

HISD PRESS RELEASE

HISD School Board Approves District of Innovation Plan

Plan Includes Longer School Year; HISD to Seek Input on 24-25 Academic Calendar in January

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) will become a District of Innovation (DOI) after the School Board approved the DOI designation tonight. The vote was 8 in favor, 0 opposed. HISD has been one of the only school systems in the state without DOI status. Systems with the designation are exempt from certain statutory requirements and have greater flexibility in the way they conduct district operations to support students. HISD's DOI Committee developed [its plan](#) as part of a broader effort to ensure every student has a high-quality education and graduates prepared for the modern workplace and world.

“HISD is a District of Innovation,” said Superintendent Mike Miles. “We are making the bold changes required to improve instruction and help students develop the competencies they will need to succeed in the future. Having the DOI designation is long overdue and will allow us to accelerate our work in important ways. I want to thank the School Board for its vote tonight. In addition, I’m grateful to the District Advisory Committee for approving the measure; the DOI Committee for developing a thoughtful plan; and our staff and community for supporting Houston’s kids every day.”

Exemptions in the DOI plan fall within the following areas: high-quality instruction, modern staffing, and improved schools. One key exemption allows the District to begin the school year before the fourth Monday in August, making it more feasible to implement an extended academic calendar. [Research](#) indicates students benefit from more time in school. HISD plans to propose that the first day of school for the 2024-2025 academic year be no earlier than August 7 and no later than August 14.

“As a mom of three children in HISD, I know that my kids and those across the District will benefit from the longer school year,” said Celeste Barretto Milligan, co-chair of the District Advisory Committee and a former HISD teacher. “Most importantly, we know kids benefit from more time in excellent instruction. Extending our school year means HISD will no longer start behind—all of our neighboring districts begin the school year earlier. Our calendar will now reflect the instructional time we need to recover learning loss and better position our students to compete for the same academic and workforce opportunities as students in surrounding districts. Not only that, but families who don’t have resources to invest thousands in summer camps or family trips will have a safe place for their children to learn, have regular meals, and to connect with their teachers.”

Certain HISD staff members and stakeholder groups—including the Teacher Advisory Committee, all principals, the District Advisory Committee, and leaders from all four geographic divisions in the District—will have the opportunity to provide feedback on proposed calendar options in mid January. HISD will then request input from all staff and families more broadly. They will be able to express their thoughts on calendar options beginning on or around January 19.

All calendar options will adhere to guidance in the DOI plan that the 24-25 academic year be no more than 180 instructional days. The District plans to submit the final proposed calendar to the School Board on February 8.




Other exemptions in the DOI plan will give HISD the flexibility to:

- Implement more District- and division-based professional development so all teachers have greater access to high-quality training from instructional experts and opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues across HISD.
- Without a waiver from the state, hire high school teachers who do not hold a certification. This will allow HISD to fill vacancies in positions that are hard to staff and will help give all students a consistent classroom teacher. (The exemption does not apply to teachers for special education, bilingual education/English as a second language, and pre-kindergarten. Those certifications cannot be waived.)
- Implement alternate minimum attendance requirements for class credit for eligible high school students. Requirements will align attendance and course credit policies to content mastery where appropriate, and recognize students' participation in out-of-school work or learning opportunities that may also count for credit to graduate.
- Expand postsecondary pathways for students by giving juniors and seniors more excused absences to visit colleges and universities, trade schools, and military programs before graduation.
- Handle instances of vaping and similar offenses at a student's home campus, through counseling or other measures outlined in the District-wide, Board-approved Code of Student Conduct, as opposed to automatically enrolling the student in a disciplinary alternative educational program.
- Improve student performance overall; close existing gaps; and attract, develop, and retain high-quality teachers by creating a rigorous teacher appraisal system for implementation in the 2025-2026 school year. The system will be (a) informed by local context and aligned to specific school and District goals and (b) streamlined to reduce administrative burden so principals and teachers can focus on coaching and instruction.

There are many exemptions for which a district may apply that are not included in HISD's DOI plan. Members of the DOI Committee—who were appointed by the Board and bring a diverse set of experiences and perspectives from across the District—worked to identify those exemptions that will make the greatest impact in HISD's effort to boost student achievement. The process involved touring schools; hearing from HISD Board members and programmatic leaders; soliciting and responding to feedback from the District Advisory Committee; and meeting as a group over eight convenings to craft and refine the plan.

In addition, the Committee took steps that are not required as part of the process to help ensure the HISD community understands how the plan will affect students and educators. These steps included drafting—for each proposed exemption—a section outlining the rationale and benefits; specific implementation guidance to explain how the exemption will be applied in schools; and a snapshot of districts that have adopted the same exemption. The Committee worked with HISD leadership to ensure alignment and a commitment to the implementation guidance. In the coming weeks, the District will revise policies to align with the provisions in the DOI plan.

The Houston Independent School District is the largest school district in Texas and the eighth-largest in the United States, with 276 schools and nearly 190,000 students. The 333-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area, with more than 27,000 employees.

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