



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-2021

Steve Terrell, Board of Trustee

Tami Russell, Board of Trustee

Amy Bannowsky, Superintendent

Jacob Hand, High School Principal

Blenda Wright, Elem/JH Principal

Felicia Laxson, Counselor

William Barker, High School Teacher

Melayne Kothmann, Elem/JH Teacher

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

2021 Renewal

March 10, 2021

Menard ISD public hearing on District of Innovation

May 12, 2021

Menard ISD appoints committee to review and amend the District of Innovation Plan

June 3, 2021

District committee meets to discuss amendments and review District of Innovation.
Draft plan posted to website and Commissioner of Education notified of District intent to renew.

July 6, 2021

Public Meeting and District of Innovation Committee Meeting
District committee meets to approve the Innovation Plan

July 14, 2021

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.

Uniform 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.

Bank Depository Contract Term

Currently

State law states that bank depository contract the district 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 two additional two-year terms. The contract term and any extension must coincide with the district's fiscal year. (TEC 45.206 and TEC 45.205)

Rationale for Exemption

In a small district and a small town, the District's choices for its depository bank are limited. MISD uses services provided by the bank on a daily basis.

Innovation Strategy

MISD will continue to use the local depository for the district without rebidding as follows: At the end of each two-year term, the district and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for multiple two additional year periods. The district must review the contract to ensure the best value and support for the district and obtain Board approval for each of the two-year periods. Nothing in this process would hinders the district's ability to undertake bidding the District Depository Bank at the end of any of the two-year periods. Further, this entire Innovation Plan must be reviewed and renewed at the end of five years, including this provision. The time saved by the superintendent and the board of trustees by not having to deal with this ministerial duty every two years will allow the superintendent and the board more time for studying and planning for student progress, instructional strategies, and innovative options for the district educational goals.

Alternative Uniform Group Insurance Coverage

Currently

The Texas Education Code (TEC §22.004) 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 Menard 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.

Rationale for Exemption

Menard ISD values our staff and the quality of the total employment compensation package we can offer. One major benefit of any potential employment opportunity is quality medical insurance at the best possible cost. This exemption allows Menard ISD the opportunity to sample the market for group medical insurance and creates the possibility for flexibility in plan design and focus. The availability of an alternative to the current TRS options will also create a database of medical claims information from our own district employees that can be utilized to drive a targeted wellness program and increase the overall health of our employees and community.

Innovation Strategy

Menard ISD will sample the market for group medical insurance plans through an official procurement process, evaluate the components of those plans, and then present to our employees an additional group medical insurance option (or options) alongside the TRS offerings during open enrollment. Employees would then have an additional choice in the options for group medical insurance, along with the associated benefits which come in a competitive insurance marketplace.

Contract Service Days

Currently

The Texas Education Code states (TEC § 21.401(b)) that an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Rationale for Exemption

State law currently requires educators employed on a 10-month contract to provide a minimum of 187 days of service. With the passage of § 25.081 which changed the required days of instruction to minutes, the law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees. The determination of how many days is required to fulfill an employee's contract should be a local decision based on accomplishment of the standard of instructional time. Determination by the district to reduce the number of teacher contract days from 187 days of service will have no effect on teacher salaries.

Innovation Strategy

Menard ISD will be able to reduce the number of contract service days for employees without reducing the salaries associated with the position.

Site-based Decision Making

Currently

In the Texas Education Code, PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. (TEC §§ 11.251 and 11.252) Sec. 11.251. (a) The board of trustees of each independent school district shall ensure that a district

improvement plan and improvement plans for each campus are developed, reviewed, and revised annually for the purpose of improving the performance of all students. The board shall annually approve district and campus performance objectives and shall ensure that the district and campus plans: (1) are mutually supportive to accomplish the identified objectives; and (2) at a minimum, support the state goals and objectives under Chapter 4. (b) The board shall adopt a policy to establish a district- and campus-level planning and decision-making process that will involve the professional staff of the district, parents, and community members in establishing and reviewing the district's and campuses' educational plans, goals, performance objectives, and major classroom instructional programs. The board shall establish a procedure under which meetings are held regularly by district- and campus-level planning and decision-making committees that include representative professional staff, including, if practicable, at least one representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities, parents of students enrolled in the district, business representatives, and community members. The committees shall include a business representative without regard to whether the representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is located in the district. The board, or the board's designee, shall periodically meet with the district-level committee to review the district-level committee's deliberations. (c) For purposes of establishing the composition of committees under this section: (1) a person who stands in parental relation to a student is considered a parent; (2) a parent who is an employee of the school district is not considered a parent representative on the committee; (3) a parent is not considered a representative of community members on the committee; and (4) community members must reside in the district and must be at least 18 years of age. (d) The board shall also ensure that an administrative procedure is provided to clearly define the respective roles and responsibilities of the superintendent, central office staff, principals, teachers, district-level committee members, and campus-level committee members in the areas of planning, budgeting, curriculum, staffing patterns, staff development, and school organization. The board shall ensure that the district-level planning and decision-making committee will be actively involved in establishing the administrative procedure that defines the respective roles and responsibilities pertaining to planning and decision-making at the district and campus levels. (e) The board shall adopt a procedure, consistent with Section 21.407(a), for the professional staff in the district to nominate and elect the professional staff representatives who shall meet with the board, or the board designee as required under this section. At least two-thirds of the elected professional staff representatives must be classroom teachers. The remaining staff representatives shall include both campus- and district-level professional staff members. If practicable, the committee membership shall include at least one professional staff representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities. Board policy must provide procedures for: (1) the selection of parents to the district-level and campus-level committees; and (2) the selection of community members and business representatives to serve on the district level committee in a manner that provides for appropriate representation of the community's diversity. (f) The district policy must provide that all pertinent federal planning requirements are addressed through the district- and campus-level planning process. (g) This section does not: (1) prohibit the board from conducting meetings with teachers or groups of teachers other than the meetings described by this section; (2) prohibit the board from establishing policies providing avenues for input from others, including students or paraprofessional staff, in district- or campus-level planning and decision making; (3) limit or affect the power of the board to govern the public schools; or (4) create a new cause of action or require collective bargaining. Sec. 11.252.

DISTRICT-LEVEL PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING. (a) 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(c)(1)-(4). The district improvement plan must include provisions for: (1) a comprehensive needs assessment addressing district student performance on the achievement indicators, and other appropriate measures of performance, that are disaggregated by all student groups served by the district, including categories of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sex, and populations served by special programs, including students in special education programs under Subchapter A, Chapter 29; (2) measurable district performance objectives for all appropriate achievement indicators for all student populations, including students in special education programs under Subchapter A, Chapter 29, and other measures of student performance that may be identified through the comprehensive needs assessment; (3) strategies for improvement of student performance that include: (A) instructional methods for addressing the needs of student groups not achieving their full potential; (B) methods for addressing the needs of students for special programs, including: (i) suicide prevention programs, in accordance with Subchapter O-1, Chapter 161, Health and Safety Code, which includes a parental or guardian notification procedure; (ii) conflict resolution programs; (iii) violence prevention programs; and (iv) dyslexia treatment programs; (C) dropout reduction; (D) integration of technology in instructional and administrative programs; (E) discipline management; (F) staff development for professional staff of the district; (G) career education to assist students in developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for a broad range of career opportunities; and (H) accelerated education; (4) strategies for providing to middle school, junior high school, and high school students, those students' teachers and school counselors, and those students' parents information about: (A) higher education admissions and financial aid opportunities; (B) the TEXAS grant program and the Teach for Texas grant program established under Chapter 56; (C) the need for students to make informed curriculum choices to be prepared for success beyond high school; and (D) sources of information on higher education admissions and financial aid; (5) resources needed to implement identified strategies; (6) staff responsible for ensuring the accomplishment of each strategy; (7) timelines for ongoing monitoring of the implementation of each improvement strategy; (8) formative evaluation criteria for determining periodically whether strategies are resulting in intended improvement of student performance; and (9) the policy under Section 38.0041 addressing sexual abuse and other maltreatment of children. (b) A district's plan for the improvement of student performance is not filed with the agency, but the district must make the plan available to the agency on request. (c) In a district that has only one campus, the district- and campus-level committees may be one committee and the district and campus plans may be one plan. (d) At least every two years, each district shall evaluate the effectiveness of the district's decision making and planning policies, procedures, and staff development activities related to district- and campus-level decision-making and planning to ensure that they are effectively structured to positively impact student performance. (d-1) Expired. (e) The district-level committee established under Section 11.251 shall hold at least one public meeting per year. The required meeting shall be held after receipt of the annual district performance report from the agency for the purpose of discussing the performance of the district and the district performance objectives. District policy and procedures must be established to ensure that systematic communications measures are in place to periodically obtain broad-based community, parent, and staff input and to provide information to those persons regarding the recommendations of the district-level committee. This section does not create a new cause of action or require collective bargaining. (f) A superintendent shall regularly consult the district-level committee in the planning, operation, supervision, and evaluation of the district educational program.

Rationale for Exemption

Menard ISD seeks exemption from the site-based decision-making process and the convening of the school health advisory committee and the many accompanying requirements falling under the governance of those two bodies. The statutory requirements as set forth in the Texas Education Code in Chapter 11 are burdensome, time consuming, and ultimately cause a misdirection of resources from the primary focus of schools: the education of students. Stakeholders will continue to be involved in the process, but one that meets the needs of this district, school, and community as opposed to the broad brush of statutory requirements leveled down from a one size fits all approach as detailed in the code. This will consolidate the number of meetings and the number of committees required by law and will better serve this community.

Innovation Strategy

The board shall adopt a policy to establish a district- and campus-level planning and decision-making process that will involve the professional staff of the district, parents, and community members in establishing and reviewing the district's and campuses' educational plans, goals, performance objectives, and major classroom instructional programs. The board shall establish a procedure under which meetings are held regularly by district- and campus-level planning and decision-making committees that include representative professional staff, including, if practicable, at least one representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities, parents of students enrolled in the district, business representatives, and community members. The committees shall include a business representative without regard to whether the representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is in the district. In place of the SBDM and the SHAC, a Superintendent's Advisory Council (SAC) will be established, meet, review, analyze, and respond to both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the district's success and most importantly, students' success. This council will convene at least two times per year and generate the general direction of district resources and efforts. This consolidation of committees will yield greater opportunity for one council to address a multiple of needs as opposed to having one meeting after another throughout the year.

Transfer of Student

Currently

The TEC § 25.036(a) Sec. 25.036 states that the TRANSFER OF STUDENT. (a) Any child, other than a high school graduate, who is younger than 21 years of age and eligible for enrollment on September 1 of any school year may transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in this state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian or person having lawful control of the child jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer.

Rationale for Exemption

The statute has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of an entire school year. Flexibility with regard to transfer of students will allow the district to create an educational environment that is more conducive to learning. Flexibility allows revocation of a transfer agreement when the student exhibits conduct that disrupts the educational environment or warrants disciplinary action such as suspension, placement in a disciplinary alternative education program, or expulsion. It allows revocation of a transfer agreement when the student exhibits attendance problems that impact the performance of the student or school district. Additionally, it allows an efficient way to remove barriers to the high-quality learning environment that other students deserve. Flexibility with regard to transfer of students allows the district to create a safer educational environment for the reasons noted above.

Innovation Strategy

Menard ISD will be able to revoke transfers at any time during the school year.

School Day Interruptions

Currently

TEC § 25.083) Sec. 25.083. SCHOOL DAY INTERRUPTIONS. (a) The board of trustees of each school district shall adopt and strictly enforce a policy limiting interruptions of classes during the school day for nonacademic activities such as announcements and sales promotions. At a minimum, the policy must limit announcements other than emergency announcements to once during the school day. (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.

Rationale for Exemption

Currently, state law currently requires the Board of Trustees to adopt and strictly enforce a policy limiting interruptions of classes during the school day for nonacademic activities such as announcements to once during the school day except in the case of an emergency. While the district agrees with maximizing class time is crucial, this requirement is not practical.

Innovation Strategy

Menard ISD will have the freedom to make announcements as needed during class time for picture days and other days that are not routine. The district will continue to minimize classroom disruptions to the greatest extent possible.

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.