students as transfers, even if they are not entitled to admission in the district. This provision has been interpreted to require a student transfer to be for a period of one school year.

**Proposed:** The district would like the flexibility to revoke approved transfers at the end of the first semester if the student consistently fails to meet the District's expectations for behavior, academic effort or attendance, is placed in DAEP, is expelled or engages in criminal behavior.

### Action Steps

1.	Guardians of transfer students will sign paperwork acknowledging APISD's expectations for behavior, academic effort and attendance in order to keep transfer status.
2.	At the end of each semester, campus principals will evaluate each transfer student's status at meeting expectations and report any issues to the Superintendent.
3.	The Superintendent will consider the information provided to determine if a notice of concern or a revoke of transfer is justified.