

Ponder Independent School District Local Innovation Plan 2017-2018

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, gave Texas public schools the opportunity to pursue exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. Chapter 12A of the TEC permits a traditional public school the authority to exercise greater local control, and utilize the exemptions in Education law that charter schools are currently entitled too. To obtain exemptions, the District must create a Local Innovation Plan detailing the code requirements that inhibit the goals of the District, and the benefits expected from the exemption to the district. The Ponder ISD Board of Trustees adopted a resolution on December 15, 2016 to initiate the process of seeking the designation as a District of Innovation.

THE TERM

The term of the plan will begin with the 2017-2018 academic school year and terminate at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, unless amended, rescinded or renewed by the Innovative Plan Committee and the Board of Trustees. The Innovative Plan Committee will review the plan annually to make adjustments if needed. Any recommended changes will be posted to the District website for 30 days and require the approval of the Innovative Plan Committee and the Board of Trustees.

INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Bruce Yeager	Superintendent, Ponder ISD
Kent Josselet	Director of curriculum, staff development & testing
Brent Lankford	Teacher
Ruben Bergara	Teacher
Connie Ford	Teacher
Shawn Simmons	High School Principal
Ted Heers	Jr. High Principal
Janell Wilbanks	Elementary Principal
Kim Broadstreet	Community Member
Ted Leveridge	Business Community Member
Ashley Barraza	Parent
Judy Rogers	Parent
Kim Perryman	Parent
Anne Kimmey	Parent
Vangee Duessen	Trustee
Jeff Chapman	Trustee

TIMELINE

December 15, 2016	Board of Trustees approved Resolution for District to consider designation as a District of Innovation.
January 19, 2017	Board of Trustees held a Public Hearing on becoming a District of Innovation and commissioned an Innovation Committee.
March 2, 2017	Committee Meeting
March 3, 2017	Innovation Plan Posted on Ponder ISD Web-Site
April 20, 2017	Board of Trustee Approval

VISION STATEMENT

PISD is a standard setter, not a trend follower in providing an Exemplary Education.

PISD MISSION STATEMENT

All students will be well rounded and prepared for the next step such as college, work or technical training & be instilled with a proud sense of community belonging. Each student will have the confidence, passion and preparation to be successful at whatever they choose.

INNOVATION PLAN EXEMPTIONS

CLASS SIZE IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH 4th GRADE

Texas Education Code: § 25.112. CLASS SIZE. (a) Except as otherwise authorized by this section, a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class.

Texas Education Code: § 25.113 NOTICE OF CLASS SIZE. (a) A campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112(d) 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.

Rationale for the Exemption:

Based on current state law, classes in grades Kindergarten through 4th may not exceed a ratio of 22 students to 1 teacher. When an individual class exceeds this ratio, the District must either add a new teacher, reassign teachers from other schools with lower student enrollment, or submit a waiver request to the Texas Education Agency. These waivers requests have not been rejected by TEA. In addition to the waiver request, it is required that a letter be sent to each parent in the class that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted and the class exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

Local Guidelines:

Ponder ISD remains committed to meeting the needs of each student. Because of the nature of student enrollment growth, it is necessary to apply for class size waivers despite the fact that new staff are assigned to campuses with highest projected growth. PISD believes that class size plays a positive role in the classroom, but this must be balanced with the timing of adding the best, qualified teaching candidates.

As part of the PISD Local Innovation Plan, the District will maintain the 22:1 student to teacher ratio in Kindergarten through 4th grades and will continue to follow the process of thoughtful planning, assignment of teachers to the schools with growing student enrollment, reviewing staffing ratios, and making decisions in the best interests of students while taking into consideration the financial capacity of the District. In the event that class sizes exceeds the 22:1 ratio, in Kindergarten – 4th grade, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, but the Superintendent will submit a request to the Board of Trustees for approval. Additionally, parents will be informed of all efforts relative to class size. This exemption provides Ponder ISD local control over class size, student learning disruption and hiring practices.

FIRST DAY of INSTRUCTION (School Start Date)

Texas Education Code: Subchapter C – OPERATION of SCHOOLS and SCHOOL ATTENDANCE - §25.0811 FIRST DAY of INSTRUCTION

(a) A school district may not begin instruction before the 4th Monday in August, unless the school operates year-round, or if district has more than 190,000 students: the days are financed by local funds, or the campus is under comprehensive reform, or the majority of the students at the campus(es) are educationally disadvantaged.

Rationale for the Exemption:

Restricting school start date to the 4th Monday in August operationally challenges Ponder ISD because the 75,600 instructional minutes must be calendared between the 4th Monday in August and generally the first week of June. Ponder ISD in collaboration with the local community should decide what is best for its students and staff in order to achieve goals outlined by the district. Flexibility of start date allows for a more targeted approach for academic excellence as well as opportunities for professional development.

Local Guidelines:

The district will have the flexibility to designate the first day of school each year. The calendar exemption does not affect the number of contract days for teachers, which will remain the same.

PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS

Texas Education Code: § 21.102(b). PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS

(b) 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.

Rationale for the Exemption:

The current system allows for one year on a probationary contract for a teacher that is new to our district but has taught five of the last eight years. This may not be a sufficient amount of time to truly evaluate whether or not the new employee will be a good fit for our district. Exemption from TEC 21.102 would allow PISD the ability to extend the probationary period for all new hires to the district to a maximum of three years. This would be consistent with what is currently in place for new hires that do not meet the requirements of TEC 21.102. The intent for Ponder ISD is to provide consistent, high-quality instructional staff in every classroom.

Local Guidelines:

All new hires would be on a contract for a term not 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 for all new hires to the district.