

Miller Grove Independent School District  
District of Innovation Plan  
August 16, 2022 to August 15, 2027



## INTRODUCTION

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- Increased flexibility, with accountability: Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates including the uniform start date and required minutes of instruction.
- Greater local control: Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- Autonomy: District submit a District of Innovation Plan to the commissioner of education, but commissioner approval is not required.

Districts are not exempt from statutes including curriculum requirements, graduation requirements, academic accountability, and financial accountability.

## COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Miller Grove ISD District of Innovation Plan is founded on and aligned to the district's mission, values, and goals.

### Mission & Values

Mission: **M**olding students for success by fostering creativity, strong work ethic, academic excellence, and respect for self and others. **G**rowing impactful "Team Players" through Academics, Agriculture, Arts, and Athletics.

Values: The operation of the district, as well as organizational behaviors, are based upon the core values of: creativity, strong work ethic, academic excellence, and respect for self and others.

### Goals

- All students will make individual progress towards the highest standards of academic proficiency and each student will achieve academic growth from the previous year
- MGISD will provide qualified instructors producing creative lesson designs emphasizing critical thinking and application, while meeting the social and emotional needs of all students.
- MGISD will partner with all stakeholders to create a value-added education system that creates an atmosphere of learning and an environment in which all students can flourish in an environment that meets the needs of all students and staff by ensuring that regular training and security plans are in place and actively followed.
- All students will be taught by certified professional staff

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**PROCESS**

On February 27, 2017 the Miller Grove ISD Board of Trustees passed a resolution to explore/initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation in order to increase local control over district operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. on April 17, 2017, the Miller Grove ISD Board of Trustees held a public hearing. With no objection from the hearing the Board of Trustees voted and approved the DOI Plan.

The proposed renewal plan will be posted on the district website for at least 30 days beginning December 15, 2021. Miller Grove ISD will notify the Texas Commissioner of Education of the district's proposed District of Innovation Plan and that the plan will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for consideration on January 24, 2022.

**TERM**

The term of this Plan is for five years, beginning August, 2022 and will remain in effect through the end of the 2026-2027 unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board will appoint the same committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The district may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

**TIMELINE**

| <b>Timeline</b>   | <b>Activity/Task</b>   |
|-------------------|--|
| Feb 27, 2017      | Board of Trustees passed Resolution to Consider Designation as a District of Innovation              |
| March 2, 2017     | Initial meeting of advisory committee to discuss District of Innovation Plan                         |
| March 7, 2017     | Meeting of advisory committee to continue work on District of Innovation Plan                        |
| March 14, 2017    | Post District of Innovation Plan to MGISD website  |
| April 17, 2017    | Board of Trustees meeting to consider approval of District of Innovation Plan                        |
| October 27, 2021  | Meeting of advisory committee to discuss District of Innovation Plan and possible renewal.           |
| December 8, 2021  | Meeting of advisory committee to work on and finalize a draft renewal of District of Innovation Plan |
| December 15, 2021 | Post District of Innovation Plan Renewal to MGISD website  |

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|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| January 24, 2022 | Board of Trustees meeting to consider approval of District of Innovation Plan |
| January 22, 2025 | SBDMCommitteeApprovedAmendmentofDOIPlan                                       |
| January 27, 2025 | 4 BoardofTrusteesApprovedAmendment toDOIPlan                                  |

### RENEWAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

| Name              | Role   |
|-------------------|--|
| Jana Qualls       | Parent   |
| Cyndi Williams    | Parent   |
| Ginger McCreight  | Teacher (Elementary)                           |
| Stacey McDonald   | Teacher (Elementary)                           |
| Samantha Watson   | Teacher (Secondary)                            |
| Ryann Lackey      | Teacher (Secondary)                            |
| Marcy Hayden      | Teacher (Secondary)                            |
| Maria Lester      | Teacher (Elementary)                           |
| Davy Moseley      | Technology (District)                          |
| Cherrie Bessonett | Special Ed Teacher                             |
| Jaime Fox         | Administrator                                  |
| Vicki Harris      | Campus- level Non-teaching Professional Staff  |
| Emma Hudson       | District-level Non-teaching Professional Staff |
| Linda Rankin      | Administrator                                  |
| Jagger Qualls     | Student (Secondary Campus)                     |
| Sandra Garrett    | Community Member                               |
| Lorna Beasley     | Business Member                                |
| Casey Zimmerman   | Business Member                                |

### AREAS OF INNOVATION

The purpose of the innovation plan is to achieve the district's vision and mission, to align the district's practices and operations, and to meet the expectations of the strategic goals. The district requires local flexibility in the areas addressed in order to support each student in attaining the skills needed to succeed in the college/career pathway of their choice. The innovation plan ensures a system aligned to the needs of our graduates as they enter the post-secondary world.

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**TEC§21.003 Teacher Contracts:** *A person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school*

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*counselor 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 their certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board for Educator Certification.*

**Rationale for innovation**

House Bill 5 has added significant support for the need to expand college and career opportunities for students. However, the current certification requirements inhibit the district's ability to hire professionals with industry experience to teach Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, such as welding, health sciences, architecture, and construction. Additionally, in the event that the district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of his or her certification area, the district must request emergency certification from TEA and/or the State Board of Educator Certification. These requests may be denied. This process is time consuming, burdensome, and it may not allow the district to meet its instructional needs in a timely fashion. With the growing teacher shortage in Texas, this process may prevent the district from being able to hire the best teacher available.

Flexibility to establish its own teacher certification requirements for instructors directly benefits students in the following ways:

- Expert industry certified and/or trade professionals to teach specialized certification courses
- Greater number of course offerings resulting in more opportunities for students
- Greater opportunity for students to obtain professional certifications
- Innovation and flexibility in scheduling to meet student needs
- Added flexibility to hire the best candidate for each position

The district does not wish to be exempted from any existing statutes relating to certified teacher contracts or teacher benefits.

**Innovative strategies**

The district will maintain its current expectations for employee certification, and our special education, bilingual/ESL, and prekindergarten teachers must continue to be SBEC certified. Any teaching assignment that requires certification as a condition of a grant or voluntary state program or if it has certification requirements outside of the TEC (i.e., federal provisions requiring certification), exemption from certification is prohibited. Teachers with less than a bachelor's degree are not eligible to teach CTE courses that meet graduation requirements for English language arts, reading, science, mathematics, or fine arts. The district will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification and skills for the position available; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the district will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the teaching position in question. The district's Board of Trustees would be able to issue an

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innovation permit for an individual teaching courses based on qualifications certified by the superintendent. The individual qualifications would include demonstrated subject matter expertise, such as:

- Professional work experience
- Formal training and education
- Relevant industry license, certification, or registration
- Combination of work experience, training, and education
- Demonstration of successful experience working with students

All candidates would be carefully considered to ensure the individual has sufficient education and expertise to provide instruction necessary to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the course(s) to be taught. Special education and bilingual teachers will continue to be required to hold appropriate state teaching certificates. Before issuing an innovation permit to an individual, the district would ensure that the individual completed the criminal background check in compliance with the State Board of Education (SBEC) rules. This would require the superintendent to certify to the Board of Trustees that the individual has undergone a criminal history background check and is capable of proper classroom management. In addition, the individual would be required to obtain classroom management training.

The issued innovation permit would only be valid in the Miller Grove ISD. An employee working under an innovation permit will not receive a contract but will work on an at-will basis. The employee will adhere to the same professional standards, ethics, and requirements of all certified teachers. The employee will be appraised under the same teacher appraisal system as required of all certified teachers.

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**TEC §21.401 Teacher Contract Days:** *Defines a teacher contract as a ten-month contract equivalent to 187 days.*

**Rationale for innovation**

House Bill 2610, passed by the 84th Texas legislature, amends the Texas Education Code §25.081, by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring districts to operate for a minimum of 75,600 minutes (including intermissions and recess). The law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees. A reduction in contract days at the current salary schedule would make MGISD salaries more competitive with area schools by increasing the daily rate the district pays teachers. This flexibility directly benefits students by improving recruitment and retention practices of quality teachers.

**Innovative strategies**

This plan reduces teacher contract days from 187 to 182 with no effect on teacher salaries. On an annual basis, the Board of Trustees will review the effectiveness and benefit of reduction of teacher contract days.

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**TEC §21.402 Retire/Rehire Minimum Salary**

**Rationale for innovation**

All districts, when hiring a retired teacher, full-time librarian, full-time counselor or full-time nurse must pay their salary based upon the TEA minimum salary pay scale. Districts are also required to pay a TRS surcharge. During this shortage of qualified and certified teachers, combined with the lack of funding, paying additional wages causes a strain on budgets and instruction.

**Innovative strategies**

As Miller Grove ISD faces budget constraints, local control for negotiating salaries for retired hires would benefit the district. In the negotiation, the salary may drop below the state minimum to allow district funds to be available to pay the surcharge to TRS. Exemption from TEC 21.402 will have the following benefits:

- Expert industry-certified and/or trade professionals to teach specialized certification courses
- Retirees can be employed and reap the benefits from a salary in addition to their retirement compensation
- Students will benefit from the experience and knowledge of retired teachers
- The district can hire retired professional staff without an increase to the budget
- The funds to pay the surcharge would be available through the negotiated decrease in salary.

MGISD would follow the following guidelines when hiring retired professional staff:

- The negotiated salary will only be for situations in hiring retired educators
- The salary will be negotiated between the superintendent and the retired educator
- The negotiated salary will be in writing
- The negotiated salary may be decreased by the surcharge amount minus the percentage the district pays to TRS for all other employees.

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**TEC §25.036 Inter-district Transfers:** *Any eligible student may transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in the state if both the receiving district and the applicant guardian jointly approve in writing to the transfer.*

**Rationale for innovation**

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Miller Grove ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (local) requiring nonresident students requesting transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space, instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules, and regulations of MGISD. TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as one year commitment by the District. Occasionally, students fail to meet the attendance or behavior expectations of MGISD.

Innovative strategies

The flexibility to revoke transfer status if a student is not meeting MGISD standards allows the district to maintain high expectations of all students. Local-Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsions. In addition, students not meeting the state's 90% compulsory attendance requirements may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

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**TEC §25.0811, 25.0812 First and Last Days of Instruction** *A district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August unless the district operates a year-round system. A district may not receive a waiver for this requirement.*

Rationale for innovation

This flexibility of start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and local community. It also offers the following direct benefits to students:

- An improved balance in the instructional calendar between fall and spring semesters, and among nine week periods, which allows teachers to better pace and deliver instruction.
- Students participating in dual enrollment opportunities will work with a more balanced semester, which more closely aligns with local colleges.
- Permits students additional instructional days prior to state assessments.
- Students and staff will be afforded more opportunities to enroll in summer college sessions with finalized official transcripts.
- Improved flexibility to build in required instructional minutes based on local needs (e.g. COVID-19 response).

Innovative strategies

MGISD will start class no earlier than the first Monday in August in order to better balance the days between semesters and among nine week reporting periods. Should the proposed calendar specify a start date prior to the second Monday in August, the calendar committee will garner input from students' parents before finalizing the calendar.

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**TEC §25.092 Minimum attendance for class credit or final grade:** *a student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.*

Rationale for innovation

In order to provide engaging and challenging learning to all students, the District needs relief from this requirement to provide educational advantages to students. The District promotes active learning through innovation in methods, locations, and delivery of instruction in an effort to accommodate students with legitimate scheduling conflicts to reduce dropouts and increase the number of qualifying graduates. In addition, exemption from this requirement will allow flexibility to prevent penalization of students who miss class due to legitimate school activities which will promote student engagement, social and emotional development, and encourage more students to participate in such activities.

Innovative strategies

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An attendance committee consisting of campus administrators and teachers will be created to discuss relevant situations including, but not limited to the number and reasons for absences, the student's academic success, and the administrator approved plan to make up days. The committee will determine if the student should receive credit or a final grade for those applicable classes.

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**TEC §25.112, §25.113 Class size Prekindergarten – Grade 4 and the associated notice:**

*A district may not enroll more than 22 students in a prekindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class. A district seeking exception must apply for an exception with the commissioner and provide written notice of the exception to the parent of each student affected by the exception.*

**Rationale for innovation**

If a district has students enroll during the school year which creates a student, teacher ratio greater than 22: 1, the district will notify the commissioner in writing that the district is claiming an exemption for the period stated in the notice. This process is time consuming, burdensome, and it may not allow the district to meet its instructional needs in a timely fashion. TEC 25.113 requires a district that is granted an exception under TEC 25.112 to provide written notice of the exception to parents of each student affected by the exception. If there is not a requirement for an exception to be claimed, then there will not be a need to notify parents.

**Innovative strategies**

MGISD believes that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom and will attempt to keep all K-4th core classrooms to at least a 22:1 ratio. However, in the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio, the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees and will make decisions regarding education decisions based on the best interest of the students and district. In the event a K-4th core classroom reaches 24: 1, the campus will notify the parents of the students in the classroom and inform them of the situation

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**TEC §28.004 Local School Health Advisory Council and Health Education Instruction:** *The board of trustees of each school district shall establish a local school health advisory council to assist the district in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the district's health education instruction.*

**Rationale for innovation**

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Due to the size of the district, Miller Grove ISD seeks exemption from the statutory provision requiring the establishment of a school health advisory council, SHAC.

### Innovative strategies

Miller Grove ISD will create a health advisory committee to continue to gather community input concerning health education and instruction without overburdening the committee with the current requirements for SHAC. The MGISD Board of Trustee will determine how often the committee will meet and the procedures to which they will adhere. The committee will continue to seek to have a parent chair or co-chair the committee and will annually report to the MGISD Board of Trustees.

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**TEC §37.0012 Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator:** *A person at each campus must be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator*

### Rationale for innovation

Current requirements include designating one person to be identified to serve as the campus behavior coordinator. This restricts local decision making by limiting the campuses from allowing the person most suitable to address the children's needs to make disciplinary decisions. The Miller Grove ISD elementary and secondary campuses are located in common facility where both of the principals are located; therefore, it is beneficial for each of them to work with the social and emotional development of the students, which includes changed behavior through disciplinary action.

### Innovative strategies

Miller Grove will not name one campus behavior coordinator per campus. Rather, the district will allow decisions to be made based on the needs of the individual student and situation to determine the most appropriate professional staff member to work with the student to promote social and emotional growth. Campus principals will guide this process by having frequent discussions about appropriate disciplinary decisions and procedures. The focus will remain on the social and emotional learning of the students. Staff members will also be provided training opportunities to ensure successful implementation of disciplinary techniques. Also, assignments to the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program will remain the responsibility of the campus principal.

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**TEC §45.205, 45.206, 45.207 and 45.208: School District Depositories**

### Rationale for innovation

A school district contract for a depository bank serves for a term of two years and may only extend for three additional two years. In the past, we have only had one or no bids in addition to

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the one that is currently contracted. This is a monetary and time constraint for such a small district in a very small rural area.

#### Innovative strategies

Miller Grove ISD seeks the opportunity to renew the two-year depository bank term automatically and will only send depository services out to bid if the district determines contract pricing becomes uncompetitive, or there is some operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out for bid. This flexibility allows the district's existing bank contract to be extended beyond the total 6-year allowable contract term if the district determines contract pricing remains competitive and there is no operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out for bid. This exemption lessens the administrative burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP) when a limited number of banking institutions are available to bid on the District's business. This will further mitigate any impact on employees who would have to change direct deposit instructions each time a new depository occurs and allow the district flexibility with respect to banking relationships. 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's educational goals. With this exemption in place, none of the additional requirements related to the bid or request for proposal detailed in Sec 45.205 through 45.208 would be applicable.

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