

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the 84th Texas Legislative Session in spring 2015, House Bill 1842 was passed. House Bill 1842 provided the opportunity for Texas public school districts to pursue the designation of District of Innovation. This allows local school districts to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code to afford more flexibility and local control for innovative programming. This legislature afforded school districts the opportunity to seek the designation: District of Innovation.

Districts of Innovation may be exempt from a myriad of state statutes and will have:

- Greater local control as the decision maker 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

Districts are not exempt from statutes including curriculum, graduation requirements, academic and financial accountability.

In order to be qualified for the designation as a District of Innovation, a school district's most recent academic performance rating must at least be acceptable.

Should the board of trustees choose to approve a Local District of Innovation plan, the plan will begin in the fall of 2018 and continue until the spring of 2023.

OVERVIEW

The process is initiated by either:

- A resolution of the board of trustees; or
- A petition signed by a majority of the members of the district-level advisory committee

After the resolution a board of trustees must hold a public hearing to consider developing a local innovation plan within 30 days.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the board may appoint a committee to begin developing a plan in pursuit of becoming a District of Innovation or simply decline to pursue the designation.

The plan may be for up to five years in length and can address:

- Site based decision making processes
- Uniform start date
- Minimum minutes of instruction
- Class size ratio
- The 90% attendance rule
- Student discipline provisions
- Teacher certifications
- Teacher contracts
- Teacher benefits
- Teacher appraisal system

This plan may be amended, rescinded, or renewed.

Yoakum ISD Innovation Plan

Introduction

House Bill 1842 was passed during the 84th Legislative Session in 2015 which created Texas Education Code Chapter 12 A about the District of Innovation concept. School districts would be able to access many flexibilities that have been available to open enrollment charter schools in Texas.

Innovations:

1. First Day of Instruction

Current Limitation:

TEC 25.0811 states that the first day of instruction for students may not begin before the fourth Monday in August. The current process allows no flexibility in the design and balancing of instructional semesters to meet the needs of students or wishes of the local teachers, administrators and School Board who represent community interests in this matter.

Innovation Strategies:

- A. Yoakum ISD proposes to have the flexibility to begin instruction no earlier than the 2nd Monday of August for students. Teachers will report for duty no earlier than the 1st Monday of August. This change will create better flexibility in the creating of the district calendar, as well as, allowing more opportunities in scheduling meaningful and balanced staff development days.
- B. The start date will allow the district to provide more instructional minutes before state assessments.
- C. This will give Yoakum ISD flexibility to better align calendars and balance instructional minutes during the first and second semester of instruction. This will also allow the district to better align its starting date to accommodate the start and end date of colleges in which the district uses for dual credit courses. The flexibility will also allow the schools to look at starting classes as a short week which can ease the transition of students entering kindergarten, junior high, and high school.

- D. This strategy will provide for more concentrated professional development in key areas during instruction instead of planning before needs are realized.

2. Probationary Contract [TEC 21.102] [DCA (LEGAL)]

Current Limitation:

TEC 21.102 (b) 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 years of the eight years preceding employment with the district. 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.

Innovation Strategy:

For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to Yoakum ISD, that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, the probationary period when becoming employed by Yoakum ISD shall be for a period of two full years with probationary contracts issued for each of the two years. Partial years will not count toward the full year requirement.

3. Teacher Certification (TEC 21.003, 21.053, 21.044, 21.051, and 21.057)

Current Limitation:

Due to learners having the opportunity to personalize their graduation plans and earn endorsements in areas of student such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) business and industry, public services, arts and humanities, there is a need for educators to have multiple certifications. It is particularly difficult to find educators who meet certification specifications in order to teach classes in the endorsements areas. Texas Education Code, sections 21.003, 21.053, 21.004, 21.051, and 21.057 limit the District's ability to hire educators to teach hard to fill positions. Flexibility in this areas will assist in finding quality candidates to teach certain course in order to avoid cancelling classes in the future.

Innovation Strategies:

This District is seeking flexibility in hiring professionals in certain vocations such as career and technical courses. The exemption from Texas Education Code 21.005 (d.1.) will enable the District to establish local criteria for such courses when hiring quality personnel. With the exemption, the District will not have to cancel classes that students are dependent upon in order to fulfill their certifications and graduation requirements.