

# MESQUITE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT'S DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN 2022-2027

## INNOVATION PLAN ITEMS

### **MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES IN GRADES K-4**

TEC Code 25.112(a-f)

TEC Code 25.113

### **MANNER IN WHICH THE STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN**

The Texas Education Code requires districts to maintain 22 students or fewer 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 or personnel assignments, 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 or assigning 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**

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-4<sup>th</sup> grade classes. As the school year progresses, the District will strive to limit K-4 class size to 24 students or fewer, 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

Applications will no longer be filed for exception when a K-4<sup>th</sup> 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 25.0811

#### **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**

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.

### **PROBATIONARY PERIOD FOR CH. 21 CONTRACTS**

TEC Code 21.102(b)

#### **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**

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. 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**

TEC Code 21.003

TEC Code 21.0031

TEC Code 21.053

## **MANNER IN WHICH STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN:**

Texas Education Code section 21.003(a) mandates 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. Districts that wish to hire an uncertified staff member or an inappropriately certified staff member must submit a request to TEA and wait on approval or denial. TEC 21.0031 states employee's probationary, continuing, or term contract under Chapter 21 is void if the employee does not hold a valid certificate or permit issued by the State Board for Educator Certification or fails to fulfill the requirements necessary to renew or extend the employee's temporary, probationary, or emergency certificate or any other certificate or permit issued. TEC 21.053 requires teachers to present their certificates to the District before their employment contracts will be binding, and the District is prohibited from paying educators for teaching or work done before the effective date of the issuance of their certificates.

## **LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES:**

The district will maintain its current expectations for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certifications. However, when that is not practicable, 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 hard-to-fill, high-demand, positions including, but not limited to, foreign languages, career and technical courses, and STEM courses. This exemption from teacher certification requirements will enable greater flexibility in staffing and will enrich applicant pools in specific areas of need.

The District will ensure that professional development plans are in place to train non-certified or inappropriately certified personnel in pedagogy (student management, instructional strategies, curriculum, parent engagement) and to provide needed support. This innovative strategy has the potential to enrich applicant pools in specialized course offerings and afford students more educational opportunities if state certified teachers are not available to teach those courses. The district will maintain all Chapter 22,

Subchapter C, Criminal History requirements, including fingerprinting.

### **TEACHER CONTRACT DAYS**

TEC Code 21.401

#### **MANNER IN WHICH STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN:**

A change in school law has converted required student instructional and attendance days to 75,600 minutes. This change resulted in the possibility of decreasing the number of days students must attend school, but it does not address a similar need to decrease the number of days required for teachers if a district deems it appropriate to do so. Currently, TEC 21.401 states an educator contract must be for a minimum of 10 months, and the educator must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

#### **LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES:**

Mesquite ISD will not be limited to having teachers work exactly 187 days, regardless of the district's schedule. Mesquite ISD can reduce the number of teacher contract days without a reduction in salary. This reduction in contract days at the current salary schedule should make our district's salaries more competitive and would effectively increase teachers' daily rate of pay. This move should improve teacher morale, enhance teacher recruitment, and better align the number of teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION TIME**

TEC Code 21.404

#### **MANNER IN WHICH STATUTE INHIBITS THE PLAN:**

Texas Education Code 21.404 requires each classroom teacher to receive at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and planning. A planning and preparation period under this section may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day. During a planning and preparation period, a classroom teacher may not be required to participate in any other activity.

#### **LOCAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES:**

The District desires that teachers participate in group planning and collaboration each week. Mesquite ISD believes that when teachers collaborate and share ideas they become more effective in delivering instruction and have a greater impact on student achievement.

Due to the severe teacher and substitute shortages, teachers may need to provide temporary classroom coverage for other classes during their planning times, on an as-needed basis. The district could offer teachers additional compensation or incentives to perform specific duties during what would otherwise be their planning periods. Teachers could assist campuses with their ongoing needs to provide constant,

appropriate supervision and instruction for all students. The district could also have flexibility regarding when teachers receive their planning periods. This innovation allows for greater school-based decision making, assists in maintaining an orderly learning environment for all students, and allows school administrators to more effectively ensure the safety and security of all students.