



2015-2016 ENROLLMENT: **18,650**  
PERCENT LOW INCOME: **74.9%**

## Innovative Practices

- Partnering with local Institute of Higher Education (IHE) to provide postsecondary endorsements and individual interventions to high school students by creating an academic calendar that aligns to the IHE calendar.
- Creating a stable learning environment in grades K-4 by using class size flexibility.
- Recruiting experienced professionals from career and technology fields through exemption from certification.

## Overview

Located in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) serves approximately 19,000 students, of which 92% are Hispanic, and 75% are economically disadvantaged.<sup>1</sup> In May of 2016, the HCISD Board of Trustees adopted a resolution to initiate the District of Innovation process. According to Chief Academic Officer Dr. Alicia Noyola, the district viewed this legislation as an opportunity to advance the district's five-year strategic plan adopted in 2014.

In June of 2016, the HCISD District Strategic Planning Committee – comprised of board members, district staff, parents, and community members – convened to review the implementation of the strategic plan and draft the DOI plan. After thoughtful review of the district's strategic plan and extensive feedback from a broad array of stakeholders, the district adopted a plan. Through the planning process, HCISD only elected the exemptions that the district and community felt would facilitate fulfillment of the district's strategic vision. Below is a summary of the innovations in Harlingen CISD facilitated by the DOI legislation.

## Piloting Calendar Aligned with Community College to Better Facilitate Dual-Enrollment

### Flexibility Needed: School Start Date

Postsecondary readiness is the primary goal of HCISD. This is evident in the district's vision and mission, and throughout its strategic plan. To that end, the district partnered with TSTC to provide postsecondary endorsements to high school students. In the seven years prior to adopting the DOI plan the district struggled to create a calendar aligned with the TSTC calendar. In the initial year of implementation of the DOI plan, HCISD is piloting a modified calendar at the Early College High School that aligns the semester end date with the TSTC calendar. In addition to facilitating dual-enrollment, this adjustment provides two additional weeks at the end of the fall semester that are now used for individualized interventions and remediation for the Texas Success Initiative (TSI).

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the Texas Education Agency, in 2015-2016 52.2% of the total student population identified as Hispanic and 59.0% as economically disadvantaged.

At the end of the year, the planning committee will review the impact of this modified calendar to determine whether this practice should be implemented on other campuses. At this time, the district is not planning to change the school start date for students. However, the district has discussed changing the teacher start date to provide professional development and externship opportunities for career and technology teachers.

## **Creating a Stable Learning Environment in K-4 to Promote Early Childhood Literacy**

### **Flexibility Needed: Class Size Flexibility**

Harlingen CISD believes that a strong focus on early childhood literacy is the foundation for postsecondary success. Due to the high mobility rate in HCISD, the district is forced to reorganize elementary classroom assignments midway through the fall semester in order to remain under the 22:1 required cap as students move from campus to campus, creating an unstable learning environment for its elementary students and diverting time and energy that should be directed at improving educational outcomes.

The HCISD planning committee elected the class-size ratio exemption to address the inefficient allocation of time and resources, and instability in the learning environment. Although the district continues to strive for the 22:1 ratio, a district cap of 25:1 for K-4 has been established. The HCISD planning committee agrees this flexibility will expedite planning and implementation, and save valuable resources that can be focused on early literacy.

## **Attracting Experienced Professionals to Teach Career and Technology Courses**

### **Flexibility Needed: Certification Requirements**

In line with the district's focus on postsecondary readiness, and in response to House Bill 5 (HB5), which requires districts to provide career pathways, HCISD is focused on growing a world-class career and technology program. Central to the success of that program is the district's ability to recruit experienced and effective teachers.

The district elected the certification requirement exemption to allow for district approved teaching permits to be issued to individuals the districts deems qualified to teach based any combination of work experience, training and education, or an industry related credential related to the subject matter he or she will be teaching. To date, HCISD has hired one full-time staff in the area of sports management and two part-time sports medicine teachers.

Harlingen CISD intentionally aligned DoI flexibilities to achieve the objectives outlined in its strategic plan, and has chosen to start small, improve on lessons learned, and scale proven innovations over the next two to three years.

The district is approaching DoI not as a one-time activity, but as a continual process to evaluate and introduce new choices, experiences, and innovative opportunities to benefit all students.

For more information about Districts of Innovation, visit [RaiseYourHandTexas.org/DOI](https://RaiseYourHandTexas.org/DOI)