

District of Innovation

Introduction

HB 1842 was passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in Spring 2015 and provides Texas public school districts the opportunity to be designated as Districts of Innovation. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.

Districts of Innovation may be exempted from a number of state statutes and will have:

- greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students.
- increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- empowerment to innovate and think differently.

Areas of Innovation include:

- 1) School start and end dates, Instructional Minutes/ length of day/ early release days (no waivers needed)
- 2) K-4 Class size reporting (no waivers needed)
- 3) Teacher Certification- one class outside of certification- CTE class - An individual with experience in the content of an elective (CTE) course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate
- 4) Probationary Contracts- extend to three years for experienced teachers new to district

Districts are not exempt from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements, and academic and financial accountability. These exemptions were chosen to provide opportunities for Wylie ISD to individualize and improve learning for all students. The Board of Trustees will work with the Superintendent of Schools to approve changes to school year calendars, instructional minutes, and other areas included in this plan. Any adjustments will be made in the best interests of our students and teachers. The plan may be amended at any time by the committee with approval of the Board of Trustees. The term of the plan is for five years and be in effect for the 2022-2023 school year through the 2026-2027 school year.

AREAS OF INNOVATION

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

1. School Start and End Date

Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812

Related Board Policies: EB LEGAL

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August TEC 25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. The Texas tourism groups lobbied to have this stopped because they believed it was hurting their tourism business. Therefore, several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Innovation Strategies

- a) Relief from the statute will allow WISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.
- b) Alignment of the district calendar with local schools, universities, advanced placement exams, and STAAR timelines.
- c) Provide for increased local control of the instructional calendar in order to be responsive to community needs, including the starting date, ending date, the number of days in each semester, 6-week reporting period and the dates of preparation days.

2. Kindergarten - Grade 4 Class Size Reporting Requirement

Exemption from: TEC 25.112; TEC 25.113

Related Board Policies: EEB LEGAL/LOCAL

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC 25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten - 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.

TEC 25.113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this notice.

Innovation Strategies:

- a) WISD believes in a low student to teacher ratio in all of its classrooms. The District has a goal of 22:1 in K-4 and 24:1 in 5-12. WISD will begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student to teacher ratio of at least 22:1 or less in each K-4 homeroom class. In the event that any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees. Decisions regarding appropriate student to teacher ratios will be made at the local level, taking into consideration the age and grade level of the students, the subject matter of class, the needs of individual teachers and student groups, and the availability of additional instructional staff members.
- b) A TEA waiver request will not be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.
- c) Parents of students in K-4 classrooms that exceed a ratio of 22:1 will continued to be notified as per TEC 25.113.

3. Teacher Certification

Exemption from: TEC§21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.057

Relevant Board Policies: DBA LEGAL/LOCAL; DK LEGAL/LOCAL

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC 21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor 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 for Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district

TEC 21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the District from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC 21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation Strategies

- a) The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification.
- b) The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to

effectively perform the duties of the position in question. Special Education and Bilingual/ESL Teachers must continue to be SBEC certified.

- c) For grades 5-12, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.
- d) An individual with experience in the content of an elective (CTE) course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.
- e) Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.
- f) The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.
- g) Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

4. Probationary Contracts Exemption
from: TEC 21.102(b)

Relevant Board Policies: DCA LEGAL

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

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 sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior to District receipt of state assessment results.

Innovation Strategies

For experienced teachers, counselors, 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 three years. All other teachers hired in the District may remain on probationary status for three years and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC 21.102(c).