

MESQUITE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, allows Texas public schools with sufficient academic ratings to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. In an attempt to reduce extra administrative or operational burdens placed on public schools, the bill made allowable certain code exemptions that already do not apply to charter or private schools.

To obtain exemptions, the District must create a Local Innovation Plan detailing the code requirements that inhibit the goals of the District and the benefits to the District expected from the exemption.

MISD's District of Innovation Committee, including several members of the Superintendent's Cabinet and the District's Site-Based Decision Making Council, developed a District of Innovation Plan which follows.

STRATEGIC PLAN & COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The MISD Innovation Plan is guided by and aligned with the District's Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Core Values, Strategic Plan and District Improvement Plan.

INNOVATION PLAN ITEMS

MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES IN GRADES K-4

TEC Code: Sec. 25.112 (a-g) CLASS SIZE

TEC Code: Sec. 25.113 NOTICE OF CLASS SIZE

MANNER IN WHICH THE STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN

The Texas Education Code requires districts to maintain 22 students or less in kindergarten through fourth grade classes. A school district must apply for and be granted an exception from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for each class that exceeds this limit. This is a burdensome requirement for Mesquite ISD as our student enrollment fluctuates during the school year.

State law also requires districts to notify parents of state-approved exceptions to class size limits. Sometimes during the course of a school year, due to shifting enrollments, class size may rise above 22:1 and then return to a smaller number before or after an exception has been formally granted.

Mesquite ISD recognizes that reasonable class size plays a positive role in the classroom, and acknowledges the intent of the state requirements. However, class size must be balanced with the logistics and timing of adding staff, available campus resources, and space. In considering optimal teacher-to-student ratio, attention must also be given to the total number, age, and needs of students. Most importantly, research shows that the teacher in the classroom has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size.

LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES

- A. Mesquite ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 in K-4th grade classes. As the school year progresses, the District will strive to limit K-4 class size to 24 students or less, guided by consideration of the factors listed:
- Subject to be taught, age of students, teaching methodology to be used and any need for individual instruction in the class
 - Available classroom space and resources
 - Whether keeping the class intact is more advantageous than separating students to form a new class
- B. Application will no longer be filed for exception when a K-4th grade classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio. Parents will be notified through individual campus and homeroom teacher communication methods when new students are added to the class as the school year progresses. This exemption does not disregard the intent of class size ratio requirements, but rather, allows Mesquite ISD the local control to determine class size.

DETERMINE A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL START DATE

TEC Code: Sec. 25.0811 FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

MANNER IN WHICH THE STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN

Restricting school start date to the 4th Monday in August operationally challenges Mesquite ISD because the 75,600 instructional minutes must be calendared between the 4th Monday in August and early June due to constraints of the venue contract for high school graduation.

Flexibility to the start date would allow the District to address the following issues caused by the current calendar constraints:

- Increased student regression due to longer summer break
- Lack of flexibility to schedule student breaks or other options during the school year
- Condensed employee work schedules limiting flexibility to schedule holidays, personal days, and professional development days impacting employee work/life balance
- Increased teacher absences and related substitute teacher expense
- Lack of true choice in development of the school calendar
- Unequal semester lengths or continuance of fall semester past the winter break

LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES

- A. Mesquite ISD will work with the Mesquite Education Association, the MISD Council of PTAs, the community, and District employees to craft an annual school calendar that best fits local needs.
- B. The calendar will meet all other state requirements except start date. The calendar exemption does not affect the number of contract days for teachers.

PROBATIONARY PERIOD FOR CH. 21 CONTRACTS

TEC Code: Sec. 21.102. PROBATIONARY CONTRACT

MANNER IN WHICH THE STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN

The Texas Education Code provides a three-year probationary period for newly hired teachers and only a one-year probationary period for teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the

previous eight years. This limited time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Relief from this requirement will allow Mesquite ISD the option to issue a probationary contract for an additional year.

An extension to a second-year probationary contract recognizes the fact that, at times, even experienced teachers new to the District need more than one year to learn the MISD teaching and learning system. A one-year probationary period may not allow the teacher or the administrator time to evaluate the teacher's capacity or ability to adopt the MISD requirements.

LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES

- A. Mesquite ISD will give campus administrators the option to recommend a second-year probationary contract to teachers who are new to the District, but have taught at least five of the last eight years in public education.
- B. There will be no changes to the first-time teacher probationary contract terms, only teachers who have taught in public education for at least five of the last eight years. The second-year probationary contract for experienced teachers is not automatic, rather at the discretion of the campus administrator and the Personnel Department.

ALLOW ALTERNATIVES TO EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION FOR CTE COURSES

TEC Code: Sec. 21.003. CERTIFICATION REQUIRED

TEC Code: Sec. 21.0031. FAILURE TO OBTAIN CERTIFICATION

TEC Code: Sec. 21.044. EDUCATOR PREPARATION

MANNER IN WHICH THE STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN:

The traditional certification requirements under Texas Education Code are not aligned with the realities of the current educational environment and the need to hire industry experts to teach many of the course offerings through the career and technology education (CTE) programs offered. As a result, Mesquite ISD has been unable to offer some requested courses due to the lack of certified candidates. Limiting CTE course offerings deprives students of high school preparation for some career pathways.

In the event that a state-certified teacher is asked to teach a CTE course outside her or his certification because no other qualified professional holding state teacher certification can be found to hire, the District must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or the State Board of Educator Certification. In addition, the District must notify parents if a course is taught by a state-certified teacher who is teaching outside her or his certification for more than thirty class meeting days. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique instructional needs of the District, especially for CTE classes.

LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES:

- A. MISD will continue to seek traditionally certified candidates for all teaching positions. However, for those career and technology education courses for which a traditionally certified, qualified candidate is not identified, the District will recruit persons with industry experience in the field needed to teach the classes, regardless of whether the individual holds state teaching certification.
- B. The District will utilize a limited exemption from traditional certification requirements to enhance its ability to recruit and hire qualified individuals with specialized knowledge in career and technology education (CTE) courses for which teachers holding traditional certifications are not readily available.

- C. The District will determine minimum required qualifications for persons hired for such CTE course teaching positions and also will identify required professional development in the following areas:
- student management
 - instructional strategies
 - curriculum
 - parent engagement
- D. The District will no longer request emergency certification from State agencies for state-certified teachers who teach CTE courses without CTE certification. The District will no longer notify parents when teachers without CTE certification teach a CTE course for more than thirty class periods.
- E. The District will maintain all Chapter 22, Subchapter C, Criminal History requirements, including fingerprinting.