



Menard Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

Introduction

The 84th Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 1842 which gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to the state's open enrollment charter schools. HB 1842 provides Menard ISD an opportunity to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of our student population, in order to prepare them for success and life-long learning. Our district must have an academic performance rating of at least Academically Acceptable and adopt an innovation plan.

Menard ISD took the first step in exploring this opportunity when the MISD Board of Trustees approved a resolution initiating the process in September. The Board then held a public hearing to consider whether the district should develop an innovation plan, at which time the Board decided to move forward in the process. A committee was appointed to develop an innovation plan. The committee created a district of innovation plan. The plan then will be posted on-line for at least 30 days. The District Advisory Committee will have a public meeting to approve it before it can go back to the Board.

District of Innovation Team

Coby Porter, Board of Trustee	Sharon Hill, Board of Trustee
Amy Bannowsky, Superintendent	Erik Thormaehlen, High School Principal
Cordelia Kothmann, Elem/JH Principal	Felicia Laxson, Counselor
Nancy Bean, High School Teacher	Cindy Feather, Elem/JH Librarian
Collyn Wright, Parent & Community Member	Valera Corbin, Parent & Community Member

District of Innovation Timeline

August 29, 2016

Informational item at Menard Independent School Board meeting

September 7, 2016

Initial meeting Administrative Team to discuss District of Innovation

Board of Trustees approve resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation

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

September 28, 2016

Initial meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

October 14, 2016

Review of plan by the District of Innovation Committee

October 17, 2016

Innovation plan posted on the district website for 30 days (TEC 12A.005(a)(1))

Commissioner notified of Board's intent to vote on District of Innovation

November 29, 2016

Public Meeting and District of Innovation Committee Meeting

December 7, 2016

Menard ISD Board Meeting

Goals of Menard ISD in our District of Innovation Plan

Goal 1: Menard ISD Board of Trustees and administration will make teacher certification and contract decisions based on district qualifications that meet the needs of our district's students and community.

Goal 2: Menard ISD Board of Trustees and administration will make governance decisions based on the unique needs of the district's students and community.

Innovations

Menard ISD in conjunction with the District of Innovation Committee proposes the following flexibilities with the Texas Education Code to provide the best educational opportunities for students at Menard ISD.

Teacher Certification

Currently

State law 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 request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification. (TEC 21.003, TEC 21.055)

Rationale for Exemption

This current system inhibits the district's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill positions as well as elective positions. It does not take into account the unique instructional and/or financial needs of our district. Menard ISD is a rural 1A school district in which teachers must teach multiple courses, but we are still limited on courses and the variety of course offerings. In order to offer additional course offerings and flexible scheduling which would benefit our students and community, the district must establish local qualification requirements. This exemption from the existing teacher certification requirements would allow the district to have the flexibility to hire community instructors or internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their certifications. In addition, this exemption would allow the district the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades, vocations, or fields to teach those trades, vocations, or languages (such as welding, fine arts, health science, criminal justice, law, Spanish, etc.) if certified teachers are not available.

Innovation Strategies

- The campus principals may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach a subject(s) out of his or her certified field. The principals must provide reasoning for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which qualify this individual to teach this subject. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.
- An individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with all of the individual's credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if he or she believe that the individual could be an asset to the students. The superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual beginning employment. Local teaching certificates will require an employment agreement rather than a contract.
- An individual with a college degree or certification in a trade could be eligible to teach a course related to his or her expertise or experience through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with all of the individual's credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if he or she believes that the individual could be an asset to the students and district. The superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual beginning employment. Local teaching certificates will require an employment agreement rather than a contract.

Probationary Contracts

Currently

State law states that 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. (TEC 21.102)

Rationale for Exemption

This time period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to state assessment results and end of year progress testing.

Innovation Strategy

Experienced teachers and counselors new to Menard ISD that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years from the last date of district employment. This allows Menard ISD more time to evaluate a staff member's effectiveness.

School Start Date

Currently

State law states a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August. (TEC 25.0811a)

Rationale for Exemption

The current process does not allow flexibility for our school district and what is the best fit for our students, school, and community. With this flexibility of an earlier start date it allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of our district. This would enable our district to increase college and career readiness, personalize learning, balance the amount of instructional time per semester, and extend learning time for December End of Course. This would also allow Menard ISD to start classes as a short week to transition the students during the back to school time.

Innovation Strategy

Menard ISD would have the ability to create a calendar that could start during the week of the third Monday of August.

Class-size Ratios

Currently

State law states a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class. (TEC 25.112)

State law states that a campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112 from class size limits shall provide written notice of the exception to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception. (TEC 25.113)

Rationale for Exemption

When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the agency. The school then notifies parents of the waiver or exception to class size limit. While Menard ISD recognizes that small class sizes play a positive role in the classroom, we recognize that it must be balanced with the best staff and the logistics of the timing of adding staff. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influence the learning environment. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. Menard ISD also uses creative small grouping opportunities during math and reading to help the students be successful. Our math and reading specialists help our elementary staff maintain small numbers while teaching the core areas. Also, we have Jacket Time which focuses on enrichment and acceleration in the small groups to help our students to be successful.

Innovation Strategy

A TEA waiver will not be filed when a K-4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ration. The superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees for approval. This allows Menard ISD local control over class size ratios but does not disregard the intent of the ratio requirements. This enables Menard ISD to have flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passion and needs. It allows flexibility in class size at all times for regrouping for success, small groups, or large groups. Menard ISD uses creative small grouping opportunities during math and reading to help the students be successful. Our math and reading specialists help our elementary staff maintain small numbers while teaching the core areas. Also, we have Jacket Time which focuses on enrichment and acceleration in the small groups to help our students to be successful. This will minimize the paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place focus on student success. This will allow the district the ability to group students based upon academic, social and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waiver when the need arises.

Term

The term for this plan is for five years unless amended or terminated earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas Law. In the event Menard ISD feels other exemptions would benefit the district, community, and/or students, the Board of Trustees will follow procedures to amend the plan.