



## Conroe Independent School District Local Innovation Plan Renewal

District of Innovation Committee Approved Plan: January 10, 2024

Public Meeting: February 14, 2024

Board of Trustees Adopted Plan: February 20, 2024

### District of Innovation

#### INTRODUCTION

Texas Education Code Chapter 12A, Districts of Innovation, establishes a process by which school districts can become “districts of innovation.” A district of innovation (DOI) is a school district that has complied with the provisions of Chapter 12A to exempt themselves from provisions in the Texas Education Code that are not required of open-enrollment charter schools. This legislation was an effort by the 84th Texas Legislature to level the playing field between school districts and open-enrollment charter schools. As a DOI, a school district’s board of trustees gains greater local control in its decision-making. DOI districts are also better positioned to be innovative and forward-thinking while continuing to comply with the state’s fiscal, instructional, and academic accountability requirements.

#### OUR PROCESS

In 2016, Conroe ISD (CISD or District) became a DOI and exempted itself from Texas Education Code §25.0811 First Day of Instruction. In 2020, the District added an additional provision to its DOI plan, Texas Education Code §21.003 Certification Required. To maintain its DOI designation, the District must review and update its DOI plan every five years.

To begin the renewal process and update its DOI plan, the District held a public hearing at the November 14, 2023, meeting of the Conroe ISD Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees adopted a resolution to initiate the process of renewing the District’s DOI designation and designated the District-Level Planning and Decision-Making Committee (DLPDMC), which includes teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, as the committee to develop the DOI plan.

The DOI Committee met on January 10, 2024, and approved the following plan for posting on the District’s website. Comments about the plan can be submitted for 30 days via the web beginning January 12, 2024. The DOI Committee will review the submitted comments and hold an open meeting on February 14, 2024, after which, if a majority of DOI Committee members approve the plan, the plan will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval at its February 20, 2024, meeting. The District will also notify the commissioner as required by Chapter 12A. If the Board approves the DOI Plan by a two-thirds majority vote, the DOI Plan will be in place for five years.

## INNOVATIONS

### Campus behavior coordinator

Texas Education Code §37.0012 requires each campus to designate a person to serve as a “campus behavior coordinator” and be responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementing Chapter 37.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Having a single person at each campus responsible for student discipline is not feasible due to the size of our schools and the necessity for the person administering discipline to have knowledge and understanding of each student’s unique circumstances. Having only one person at each campus designated as a “campus behavior coordinator” is not feasible nor in the best interest of the District’s students, their families, staff, or campus safety.

**Local Innovation:** The student discipline structure in the District’s schools utilizes assistant principals, typically assigned by grade level or alphabet, to be responsible for the discipline of students assigned to them. This allows administrators to build relationships with students and their families in case there is a discipline issue, as well as ensuring the administrator will have a better understanding of the student and his or her situation. The District also employs behavior coaches and school psychologists who assist students with behavior or discipline issues. Decisions regarding student behavior and discipline are collaborative to ensure student needs are met and District schools are safe. Campus administrators, primarily assistant principals, will be responsible for implementing Chapter 37 and the District’s Student Code of Conduct. The District will assign one administrator as the lead contact for student discipline and whose job duties will include reviewing discipline data, analyzing discipline trends, and collaborating with staff to address student behavior issues.

### First day of instruction and last day of school

Texas Education Code §§25.0811 & 25.0812 prohibit school districts from beginning instruction for students prior to the fourth Monday in August and from ending school before May 15, respectively.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Exemption from these provisions gives the District more flexibility to determine school start and end dates that best meet the needs of the CISD community.

**Local Innovation:** The District has a robust school calendar development process. Having flexibility in the process will give stakeholders more options to consider. The District’s district-level planning and decision-making committee, based on input from stakeholders, will continue to make a calendar recommendation to the Board of Trustees, who have the ultimate approval of the school calendar.

### Minutes of instruction

Texas Education Code §25.081 (a-c) requires school districts to operate (i.e., provide instruction to students) at least 75,600 minutes each school year and gives the commissioner the authority to grant exceptions in the event of disasters and other types of emergencies. If the commissioner does not grant an exception, schools must add minutes to meet the time requirement.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Exemption from this provision eliminates the possibility of the commissioner not approving a request by the District to reduce the number of required minutes of instruction in the event of a weather or other type of disaster that could impact the ability of students to attend school. It will give the District, through its Board of Trustees, in non-disaster situations, the authority to determine the number of minutes of instructional time that best meets the needs of its schools, students, their families, and staff.

**Local Innovation:** The District will determine the needs of its campuses in setting the amount of required instructional time. Having flexibility will give the District options to alter the length of school days, modify school start and stop times, and allow for early or late release based on the needs of the District and/or the needs of individual schools or programs. This flexibility will also give teachers time to learn from one another, make instructional decisions based on student data, build in regular time for parent conferences, and give the District discretion to determine if it is necessary to make up instructional minutes lost due to a disaster or other event resulting in loss of instructional minutes.

## Possession of nicotine e-cigarettes

Texas Education Code §37.006(a)(2)(C-2) requires school districts to place students who possess, use, sell, give, or deliver to another person, an e-cigarette, as defined by §161.081, Health and Safety Code in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP).

**Rationale:** Exception from this provision allows the District to utilize the six factors set out in Texas Education Code §37.001(a)(4) when assigning discipline to students who possess nicotine e-cigarettes at school. Without exemption from this provision, students possessing an actual cigarette containing nicotine would receive a lesser disciplinary consequence under the Student Code of Conduct. Additionally, removing students from campus to a disciplinary setting can negatively impact student learning. The District's DAEP has limited capacity. The seats in DAEP should be reserved for students who engage in serious Student Code of Conduct violations, such as assaultive offenses and offenses that disrupt the educational environment.

**Local Innovation:** The District will provide students who use, possess, sell, give, or deliver nicotine, regardless of the form, educational support regarding the dangers of nicotine use in addition to disciplinary consequences based on the factors set out in Texas Education Code §37.001(a)(4).

## Teacher appraisal requirements (student learning objective)

Texas Education Code §21.352 sets out the metrics that may and may not be used as part of the teacher appraisal process.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Exemption from this requirement will eliminate a compliance requirement that does not benefit student instruction. While it is essential to use a variety of measurements, including goal-setting, self-assessment, observations, student progress toward learning objectives, and other formative assessments in determining teacher performance, teachers already dedicate a significant amount of time in data meetings and in professional learning communities (PLCs) to evaluate the growth and progress of students toward learning objectives. The student learning objective (SLO) process is duplicative and takes a significant amount of teacher time without a corresponding benefit to students.

**Local Innovation:** The District will have the flexibility to determine what performance measures are best suited for evaluating the job performance of a teacher and teachers will have more time to focus on meaningful ways to impact student success and ensure student growth.

## Teacher certification

Texas Education Code §21.003 prohibits school districts from employing a teacher, teacher intern, teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Exemption from this requirement will provide the District the flexibility to hire the most qualified candidates for teaching positions. More flexibility in hiring individuals who have content-specific knowledge but do not have a teaching certification will allow the District to hire individuals who best meet the needs of the students and who are able to provide the content knowledge students need to enter an increasingly innovative world. Additionally, it will allow the District to utilize a certified teacher to provide instruction in classes outside of their content area or grade span.

**Local Innovation:** The District's priority is to continue to hire certified staff. However, lack of certification will not exclude an applicant who can demonstrate the skills necessary to teach students the content in courses and subjects that are difficult to fill or that are in high demand.

## Teacher contracts

Texas Education Code §21.102(b) prohibits a school district from giving a probationary employment contract for more than one school year to a teacher who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment in a school district.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Exemption from this requirement will allow the District to give probationary contracts for more than one year to teachers who have previously worked in public education for five of the last eight years, giving the District additional time to determine if the teacher's performance merits a term employment contract.

**Local Innovation:** Campus administrators and hiring officials will have an additional school year to fully assess a teacher's job performance, as well as time to provide additional support and training to a teacher before deciding if the teacher should receive a term employment contract.

## Teacher workdays

Texas Education Code §21.401(b) requires that employment contracts for educators be for a minimum of 10 months and provide for a minimum of 187 days of service.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Exemption from the 187-day service requirement will give the District more flexibility in setting educator work schedules.

**Local Innovation:** The District will continue to provide ten-month contracts to educators, but without the 187 days of service requirement.

## Transfer students

Texas Education Code §25.036 allows school districts to accept transfer students on an annual basis when both the receiving district and the student applicant's parent or guardian approve the transfer in writing.

**Benefit of Exemption:** Because transfers granted under this provision are for one school year, school districts are prohibited from revoking the transfers during the school year. Exemption from this requirement will allow the District to revoke transfers granted under this provision when students fail to comply with the District's Student Code of Conduct, or their attendance drops below 90%.

**Local Innovation:** The District will have the ability to revoke a transfer granted under this provision if the student violates the District's Student Code of Conduct and is expelled, placed in a disciplinary alternative education program, or in or out of school suspension, or when the student's attendance falls below the TEA 90% attendance standard.