

QUANAHA

Independent School District

LOCAL INNOVATION PLAN

Background and Timeline

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allows public school districts to declare exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code by becoming a designated District of Innovation. On August 6, 2018, during the regularly scheduled board meeting, a public hearing was conducted to consider whether Quanah ISD should develop a plan for designation as a District of Innovation. The Quanah ISD Board of Trustees unanimously passed a resolution to consider developing a Local Innovation Plan. The board of trustees appointed a Local Innovation Committee to research, discuss and develop the Local Innovation Plan.

Local Innovation Committee

Melissa Sulak, Superintendent – Chair
Lillie Cary, Principal
Janna McSpadden, Teacher
Tami Osborne, Teacher
Bryan Knox, Parent
Gayle McKinley, Principal
Trenton Boyd, Teacher
Mackenzie Burt, Teacher
Townly Thomas, Parent
Tammy Witten, Principal
Payton Jackson, Teacher
Dody Lehman, Teacher
Kitty Henderson, Parent

The committee met on the following dates: January 24 and February 7. In addition to the face-to-face meetings, the committee collaborated on-line, and each member reviewed plans from numerous other school districts.

The Local Innovation Committee reviewed provisions in Texas Education Code that apply to HB1842 and identified those that exemption from will provide for greater local control and more flexibility therefore benefitting the students of Quanah ISD.

It is the belief of the committee that we, the professionals that work with our students on a daily basis and are a part of our community, are in the best position to make decisions for the betterment of students of Quanah ISD. We believe we have developed a plan that will allow us to do just that.

Our committee voted unanimously, 13-0, on March 1, 2019, to post the following plan online for public comment and feedback. On April 8, 2019, a public meeting was held to

discuss the plan. On that same date, the board of trustees approved the District of Innovation Plan and informed the Commissioner of that action.

1. Uniform Start Date (TEC §25.0811)

State law currently prohibits school districts from starting class before the fourth Monday in August, unless they are year-round districts.

Innovation Strategies

The flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the need of the students, the school, and the community. In addition, this flexibility allows the district to better align its starting date to accommodate the start date of colleges in which the district uses for dual credit courses. Another benefit of exempting this restriction is it allows the school to look at starting classes as a short week which can ease the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school. Additionally, the ability to change the school start date can also help to better balance the amount of days in each semester. The ability to start earlier would allow for more instructional days before the spring testing window. In addition, an earlier start date would potentially result in an earlier release date, allowing for extended time for remediation before summer test administration.

2. Length of School Day (TEC §25.081, §25.082A)

State law currently requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day in order to count for ADA calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.

Innovation Strategies

The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction within a designated school day will assist with personalizing learning to better meet student needs. Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Quanah ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum number for the school year.

Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling (above and beyond the 6-day maximum as needed) without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements. This would allow the district the flexibility to schedule non-instructional days into the schedule to allow for teachers to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development.

Quanah ISD does not have any intentions to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, "early release" days would be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar, which is approved by the Board of Trustees and published and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year and continuously published using school media.

3. Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.044, §21.053 and §21.057)

State law states that a person may not be employed as a teacher 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 of their certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification.

Innovation Strategies

The current certification requirement severely limits the district's options to hire professionals with work related experience or degrees to teach a variety of courses from CTE and STEM related courses along with other required courses, such as fine arts, needed throughout the district. In order to maximize the opportunities for students to take such courses, the district will consider the qualifications necessary to create a local requirement for these courses instead of the requirements set forth in TEC 21.003(a). Exemption will allow the district to consider professionals, those with proven skills, and trade-related professionals to teach courses on a full-time or even part-time basis. The district reserves the right to identify professional development for persons with industry experience in the areas of student management, instructional strategies, curriculum, and/or parent engagement.

When unsuccessful attempts have been made to fill a position with a teacher with the proper grade-level certification, a teacher could teach one grade level above or below a state issued certification. In the case of a teacher hired after the first day of instruction additional, flexibility could be considered.

The campus principal shall submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow a certified or non-certified teacher to teach a subject(s) or grade for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.

Background checks will be conducted and fingerprints required. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following these assignments.

A teacher certification waiver, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency.

4. Probationary Contracts (TEC §21.102(b) and DCA(Legal))

States that a probationary contract may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment with the district.

Innovation Strategies

This period of time is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the availability of end of year classroom and student data. For all teachers new to Quanah ISD the probationary period when becoming employed by Quanah ISD shall be for a period of two years with probationary contracts issued for each of the two years. The probationary period could be extended for one additional year at the campus principal's recommendation.

5. 90 Percent Attendance Rule (TEC §25.092)

State law mandates a student 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. In addition, if a student is in attendance greater than 75 percent and less than 90 percent may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the campus administrator and meets the instructional requirements for the class.

Innovation Strategies

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage. Districts should have the option to set their own requirement. Local districts need the flexibility to set attendance requirements which reflect their specific situations and expectations.

While Quanah ISD will continue to stress and enforce the 90 percent rule, students who fail to meet the 75 percent could be granted credit when the absences are due to district-approved extenuating circumstances or extracurricular activities, provided the student demonstrates mastery of the content and earns a passing grade in the class. The final decision on granting credit will rest with the District Attendance Committee.

If the Quanah ISD is to be able to implement innovative instructional methods such as virtual classrooms, blended learning, and work-study opportunities, and other educational activities as approved by administration, it will need an exemption from the 90% "seat time" attendance rule as set forth in §25.092. Relief from this Section will also inhibit barriers for students who wish to engage in service learning opportunities in the community.

6. District Transfer Policy (TEC §25.036)

Under TEC 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

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Quanah ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring non-resident 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 and attendance records are 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 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 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. At any time during the school year, a transfer student who becomes a discipline issue, has a record of poor attendance, or is in need of services which exceed state funding for that student, Quanah ISD can terminate their transfer agreement.

7. School Health Advisory Committee (TEC §28.004)

The local school health advisory committee shall meet at least four times each year.

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Quanah ISD will be exempt from the requirement to hold a minimum of four meetings per year. The QISD SHAC shall meet at least once per semester. The district's size and stability of the membership of the SHAC ensures that the committee members are aware of the needs of the district's students and are able to accomplish the required actions in fewer than four meetings.