I. Introduction
The 84th legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allowed traditional independent school districts the ability to access flexibilities which had previously been reserved for Texas’ open enrollment charter schools. In order for an independent school district to obtain these flexibilities, districts must seek designation as a “District of Innovation.” On Monday, February 13, 2017, the Happy ISD Board of Trustees initiated the process by adopting a resolution to pursue a “District of Innovation” designation.

II. Mission
In partnership with parents, teachers, and students, the mission of the Happy Independent School District is to ensure a positive, supportive, nurturing environment in which to educate all students through a commitment to quality and high standards.

III. Motto
Where excellence is expected, respected, and rewarded.

IV. Committee Members
1. Ray Keith, Superintendent
2. Toni Waldo, Principal
3. Stacie Barnett, Assistant Principal
4. Dayna McMillan, Elementary Teacher
5. Joli Johnson, Elementary Teacher
6. Tina McNeill, Elementary Teacher
7. Robby Bow, Secondary Teacher
8. Christy Johnson, Secondary Teacher
9. Tye Keith, Secondary Teacher
10. Jennifer Sperry, Secondary Teacher
11. Nicki Sturgess, Parent
12. Christina Flowers, Parent
13. Keitha Rahlfs, Parent
14. Erica Reyes, Parent
15. Traci Drake, Parent
V. Timeline of Events

**Monday, February 13, 2017**
Board of Trustees approve resolution to consider and discuss the possibility of using HB 1842 to become a District of Innovation

**Monday, March 6, 2017**
6:30 pm, Public Hearing
- Public hearing to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation
7:00 pm, Regular Board of Trustees Meeting
- Approve a motion to pursue local “District of Innovation” plan
- Board of Trustees approve the members of the District of Innovation Committee

**Wednesday, March 29, 2017 – 2 pm School Library**
Initial meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

**Monday, April 3, 2016 – 2 pm Superintendent’s Office**
2nd meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

**Thursday, April 27, 2017—2 pm School Library**
District Improvement Committee Edits Final Version and Votes on Proposed Local Innovation Plan

**Friday, April 28, 2017**
Post the Proposed District of Innovation Plan on the district website for minimum of 30 days

**Tuesday, May 9, 2017**
Board of Trustees vote to continue the pursuit of the local District of Innovation Plan

**Thursday, May 18, 2017**
Notified Commissioner of Education of the Board’s intention to vote on adoption of proposed plan

**Tuesday, June 13, 2017**
6:45 pm, Public Hearing
- Public hearing to explain and discuss the proposed District of Innovation Plan
- DOI Committee Members voted to approve the District of Innovation Plan as Presented
7:00 pm, Regular Board of Trustees Meeting
- District of Innovation Plan Approved with Unanimous Vote

**Thursday, June 22, 2017**
Notified Commissioner of Education of Approval of Local Innovation Plan
VI. Term of Plan

The term of the District of Innovation plan, as constituted by the Texas Education Agency, will be five years. Therefore, this plan will begin with the 2017-2018 school year and conclude at the end of the 2021-2022 school year unless terminated by the Board of Trustees. The District Improvement Committee will annually monitor the Local Innovation Plan and provide feedback to the Board on the effectiveness of the plan.

VII. Innovations

Calendar (EB Legal) (TEC §25.0811, 25.0812)
Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday in August. Texas Education Code Section 25.812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15.

Innovation Strategy
School start date is an area in which the district should be able to determine locally and on an annual basis to determine what is best for our community. Having the ability to modify the start date of school allows us the flexibility to balance semester days, align classes to college courses, and ease transitions by beginning school on a shortened week. With a minute requirement of 75,600 and the state assessment given in early May, it might be possible to finish the school year prior to May 15. An exemption from 25.0811 and 25.0812 is requested.

Class Size Waiver (EEB Legal) (25.112, §25.113)
State law requires that a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class. If classes are going to exceed this cap, a waiver is required from the Texas Education Agency. If approved, the district must then notify parents by “specifying the class for which an exception from the limit imposed by Section 25.112(a) was granted; (2) state the number of children in the class for which the exception was granted. (§25.113, 1-2).

Innovation Strategy
By seeking an exception from TEC 25.112, the District would have flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation Designation and would not be required to seek waivers annually. While the District intends to remain within the guidelines of the current education code as much as possible, the District seeks flexibility to provide the best learning environment for our K-4 students, including more flexibility when teaching, creative ways of delivering instruction, and ability to manage increases in class sizes. Small class sizes may have a positive effect in the classroom, but must also be balanced with the timing of adding staff, the qualifications of staff available, the makeup and chemistry of the classroom and other classroom influences. In the event a classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio in grades K – 4, the class sizes will be reviewed by appropriate district and campus administration. The Board of Trustees will be informed of K-4 classes that exceed 22:1. TEA waivers for class sizes exceeding 22 will not be required. An exemption from TEC 25.113 is also requested.
As a small school district it is sometimes difficult to find qualified applicants for certain fields. When an applicant is unavailable, it occasionally becomes necessary for a teacher to teach outside his/her certified teaching field. In order for a teacher to teach outside his/her teaching field, the district is required to submit a request to TEA. TEA then approves or denies this request. Another area in which flexibility would benefit Happy ISD would be the ability to hire full time employees, with industry experience, for innovative, dual credit, or new classes in which we are unable to find certified teachers for a position. TEC§ 21.057 requires that a school district provide parental notification if the district assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days.

Innovative Strategy
In order to best serve Happy ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. With the current teacher shortage, this exemption from teacher certification requirements will enable greater flexibility in staffing and will enrich applicant pools in specific areas of need. The district’s exemption from TEC 21.003 would allow the district to consider part time professionals to teach courses, allow industry expert professionals to transition to the teaching profession in Career and Technology and also assist in staffing high need STEM and dual credit course offerings. Out of state certified teachers could be considered for positions upon a local review of experience, education and credentials. Often experienced certified teachers in our district could teach a course outside of their certification area due to their education, background and/or experience. Local decisions outside of state certification requirements would allow innovation and flexibility in scheduling to meet student needs.

a) The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach classes out of his/her certified field.
b) An individual with college teaching or industry experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certificate. The campus principal would make a request to the superintendent and make all credentials available. The superintendent would have the capability to hire this person on a local certification and the employee would obtain an at-will contract.

Teacher Contract Days (DCB Legal, Local) (TEC §21.401)
Current education law in Chapter 21 requires a teacher who is on a 10 month contract to work an equivalent of 187 days.

Innovation Strategy
In an attempt to align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students, the district would have the option to reduce the amount of contract days with no effect on teacher salaries.
**Probationary Contracts (DCA Legal) (§21.102)**
For experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years. A one year probationary period is not a sufficient amount of time to evaluate the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Currently, contracts for Happy ISD employees occur in March or April which demands that employment decisions must be made with very little time for evaluating teacher effectiveness and prior to state assessment results.

*Innovation Strategy*
For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years from the first day of employment with Happy ISD.

**Length of School Day (EC Legal) (TEC §25.082a)**
TEC 25.082a states that a school day must be 7 hours each day including recesses and intermissions. SAAH 3.8.1 states that a school day must be at least 420 minutes including recesses and intermissions. School districts are subject to this requirement.

The current rules allow no flexibility in the design of district and campus schedules.

*Innovation Strategies*
The opportunity to exempt from the 420 minute school day requirement will provide the district the opportunity to provide each campus the flexibility of creating a daily schedule that will better serve the students and teachers on each campus. This flexibility will give local control to the district in meeting the yearly requirement of 75,600 minutes in relation to the district calendar for each specific school year. This exemption will provide greater flexibility than the current 6 day waiver maximum that relates to the length of the school day. The opportunity to be exempt from the 7 hour day requirement will allow the district to create more flexibility within the daily schedule for students and staff. This flexibility will be used to create a unique bell schedule instead of the static schedule required of schools by this mandate.

**Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (TEC§37.008)**
TEC 37.008 states that each school district shall provide a disciplinary alternative education program that: (7) employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subchapter B, Chapter 21

*Innovation Strategies*
Happy ISD seldom needs the existence of a DAEP and is usually a short term requirement since there will be a very limited number of students assigned to DAEP. Since the classes will be provided using computer based instruction, it is not necessary to have certified teachers monitoring DAEP. The Campus administrator will ensure that the staff of the DAEP has the support necessary to properly supervise the students assigned to the program and will lend assistance of teachers with specific certification as needed.
Transfer Students (FDA) (25.036) Under Texas Education Code 25.001, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

Innovation
TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer student as a one-year commitment by the district. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applications. On rare occasions that include but are not limited to the following: suspensions, (in or out of school), DAEP assignment, expulsion, habitual code of conduct violations, and attendance issues. Happy ISD will seek exemption from the one-year transfer commitment. By having this exemption Happy ISD may consider a high risk transfer student in hopes that permitting a school change, for the student, will help in areas such as grades, attendance, and discipline.

Courses of Study; Advancement - School Health Advisory Council (BDF Legal) (TEC§28.004)
TEC 28.004 d-1 The local school health advisory council shall meet at least four times each year.

Innovation
Happy ISD will be exempt from the requirement to hold a minimum of four meetings per year. The HISD SHAC committee shall meet at least once per year. The district’s size and the stability of the membership of the SHAC committee ensures that committee members are aware of the needs of the district’s students and are often able to review, advise, and revise plans in fewer than four meetings. The HISD Board of Trustees and the members of the SHAC committee should determine how often the committee should meet. Happy ISD seeks exemption from 28.004 d-1.

Absences for College University Visits (FEA Legal/Local) (TEC§25.087 b-2 (1) (2) and TAC§129.21 (j) (Excused Absences Higher Education Visits)
Happy ISD will be exempt from the higher education student two-day excused absence limit listed in TEC 25.087 b-2 (1) (2) and 19 TAC 129.21 (J). Happy ISD will establish the number of days that a student may receive an excused absence while visiting an institution of higher education. The current limit of two days does not allow time for a student to travel to an out-of-state or some in-state institutions. Happy ISD high school principals, counselors, and central staff will propose a policy change to the Board for their consideration for approval.

Innovation
Currently students are allowed to miss only two days for college visits, limiting how many campuses they can see and where. Allow more than two days, but only with administrator approval and the Board of Trustees would have to approve a policy change.
Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade (FEC) (TEC §25.092)

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. Board Goals are inhibited by TEC §25.092

Innovation
Happy ISD will provide the consistent delivery of an innovative curriculum that: individualizes instruction, motivates and meets the needs of all students, addresses varied learning styles, and strives toward the highest standard as measured by the Texas Education Agency. Flexibility with regard to minimum attendance for class credit or final grade allows the district innovative options for assessing student mastery and individualizing instruction. Students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, who could otherwise demonstrate mastery, would not have to be penalized or experience delays in advancement. The district will determine appropriate methods for assessing or otherwise determining whether the content of a course has been mastered. These methods will be used when, for legitimate reasons, a student is not in attendance for 90 percent of the days a class is offered. Legitimate reasons include scheduling conflicts due to extra- and co-curricular activities, academic activities, and other extenuating circumstances as deemed appropriate at the local level. Such scheduling conflicts can currently discourage participation in activities that promote social and emotional engagement and development. Additionally, students with extenuating circumstances who are penalized by minimum attendance requirements might be more likely to drop out. Additionally, the district will explore innovations in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students. Options such as blended learning increase the ability of the district to motivate and meet the needs of all students, address varied learning styles, and strive toward high standards.

Note: Relief in the area of minimum attendance for class credit or final grade does not impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. It does not limit a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Sec. 28.214 nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Sec. 28.216.

X. Summary

The direction provided by this Local Innovation Plan is a culmination of collaboration between community members, parents, teachers, administrators and board members. This committee investigated the needs of our faculty and students and formulated a plan which allows our district to provide an efficient, high quality education for all students. This plan provides an opportunity for the Happy community to make local decisions on the best way to educate our children. We are thankful for the support of the Happy Board of Trustees, local and state legislatures, and the Texas Education Agency for making this process possible.