

ROCKDALE ISD

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The District of Innovation (DOI) is a concept passed by the 84th Texas Legislature through House Bill (HB) 1842 that gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to open enrollment charter schools, including exemption from many requirements mandated in the Texas Education Code. As a District of Innovation, Rockdale ISD 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;
- power to innovate and think differently.

HB 1842 does not allow for exemptions from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements or academic and financial accountability.

TIMELINE



PROCESS

On March 7, 2017, the Rockdale ISD District Education Council signed a petition to initiate the process of becoming a District of Innovation under HB 1842 to increase local control over RISD operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. A public hearing to consider whether the District should develop a local innovation plan for the district to become a district of innovation was held on March 27, 2017. At the regular board meeting, the school board appointed a District of Innovation Committee including administrators, teachers, parents and community members.

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Monzingo	Denise	Superintendent	Thompson	Sabrina	Junior High Teacher
Kaufmann	Pamela	Assistant Superintendent	Azua	Cynthia	High School Teacher
Commerford	Tiffany	High School Principal	Swiech	Cheryl	High School Teacher
Blair	Kelly	Junior High Principal	Johnson	Robert	High School Teacher
Pelzel	Kathy	Intermediate Principal	Fisher	Brooksy	CTE Representative
Eoff	Alesha	Elementary Principal	Willingham	Valarie	Non-teaching Representative
McCoy	Sari	Director CTE	Sanders	Sara	Non-teaching Representative
Korenek	Genella	Director Finance	Brown	John	Non-teaching Representative
Sanders	Allen	Director Community Relations	Windham	Kelly	Non-teaching Representative
Gibbs	Laura	PEIMS	Hollinger	Sara	Parent Representative
King	Rebecca	District Representative	Miles	Charles	Parent Representative
Whiteley	Lynn	Elementary Teacher	Straznicky	Adam	Community Representative
Keefer	Christi	Elementary Teacher	Goodrich	Stephen	Community Representative
Moody	Melanie	Elementary Teacher	Eanes	Shelly	Business Representative
Straznicky	Sara	Elementary Teacher	Loth	Tom	Business Representative
Willis	Cindy	Special Education Teacher	Bowermon	Kent	School Board Member
VanDyck	Patti	Intermediate Teacher	Barcak	Jason	Parent
Gibbs	Jennifer	Intermediate Teacher	Castillo	Robert	Parent
McMahon	John	Intermediate Teacher	Luna	Sylvia	Parent
Kaufmann	Kristy	Junior High Teacher	Barker	Rachael	Special Education Teacher
Mynar	Tanya	Junior High Teacher	Eschberger	April	Policy
Auvil	Jennifer	Junior High Teacher			

The DOI Committee met on March 28, 2017 to discuss and create the RISD innovation plan. During the meeting, the committee decided to address the following exemptions: First Day Instruction, Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator, Teacher Employment Contracts, Minimum Salary Schedule for Certain Professional Staff, Class Size and Student/Teacher Ratio, and Teacher Appraisal.

TERM

The term of the plan is for five years, beginning July 1, 2017, and ending June 30, 2022 unless terminated, amended or renewed by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The District Education Council and the Board of Trustees will review the plan annually. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board of Trustees will appoint a committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment. Any amendment approved by the District Education Council and adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan.

INNOVATIONS

Rockdale ISD proposes flexibility and seeks an exemption in the following areas:

First Day of Instruction

Board Policy: EB(Legal)

TEC §25.0811

A school district may not begin instruction before the 4th Monday in August.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- More professional development opportunities during the school year for teachers
- Flexibility with the first week of school; possibility for students to have a shorter first week
- The calendar would be more aligned with college schedules, providing our students with opportunities to start summer college classes in June
- More instructional days prior to State Assessment
- Increase of instructional days in the first semester to provide more balanced semesters

Proposed Innovation:

- RISD will no longer be required to delay the start of school to the fourth Monday in August. The district will determine annually an appropriate start day for students that does not occur before the third Monday.
- RISD will continue to seek stakeholder input as required by Board Policy EB(Local) as part of the yearly calendar development.

Note:

- Changing the first day of instruction does not alter the University Interscholastic League (UIL) restrictions for the first day of practice for athletic and fine arts programs. RISD will continue to comply with the UIL calendar for summer practices.

Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator

Board Policy: FO; Student Code of Conduct

TEC §37.0012

Requires that a person be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator who is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementation of TEC Chapter 37. This provision also allows duties imposed on a campus principal or other campus administrator to be performed by the campus behavior coordinator. Duties include, but are not limited to, promptly notifying parents by telephone and in writing

when a student is suspended, removed to DAEP or taken into custody by the law enforcement.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- This exemption is to only allow for the interpretation of the role and responsibilities of a Campus Behavior Coordinator to be fulfilled by multiple administrators as it is unrealistic to have only one person in this role to serve all students.

Proposed Innovation:

- The district will maintain all the duties and responsibilities outlined for the Campus Behavior Coordinator and allow the role to be fulfilled by more than one administrator per campus.
- Will provide campuses the opportunity to allow campus administrators to fully understand and get to know the students in their caseload rather than having one employee handle all discipline. While it is imperative that all employees work together and be informed as to the discipline occurring on campus, it is just as crucial for student to depend on an administrator they know and trust. Each campus should have the freedom to designate more than one campus behavior coordinator to best meet the needs of their students.
- Maintenance of student discipline will be appropriately addressed in the Student Code of Conduct.

Teacher Employment Contracts

Board Policy: DCA

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 of the eight years preceding employment with the District. In this statute, “teacher” means a principal, supervisor, classroom teacher, school counselor, nurse, or other full-time professional employee. This statute in the TEC 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.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- This limited period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the employee’s effectiveness since contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the end of the school year.

Proposed Innovation:

- Experienced teachers new to the District that have been employed in public education for at least five of the previous eight years may be issued a probationary contract for up to two years from the date of District employment.

Retire/Rehire Minimum Salary

Board Policy

Teacher Retirement Guidelines

TEC §21.402

Currently all districts, when hiring a retired teacher must pay their salary based upon TEA minimum salary pay scale; in addition, the districts are required to pay a TRS surcharge. “Teacher” refers to classroom teacher, full-time speech pathologist, full-time librarian, full-time school counselor, full-time school nurse.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- RISD believes that by hiring an eligible retired teacher our students, campuses, and district will reap the reward of having a veteran educator who is still involved and passionate in the education process.
- The district will be able to have an experienced educator at a significantly lower cost than paying the minimum plus the TRS surcharge.
- Besides adding value to our schools, this would be a sound fiscal decision for our district’s stakeholders.

Proposed Innovation:

- Rockdale ISD would like the opportunity to hire an eligible retired teacher and pay them a negotiated salary which may drop below the TEA minimum pay scale while also paying the required TRS surcharge.

Class Size and Student/Teacher Ratio

Board Policy EEB

TEC §25.112

TEC §25.112 sets a limit of 22:1 student/teacher ratio for grades K-4.

Rationale:

- The District will begin the school year with staff based on projections of student enrollment.

- Due to fluctuating enrollment during the school year, teachers and/or students must be moved from class to class to meet the 22:1 requirement. This exemption would give the District flexibility with the inflexible 22:1 requirement and allow students to remain with the teacher and classmates that they began the year with, fostering continuity and stability that will support increased student achievement.
- Class sizes can be organized so that student groups who need specialized assistance, such as English Language Learners and those with IEP's, can have a reduced student/teacher ratio while remaining classrooms could accommodate the other students.
- The District will not be forced to hire new teachers not accounted for in the Boards adopted budget; also negating the need to apply for a state waiver with the Texas Education Agency. Exemption from TEC §25.113 is sought as it pertains to TEC §25.112.

Proposed Innovation:

- The District will continue to strive to keep class sizes at or below 22:1, with the flexibility to go above 22:1 if needed.
- Should the student/teacher ratio in a single class need to exceed 23:1, the Superintendent will meet with both administrator and the teacher to discuss.
- The student/teacher ratio in a single class will not exceed 24:1.
- The District will consider in the decision making process: the makeup and chemistry of the classroom, the potential for disruption to student learning from splitting a class, the expertise and opinion of the teacher and the approval from the campus administrator.
- The Board of Trustees will be informed each time a class exceeds 22:1.

Teacher Appraisal

Board Policy DNA
TAC §150.1003(g)

TEC §21.352

By written mutual consent of the teacher and the certified appraiser, the required minimum of 45 minutes of observations may be conducted in shorter time segments. The time segments must total at least 45 minutes.

Rationale:

- T-TESS is at least one 45-minute observation period.
- The Commissioner's Rules issued for T-Tess require mutual written agreement between the educator and appraiser to conduct the 45-minute observation period in two or more shorter sessions that aggregate to 45 minutes.

- Some RISD campuses, primarily elementary and intermediate, have classes that are less than 45 minutes in length. The schedules were developed to best meet the instructional needs of students.
- Other instructional areas, such as electives, interventions and special education may not provide 45 minutes of continuous instruction.
- A split observation could result in a technical, procedural error in the observation process, even though the overall minutes of the observation period were conducted.

Proposed Innovation:

- RISD will continue to follow the Commissioner’s Rules for teacher appraisal that provide for a single 45- minute observation for most educators.
- For teachers whose instructional assignment does not allow for a meaningful observation period of 45 minutes, the appraiser may use his/her discretion to conduct the required observation in two or more shortened periods without written agreement from the educator.
- During the preconference, the appraiser will notify the educator if the 45-minute observation period will be conducted in two or more time periods.
- This innovation applies to the 45-minute observation and does not alter the expectation that each appraiser also conduct frequent walk-through observations.

Teacher Certification

Board Policy DBA, DK

TEC §21.003(a)

States a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, education aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B.

Rationale:

- Rockdale is committed to providing an excellent learning experience and values the need for certified teachers. However, the district experiences difficulty in hiring certified educators in certain areas.
- Teachers with industry certification and native Spanish speakers with qualified experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certificate.
- Flexibility could also allow a certified teacher to teach outside their field in order to avoid the disruption of an instructional path for students allowing RISD to reduce scheduling conflicts.

Proposed Innovation:

- The district will establish local requirements, such as years of experience, qualifications, and industry certifications.

- The district will utilize this exemption in the areas of Career and Technical Education, Languages other than English, dual credit, and hard to fill electives.
- For core classes, this exemption will be considered a last resort working first to hire a certified teacher.
- A currently certified teacher being asked to teach outside their certified field will be informed as soon as possible in order to plan accordingly.
- Principals will submit candidates to the superintendent who will then determine whether it is in the best interest of the District to certify the individual. The School Board will be notified prior to beginning employment.
- Teachers employed under this exemption will receive extra training in classroom management and pedagogy.