



Alief District of Innovation Plan

Approved by the Alief ISD Board of Trustees
February 21, 2017



Preparing Students for Tomorrow – Caring for Them Today

Board of Trustees

Ann Williams, President
Rick Moreno, Vice President
Sarah B. Winkler, Secretary
Dr. Lily Truong, Assistant Secretary
Nghì T. Ho, Member
Tiffany D. Thomas, Member

District Administration

HD Chambers, Superintendent
Ava Montgomery, Deputy Superintendent, Instruction
Charles Woods, Deputy Superintendent, Business
Hilda Rodriguez, Assistant Superintendent, Support Services
Dr. Elizabeth Veloz-Powell, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources
Deanna Wentz, Assistant Superintendent, Finance
Maggie Cuellar, Area Superintendent
Dr. Sue Page, Area Superintendent
Nancy Trent, Area Superintendent

Alief District of Innovation Committee

Facilitator – Shannon Buerk, CEO, Engage 2 Learn

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Darrell Alexander Human Resources | Tarik Celik World Chamber of Commerce | Francisco Garcia Texans Together |
| Jessica Alvear-Moreno Hicks Elementary | Linda Chambers Holub Middle School | Tracy Gaston Killough Middle School |
| Stacy Amos Hicks Elementary | Gladys Cheng Holmquist Elementary/EIC | David Gilkeson Westchase District |
| Tameka Anderson After School Program | Patrick Cherry Hastings High School | Eric Goodie Houston Area Urban League |
| Jackie Armwood Student Management Services | Carolyn Clark Prevention & Safe Schools | Roland Gramajo Community |
| Nikki Babineaux-Henry Alief Early College High School | Jesus Davila Children At Risk | Licia Green Waterman Steele Group |
| DeaAnne Baker Special Education | Chip Davis Parent | Dr. Tracee Grigsby-Turner Professional Development |
| Jennifer Barnes Cummings Elementary | Mary Davis Parent | Dr. John Hansen Houston Community College |
| Marla Bernal Youens Elementary | Raynese Edwards Outside In Consulting, LLC | Elizabeth Harden Horn Elementary |
| Martha Bissett Special Education | Mark Ferraz Parent | Karen Harris Lucas Food & Cake |
| Cynthia Blanco Youens Elementary | Dr. Reagan Flowers C-STEM Teacher & Student Support Services, Inc. | Beryl Hogshead Community |
| Johnnie Brumfield Parent | Dr. Robert Ford DRF Industries, LLC | Tara Hoopes Technology Integration/EIC |
| Rosalind Burroughs Budewig Intermediate | Karen Franklin World Youth Foundation | Don Hoyt Community/EIC |
| Corey Calcote Alief YMCA | Angela Freeman Houston Minority Business Council | Kydra Hubbard Taylor High School/EIC |
| Ani Caloustian Parent | Sangeeta Gad University of Houston Downtown | Robin Human Heflin Elementary School/EIC |
| Patricia Cantu Second Language Education | | |

Alief District of Innovation Committee

Kathleen Jameson
SOAR/LINC/Night High School

Ella Jefferson
Community

Courtney Johnson Rose
George E. Johnson Properties

Byron Johnson, Sr.
Shell

Mike Kreinsen
Community

C.C. Lee
Houston Chinese Chamber of
Commerce

Wea Lee
International Management
District

Karen Loper
State Representative Hubert
Vo's Office

Shannon Lucas
Organic Sweet Shoppe, LLC

Joni Maniatis
Curriculum & Instruction

Bill Marshall
Career & Technical Education

John Martinez
Community

Mariely Matos
Collins Elementary

Dr. Kimberly McCleod
Harris County Department of
Education

Cort McMurray
Community

Lisa McNeill
Waterman Steele Group

Zak Miller
Outreach Strategists, LLC

Scott Moehlig
Athletics

Lalla Morris
Families Empowered

Reverend David Pantermuehl
Grace United Church of Christ

Reverend Gregg Patrick
Southwest Community Christian
Academy

Debby Pepper
Taylor High School / Texas State
Teachers Association

Dr. Larry Ponder
Miller Intermediate

Gayle Price
Killough Middle School/EIC

Dr. William Price
Taylor High School

Adrienne Redmon
Elsik High School

Tyrolyn Redmond
Alief Middle School/EIC

Hilda Rodriguez
Support Services

Dr. Tracy Scholz
Advanced Academic Services

Gina Sprang
Taylor High School/EIC

Christina Stark
Albright Middle School /
Association
of Texas Professional Educators

Kelley Sullivan
Physical Education & Wellness

Tammy Talley
Parent

Sylvia Teague
Communities in Schools Houston

Shanceler Terry
Family & Community
Engagement

Veronica Thibideaux
American Federation of Teachers

Kelli Upshaw
Landis Elementary

Tyra Walker
Guidance & Counseling

Zack Ward
Federal Programs & Grants

Shannon Wesley
Albright Middle School/EIC

Jennifer Winston
Klentzman Intermediate School

I. Introduction

The District of Innovation concept, passed during the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools. The flexibility derives from the district's ability to exempt itself from state mandates that may limit its ability to implement innovative ideas. The potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include increased local control to decide which flexibilities best suit local needs, freedom in customizing an innovation plan, and autonomy in that the innovation plan does not require state approval.

Recognizing the potential benefits of a District of Innovation designation, the Alief ISD Board of Trustees unanimously approved a resolution in March 2016 to investigate the District of Innovation concept and what it may mean in terms of new and better ways to meet the needs of our students in receiving a world class education. To conduct this evaluation, the Board appointed an Alief District of Innovation (ADI) Committee comprised of district staff, parents, and community members. The district also appointed an ADI Work Group comprised of central level and campus-based instructional leaders to support the efforts of the ADI Committee through activities such as research and plan development.

II. Timeline

The ADI process follows the following timeline.

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <p><i>March 2016</i></p> | <p><i>Adopt Resolution</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On March 22, the Alief ISD Board of Trustees adopted a resolution to investigate the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation.</i> <p><i>Hold Public Hearing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Immediately after adopting the resolution, the Board held a public hearing concerning Districts of Innovation.</i> <p><i>Appoint Committee</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With approval from the Board of Trustees, the district appointed the Alief District of Innovation Committee.</i> |
| <p><i>April 2016</i></p> | <p><i>Appoint ADI Work Group</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A group reflective of all areas of the district participated in an orientation meeting.</i> |
| <p><i>May-December 2016</i></p> | <p><i>Develop ADI Plan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The ADI Committee met five times between May and December.</i> • <i>The Alief Work Group provided support as needed.</i> |
| <p><i>January 2017</i></p> | <p><i>Notify State of Intent to Vote</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On January 17, the Board voted to notify the Texas Education Commissioner of its intent to vote on the plan.</i> <p><i>Post Plan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On January 18, the draft ADI Plan was posted on the district website for 30 days.</i> |
| <p><i>February 2017</i></p> | <p><i>Approve Plan and Notify State</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>On February 21, the District Educational Improvement Council held a public meeting and approved the ADI plan by majority vote.</i> • <i>On February 21, the Board of Trustees approved the ADI Plan by two-thirds majority.</i> • <i>On February 24, the Texas Education Agency Commissioner was notified of plan approval.</i> |

III. Term

The ADI Plan has a term of up to five years beginning at the start of the 2017-2018 school year. The plan may be amended, rescinded, or renewed by the district Educational Improvement Council (EIC) and the Board of Trustees in the same manner required for initial adoption.

IV. A Comprehensive Educational Program

Alief ISD has implemented a continuous improvement planning process which results in a comprehensive educational program reflected in the District Improvement Plan (DIP). The DIP includes the district's vision, goals, priorities, objectives, and strategies. The ADI Plan is a component of this process and is appropriately reflected in the District Improvement Plan.

A. Vision

The Board of Trustees adopted the following vision to guide the district:

The Alief Independent School District, in collaboration with parents and community, will provide an exemplary education for all students in a safe environment.

B. Goals

The Board of Trustees established the following goals for the district:

1. AISD will close the achievement gap to ensure that all students reach their academic potential.
2. AISD will improve student preparation for college and career.
3. AISD will maintain a safe and orderly environment.
4. AISD will recruit, develop, and retain highly qualified and effective personnel.
5. AISD will continue to build positive relationships with all stakeholders.

C. Priorities

The Board of Trustees annually establishes priorities which provide focus and guide the district's continuous improvement planning process toward achievement of district goals. For the 2016-2017 school year, Priority 3 states:

Alief ISD will explore meaningful and useful student, staff, and community opportunities as a District of Innovation.

D. Call to Action

During the first ADI Committee meeting in May 2016, the group analyzed the Board's goals and priorities, and collectively shared a call to action that encapsulated the Committee's highest hopes for our students into the following central ideas.

- Innovative Thinkers
- Contributing Citizens
- Building Meaningful Relationships
- Problem-solvers
- Equipped with Tools and Choices
- Thriving

E. Innovations

The ADI Committee then identified innovative strategies based around these central ideas. These strategies were categorized, prioritized, and researched. The sense of the Committee was the need to provide students with relevant, real-world, personalized learning opportunities while ensuring that social and emotional needs are addressed. Ultimately, the ADI Committee identified several action ideas that are incorporated into three areas of innovation.

- Non-Traditional Schools
- Special Programs
- Non-Traditional Schedules

Over the next five years, flexibility and innovation in a number of areas may be necessary in designing and implementing non-traditional schools, special programs, and non-traditional schedules in Alief ISD. Section V lists several Texas Education Code statutes, exemptions from which may provide the flexibility needed to meet the goals of the Alief District of Innovation Plan. The district Work Group will begin the development of detailed plans, timelines, and budget considerations for the innovations discussed below during the spring of 2017. Plans will include exemptions only as needed and appropriate.

Prior to implementation of any exemption, an internal committee will determine the need for the exemption, develop parameters, and draft changes to Board policy, as appropriate. Parameters will answer such questions as: From what specific statute does the district need exemption? For what purpose? Who will be impacted? What will occur in lieu of the statute? As a result, what Board policy needs to be changed and how? Draft revised Board policies will undergo a legal review and will then be broadly shared for feedback. Communication through teacher organization representatives, the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council, if possible, the ADI Committee, emails to staff, and the ADI website will provide opportunities for feedback prior to Board consideration. The district will continue its practice of inclusion and full transparency through communication with staff, parents, and the community before implementation.

i. Non-Traditional Schools

The Committee recommends the expansion of non-traditional school models that provide students and parents with a variety of options for how education is delivered. Public education as a whole is rapidly evolving. The expansion of career and technical education programs, dual credit course offerings, and dual language programs, coupled with the implementation of House Bill 5, is evidence of a need for choice and flexibility in public education. Furthermore, Alief's growing multicultural community - comprised of more than 80 languages and dialects – needs flexibility in receiving an education that adequately prepares them for postsecondary success in a global marketplace.

Alief needs to take a pragmatic approach to keep up with trends and changes in education as it strives to prepare students for tomorrow. Part of this approach is to provide students in prekindergarten through grade 12 with opportunities for flexible personalized learning environments and enrichment through problem-based and experiential learning. Alief recently broke ground on a state-of-the-art career center that will open in 2018. This is a significant step toward providing a variety of educational pathways for students. However, more choice and flexibility is needed for our large and diverse student population. **Non-traditional school models that Alief ISD can leverage to meet these needs include international schools, magnet programs, and school-within-a-school models.**

Research indicates that *international schools* are predicted to see significant growth in the foreseeable future. There are currently more than 8,200 international schools worldwide meeting the learning needs of over 4.3 million students. In the United States, there are more than 70 international campuses. International schools give students access to cultures, languages, and ways of thinking that can help them adapt and flourish in a global economy and marketplace. Students enrolled in these programs are taught at a rigorous level which enables students to better prepare for the SAT and ACT, and score well on these examinations, thereby increasing their chances of acceptance to prestigious universities.

Magnet programs – including school-within-a-school models and separate magnet schools – have been shown to be more effective than traditional schools in elevating student achievement scores at all levels (prekindergarten through grade 12) and graduation rates. These programs speak to the need to increase student engagement by addressing their individual interests. Students in these programs are more likely to attend class regularly, have a greater sense of community at school, and perceive more peer support for academic achievement. Magnet schools also report higher levels of family and community involvement.

ii. Special Programs

The Committee recommends an increase in special programs in multiple focus areas that are all designed to enhance student engagement through personalized learning. **The special programs recommended include, but are not limited to: career and**

technical education (CTE) partnerships, career explorations, enrichment, STEAM activities, and problem-based learning.

CTE partnerships and career exploration programs and activities at all levels unite our students and local community industry experts through relevant, hands-on education experiences. Interest and participation in CTE programs is rapidly growing. At Alief ISD's three comprehensive high schools, 72% of students are enrolled in at least one CTE course. That number is up 37% from five years ago, and the growth is expected to continue over the next five years and beyond with the implementation of House Bill 5, the opening of our career center in 2018, and the continuous growth of both CTE programming and the number of partnerships in the district. Alief currently has several industry and career partnerships in areas such as health science, construction, culinary arts, hospitality and tourism, finance, and agriculture; however, the annual growth of CTE enrollment is evidence of a need for a wider breadth of partnerships and pathways. Increased partnerships will give Alief's students valuable, relevant experiences and real-world connections with our vibrant, inclusive community.

Research from Harvard University identified an activity gap between privileged students and underprivileged students. The study found that the amount of enrichment activities in which a student participates can make a significant difference in his future. This area is of particular importance in Alief as 83% of Alief students are economically disadvantaged. A lack of financial resources at home may mean that these students do not get exposure to the many rich and diverse *enrichment experiences* available in the greater Houston area. Having the flexibility in curriculum and scheduling to implement a variety of enriching experiences will give our economically-disadvantaged students an educational experience commensurate with that of their more affluent peers. Moreover, the learning of all students is enriched and expanded through external opportunities that provide real-world, relevant experiences.

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) activities and problem-based learning also help students make connections to the world around them. These programs aim to teach students to think critically and solve problems using an infusion of left brain (STEM) and right brain (STEAM) functions. Research shows that innovative practices of art and design play an essential role in improving STEM education and advancing STEM research. STEAM and problem-based learning activities often extend beyond the traditional classroom environment, and may involve community resources. These special programs are yet another method of providing personalized learning that meets the interests and needs of our diverse student population.

The ADI Committee singled out STEAM, CTE and community partnerships, career exploration, and addressing the social and emotional needs of students from early childhood through graduation for particular attention during the first year of implementation of the ADI Plan.

iii. Non-Traditional Schedules

The committee recommends exploring non-traditional scheduling options that allow for flexibility. This may include acceleration, flexible start and end times for daily schedules to accommodate individualized programs, and self-paced, personalized progression through courses, using strategies such as blended or problem-based learning. Research shows that student performance is primarily impacted by what teachers do with the allotted time they have with the students, not just the amount of time or structure of the schedule. Flexibility with scheduling will allow the district to support non-traditional school models and special programs, and provide educational experiences that are personalized and need based, thereby maximizing the impact of teaching during the allotted class time.

V. REQUIREMENTS OF THE EDUCATION CODE THAT INHIBIT THE GOALS OF THE PLAN FROM WHICH THE DISTRICT WILL BE EXEMPT UPON ADOPTION OF THE PLAN:

A. First Day of Instruction

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction prior to the fourth Monday in August.

Rationale: The flexibility of start date will allow the district to determine on an annual basis what best meets the needs of the students and local community. Having the flexible start date will allow the district to balance the amount of instructional time in each semester, which will improve the ability to implement special programs and non-traditional school models. It will also support our college and career readiness efforts by aligning with local college calendars. Ending the school year earlier will create a more favorable schedule for summer enrichment to ease documented summer learning loss. A flexible start will also allow the district to go back to the tradition of starting the school year with a short week, which has previously proven to foster a smoother, less tiring transition back to the school year.

B. Class Size

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 25.112 states that districts must maintain a student to teacher ratio of 22:1 or less for kindergarten through fourth grade classes, and districts must complete and file a waiver with the agency if a class exceeds this limit. Section 25.111 requires districts to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers to maintain an average ratio of not less than 1 teacher for each 20 students in average daily attendance.

Rationale: Alief supports the class size ratio and makes every effort to comply with the state's mandate. However, the flexibility to add a student or two in extenuating circumstances will provide ease in changing student groupings that are in the best interest of students. Flexible grouping is required when instruction is differentiated for

each student. Additionally, when students participate in special programs there may be situations when classroom numbers exceed the state ratio requirements. If this situation were to occur in grades K-4, the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees. This exemption only allows the district local control of class size ratios in special circumstances and does not disregard the intent of the state's ratio requirements. In addition to growing and changing special programs, Alief's plan includes non-traditional school models and schedules. Flexibility with class size ratios will be critical to facilitating these programs and models, particularly with our highly mobile student population.

C. Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 25.092, commonly referred to as the 90 percent rule, provides conditions for credit or a final grade for a class based on student attendance for at least 90 percent of the days a class is offered. The law also provides provisions for students who are in attendance at least 75 percent of the days a class is offered, in that he/she may be given credit or a final grade if the student completes a plan approved by the principal that meets the instructional requirements of the class.

Rationale: One goal of the Committee is to provide a rigorous, active, and engaging K-12 curriculum through innovative teaching and learning methods. These methods and strategies may require varied forms of delivery and be supported by problem-based, blended, and personalized learning for students and may require flexible scheduling in regards to where and how students learn. Students working independently or working on group projects may complete work in various locations, (including but not limited to labs, field trips, work-related areas, etc.) and varied timelines. Exemptions from Section 25.092 will benefit our students in the way that instruction will be delivered and ultimately in student learning outcomes. Alief believes that awarding a student credit or a final grade for a class based on content-based mastery rather than seat time will improve student achievement, student test scores, and graduation rates. Relief from Section 25.092 will not change or impact Section 25.085 in regards to compulsory attendance, Section 28.0214 in regards to finality of a grade by a teacher, and Section 28.0216 regarding the district's grading policy.

D. Minimum Minutes of Instruction

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 25.081 states that districts are required to provide 75,600 minutes of instruction.

Rationale: The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction and hours within a school day will assist with personalizing student learning in order to better meet individual student needs. The district would be able to consider possibilities such as altered length of a school day, later start/early release time, accelerated credit attainment, and mitigated credit deficiencies for students with unique challenges and/or personal goals and plans not accommodated in traditional school structures. The diversity of Alief ISD students and the goal to prepare all students for career and college readiness while developing

social and emotional competency compels us to offer personalized, individual pathways to graduation and postsecondary success. Flexible scheduling and varied seat time scenarios are essential to allowing greater opportunities for all students as well as the staff development relevant to ensuring our students are successful in meeting standards.

E. Early Release

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 25.082(a) states that a school day shall be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

Rationale: In addition to the flexibility of Minimum Minutes of Instruction above, an exemption from Section 25.082(a) would allow for early release days creating much-needed time for teacher professional development and collaborative planning that directly support first line instruction. Flexibility with early release schedules allows the district to accommodate these essential professional learning and preparation times.

F. Certification Required

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 21.003 mandates that districts that wish to hire an uncertified staff member must submit a request to TEA and wait on approval or denial. Section 21.0031 provides that an employee's probationary, continuing, or term Chapter 21 contract is void for failure to maintain certification in certain circumstances. Section 21.051 provides that before a school district may employ a candidate for certification as a teacher of record, the candidate must complete at least 15 hours of field-based experience in which the candidate is actively engaged in instructional or educational activities.

Rationale: To adequately supply programs with qualified candidates, the district requires the flexibility to hire community college and university professors, as well as current staff members who would qualify for placement in assignments outside of their traditional certification areas and to retain them. The district will establish local qualification and training requirements for professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of state requirements. The district will make decisions on certification needs for the various special programs. These exemptions are of particular importance for hard-to-fill and high-demand courses. The district will ensure that professional development plans are in place to train non-certified personnel in pedagogy and to provide needed support.

G. Planning and Preparation Time

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 21.404 states that teachers are entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two week period for preparation for teaching, conferencing with parents, and evaluating student work.

Rationale: The flexible scheduling components of Alief's plan include flexibility in a teacher's schedule where select teachers can extend their reach to more students and have more planning time with teacher teams. Moreover, the flexible school components of Alief's plan, including possible international, magnet, and schools-within-schools may necessitate flexible planning and preparation schedules. Planning and preparation time will be available for all teachers, but flexibility regarding when that occurs is needed.

H. Staff Development

Requirement: Texas Education Code Section 21.451 prescribes staff development requirements at the campus level.

Rationale: The district seeks relief from this provision's oversight by the campus-level committee established in Texas Education Code Section 11.253. Relief from this provision will allow staff training to remain flexible and responsive to campus needs and to newly emerging data aimed at improving students' success, including their ability to compete in a global society.