Inspiring Excellence!!!

Axtell ISD Local Innovation Plan
1. 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. On October 10, 2016, Axtell ISD’s Board of Trustees passed a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation (DOI). The purpose of passing the Resolution was to increase local control over Axtell ISD’s operations and to support innovation and local initiatives to improve the educational opportunities for the benefit of students, staff, and the community. In its Resolution, the Board clarified that it desired the District to develop a plan that would be in conjunction with Axtell ISD’s strategic plan. In addition, Axtell ISD has no intent to be exempt from any existing laws relating to teacher contracts or teacher benefits.

During the months of October, November and December, the Board also had a Charter presented to them that included the goals, parameters, desired outcomes, and suggested committee members, with an opportunity for the Board to appoint additional representatives from the community. The Board was asked to approve the Charter in addition to approving the Resolution. Committee members are comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of Axtell ISD’s various stakeholders, including teachers, principals, parents, community members, and administrators. The Committee met on the following dates:

- October 10, 2016 - Axtell ISD Board of Trustees Adopted Resolution to begin Axtell ISD’s of Innovation process.
- December 9, 2016 - Axtell ISD’s Leadership team established purpose and priorities for DOI
- December 12, 2016 - Axtell Board of Trustees adopted purpose statement and priorities.
- January 2, 2016 (Axtell ISD’s Presentation/Discussion)
- January 29, 2017 Site-Based Meeting Elementary School

### Local Innovation Plan Committee Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Appointment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. JR Proctor</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danette Stranacher</td>
<td>Elementary Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Kocian</td>
<td>Secondary Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Beseda</td>
<td>Secondary Associate Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice Hornsby</td>
<td>Director of Technology/ATPE Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Stone</td>
<td>Elementary Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy Lynch</td>
<td>Axtell ISD’s Technology and Curriculum Integration Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacy Hollingsworth</td>
<td>Director of Special Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Radde</td>
<td>Elementary Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Hardin</td>
<td>Secondary Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathey Bennett</td>
<td>Secondary Media Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathryne Nivin</td>
<td>Elementary Media Specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• February 2, 2017 Site-Based Meeting High School
• February 13, 2017 Board Meeting Discuss role of CBA.
• February 24, 2017 District Leadership Team meeting
• March 15, 2017 District Staff Meeting to cover final draft of plan
• March 20, 2017 Student Survey Concerning District of Innovation
• March 20, 2017 Community Meeting
• April 25, 2017 Final Review Elementary SBDC
• April 27, 2017 Final Review Secondary and District SBDC
• May 8, 2017 Axtell ISD Board of Trustees adopted DOI

The Committee sought and considered input on the Plan through a series of strategies, including establishing Axtell ISD’s website, Google documents for the purpose of getting feedback from the larger community, as well as digital and interactive surveys with teachers, parents, and high school students. Based on direction provided by the Board and input from various Axtell ISD stakeholders, the Axtell ISD Leadership Team proposes this Plan.

2. TERM

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning at the start of the 2017–18 school year and concluding at the end of the 2021–22 school year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The Committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications to the Plan.

3. A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Plan’s comprehensive educational program is guided by and aligned with the Board’s Vision, Mission, Strategic Priorities, and Strategic Plan for the Axtell ISD’s.

A. VISION

The Board, with the adoption of the Axtell ISD Portrait of a Graduate, has the following Vision to guide the Axtell ISD’s:

Axtell ISD will provide all students with a great educational experience that creates engaged problem-solvers who are ethical citizens and possess an entrepreneurial spirit.

B. PRIORITIES/CORE VALUES

The Axtell ISD’s Leadership Committee established the following priorities as guidelines for how decisions would be made and approved these parameters in accordance with our beliefs, mission and objectives:

1. We will make decisions in the best interest of students and their achievement.
2. We will not give up on any student.
3. We will create a system conducive to teacher satisfaction.
4. We will create a system where parents are a valued partner in the educational process.
5. We will create a system where the community is a valued partner in the educational process.
6. We will create a system that is sustainable.
7. We will not ask our teachers or students to sacrifice their own well-being.
8. We will treat all people with dignity and respect.
9. We will model and expect personal responsibility.
10. We will practice responsible stewardship of our resources.
11. We will not compromise our commitment to inspiring excellence with integrity.

C. STRATEGIES

The Board has adopted the following strategies for accomplishing our strategic vision, mission, and goals:

1. We will craft a system of innovative learning approaches, patterns, and practices that respond to the unique needs, interests, and talents of all students.
2. We will ensure a culture of responsibility, service, and community committed to inspiring excellence, innovation, and responsiveness.
3. We will leverage the use of technology, resources, and space to address the needs and learning goals of our students and community.
4. We will expand and enhance unique learning opportunities through strategic partnerships within Axtell ISD, Region, and State of Texas.

D. STRATEGIC PLAN

The Axtell ISD Leadership Team, Board of Trustees, and community recognize that for students to succeed in their future schools must go beyond a general diffusion of knowledge. We must embrace an opportunity to provide inspiring learning opportunities for students that are relevant, purposeful, interesting, engaging, and authentic for their future. Last, but certainly of critical importance, is the need to personalize learning so that the school experience is: responsive to what each student needs in order to be successful; thoughtful about what students find interesting; and aligned to their passions. Axtell ISD believes that while it is important to meet the credit requirements, there is a need to prepare students to be college, career, and life ready. All three of these are of equal importance and necessary for success. Accordingly, Axtell ISD’s Strategic Plan has an emphasis on nurturing an entrepreneurial spirit, an ethical citizenry, and engaged problem-solvers. In essence, the Strategic Plan is designed to create a learning system that is student-centered, collaborative, and cognitively challenging.

The Strategic Plan signals a transition from a teaching platform focused on compliance, bureaucratic exercise, and test preparation, to a student-centered learning platform. The Strategic Plan emphasizes a commitment to established priorities for administrative and systematic support for teaching and learning. Based upon Axtell ISD’s Instructional model, there are four key components necessary to build organizational capacity to make a shift from compliance to inspiring excellence. These four components must be so embedded in the day-to-day core work that they drive everything that takes place in the classroom. These components include:

1. Educator commitment to Planning dynamic, relevant, learning experiences;
2. Designing authentic Instructional experiences for all students;
3. Providing resources to create Learning Environments that inspire student engagement;
4. Administrative commitment to **Professional Growth** at all levels.

![Axtell ISD Instructional Model](image)

Until schools have the flexibility, time, and resources to move what happens in the classroom to support a new paradigm where learning is the goal, then we are really only tinkering with the system. This is truly what is at the heart of transformation and innovative practice. It is not brick and mortar. It is not technology for technology’s sake. The great divide in education is conceiving and adopting new Instructional frameworks that embrace learning for all students, and how to move a system from focusing strictly on teaching to focusing more on learning. In order to cross the divide, professionals must work collaboratively around creating and designing different tasks for students to do, in classrooms, that are intellectually stimulating and collaborative, with outcomes that are more authentic and not just based on standardized measures, with outcomes/results that truly are transferable to life, work, and one’s personal intellectual pursuits. In this process a critical lens must be used to examine all facets of the educational process and must not be assumed to be effective in the conveyance and distribution of learning.

**INNOVATION**

To achieve Axtell ISD’s Vision and Mission, as well as to align Axtell ISD’s practices and operations with Axtell ISD’s Strategic Plan and Learning Platform, Axtell ISD needs the flexibility to exert local control, at both the Axtell ISD’s and campus levels, to:

- Promote innovative curricular design approaches
- Promote innovative instructional pedagogical practices
- Promote blended learning and digital responsibility
- Promote innovative use of learning time by modifying the school calendar and the use of learning time
- Promote innovative ideas regarding campus leadership
- Promote innovative ideas regarding parental involvement
- Promote innovative ideas regarding community participation
- Promote innovative ideas regarding student voice
In order to achieve these lofty goals, Axtell ISD needs local flexibility in the areas listed above to improve student learning and ensuring that graduates are Ethical Citizens, Engaged Problem-Solvers, and possess an Entrepreneurial Spirit. Subsequently, the Axtell ISD’s needs more latitude to expand the potential for providing more high-quality, meaningful professional learning opportunities for staff so that they can enhance their professional capacity and collaborate regarding best practices as they move to the new role of “teacher as the architect of learning.”

The promotion of innovative curriculum and instructional pedagogical practices will help Axtell ISD provide more engaging and challenging learning, using digital tools and systems so that learning is not confined to the four-walls of the classroom and students have a personalized pathway to meet their learning needs. Promoting innovative ideas regarding community participation, campus governance, and parental involvement will help build strong supports for students, schools, and the community by increasing community partnership which brings together education, business, and civic agencies so that every school, family and student will feel supported by, and connected to, Axtell ISD.

Finally, modifications in the scheduling of the school year and the school day will provide the flexibility necessary to:

- Move from an emphasis on “seat time” to an emphasis on “learning time;”
- Try new innovative approaches that engage students in enriched and accelerated learning opportunities; and
- Allow more time for providing professional learning opportunities for staff.

Two key goals identified by the Committee as critical to achievement of Axtell ISD’s Vision, Mission, strategic priorities and Strategic Plan are: 1) the innovative expansion of blended learning through a partnership with Modern Teacher, Schoology, and ESC Region 12. 2) Focus on innovative lesson and curriculum design.

**REQUIREMENTS OF THE EDUCATION CODE THAT THE LOCAL INNOVATION PLAN EXEMPTS AXTELL ISD FROM (UPON ADOPTION OF THE PLAN)**

**Submitting waivers for Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 4 class size TEC § 25.111 TEC § 25.112 TEC § 25.113**

Pre-Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes are to be kept at a 22 student/teacher ratio according to state law. When a class exceeds this limit, Axtell ISD must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are very rarely rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves little purpose.

Along with the waiver, it is required that a letter is sent home to each parent in the section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted. Many times soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of Axtell ISD and we are below the 22:1 ratio.

**Innovative Practice:**

While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, we do not believe it has a negative effect when you only add one or two more students. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influence the learning environment.

a. Axtell ISD will attempt to keep all Pre-K-4th core classrooms to a 22:1 ratio. However, in the event the class size exceeds this student/teacher ratio, the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees.

b. In the event a K-4th core classroom reaches a student/teacher ratio of 25:1, the campus will notify the parents of the students in the classroom and inform them of the situation.
c. A TEA waiver will not be necessary when a K-4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

d. This gives Axtell ISD the flexibility without having the bureaucracy of waivers and the subsequent communication within the Texas Education Agency.

Site-based decision making TEC § 11.251, TEC § 11.252, & TEC §11.253

Axtell 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 for by Texas Education Code in Chapter 11 and 28 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 TEC § 11.251, TEC § 11.252, and TEC §11.253. This will consolidate the number of meetings and the number of committees required by law and will better serve this community.

Innovative Practice:

In place of the district and campus level planning and decision making processes outlined in TEC § 11.251, TEC § 11.252, and TEC §11.253, 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. The Site-Based Decision Making Committees at the campus level will still be used as a necessary part of the SAC, but will coordinate decision making at the district level. 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 multitude of needs as opposed to having one meeting after another throughout the year.

Uniform school start and end date: TEC § 25.0811 & 25.0812

Axtell ISD wishes to no longer be required to start school on or after the fourth Monday of August or not be permitted to conclude the school year prior to May 15. These requirements placed upon schools are greatly based on the lobbying conducted on behalf of the business and tourism industries. These statute requirements do not take into account the wishes of local education agencies and even more importantly, the needs of students. As such, Axtell ISD seeks relief from Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 dictating that schools must not start prior to the 4th Monday in August.

Innovative Practice:

Emphatically, Axtell ISD seeks local control over the start and end dates of a school year. Axtell ISD anticipates starting school during the month of August and concluding the school year in May. The primary goal of this change will be to better balance the days of instruction in each semester, afford greater flexibility in calendar options, and better align the district’s calendar with the local junior college in order to accommodate Axtell ISD students enrolled in dual-credit courses.

Inter-District Transfers TEC § 25.036

Currently, under Texas Education Code 25.036, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC 25.036, has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year. Axtell ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and 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 the district. TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one-year commitment by the district. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, Axtell ISD seeks exemption from the one year transfer commitment.

**Innovative Practice:**

Non-resident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students 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 expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State’s 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

**Teacher Certification TEC § 21.003, TAC Title 19 Part 7 Chapter 231**

Axtell ISD will be exempt from the requirements which limit the district’s ability to hire the best candidate for a job based solely on certification issues. (Special Education and Bilingual teachers will continue to be required to have appropriate certifications).

**Innovative Practice:**

There are rare instances when a certified teacher is not certified in an area of great need, and has the ability to help Axtell ISD students grow. Especially in areas related to CTE. This will be an unusual circumstance which makes this an appropriate action, and will be decided by a team of educators in each instance. The Axtell ISD SAC (which includes ATPE president) will determine when an educator is qualified to be considered for this exceptional situation. Axtell ISD will continue to seek and employ fully certified teachers in almost every case.

**Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade TEC § 25.092**

In order to provide engaging and challenging learning to all students, the Axtell ISD’s needs relief from Texas Education Code Section 25.092, which inhibits the goals of the DOI Plan by not allowing Axtell ISD to issue class credit or a final grade for a class if a student is not in attendance an arbitrary percentage of the time that a class is offered. In other words, the law currently requires the Axtell ISD’s to award class credit to students based on “seat time” rather than based on content mastery.

**Innovative Practice:**

Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the Axtell ISD’s by promoting active learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, and reducing the number of dropouts/increasing the number of qualifying graduates.

One of the overarching goals in the Strategic Plan within the focus area is providing students with the curriculum, tools, resources, and pedagogy to achieve their full potential by taking ownership of their learning and setting high academic goals. This will be accomplished by designing and implementing more responsive learning environments, where blended and personalized learning opportunities are available. Blended learning, where instruction is delivered through a combination of time in class and time spent learning online, is only one example where exemption from Section 25.092 will likely foster greater innovation to promote active learning and improve student outcomes. In addition, exemption from this requirement will allow Axtell ISD to not penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities and/or family issues that may prevent students from meeting the 90% class attendance rule, as long as mastery of content can be documented. This will address the social and emotional issues that the Axtell ISD’s often encounters when serving students who
find themselves in situations that place them in alternative school.

Relief from Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher’s right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher’s right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.