

Sierra Blanca Independent School District
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Ms. Ronni McGraw, Superintendent

Sierra Blanca Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

Background

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 that allows public school districts to declare exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code by becoming a designated District of Innovation. On February 24, 2023 a meeting was held with the staff to discuss the previous proposed district of innovation plan. It was determined that the plan was not ever filed with TEA for final approval. On Monday March 9, 2023, during the regularly scheduled board meeting, a public hearing was conducted to consider whether Sierra Blanca ISD should pursue the development of a plan for designation as a District of Innovation. The plan had been previously discussed under prior administration and board committee members, but the process was not completed. On this date, the Sierra Blanca ISD Board of Trustees unanimously passed a resolution to consider developing a District of Innovation Plan using the current plan and any other suggestions made by a new committee. The board of trustees approved a committee of community, school and district personnel to research, discuss and develop a new proposed District of Innovation Plan.

The committee met on March 20, 2023 to review, discuss, and develop the innovation plan. The plan was posted online for public viewing and feedback on March 21, 2023 and will remain online until April 24, 2023.

District of Innovation Committee & District Advisory Committee

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| Ronni McGraw, Superintendent Armida Gomez, Non professional Michelle Penalosa, Teacher Jennifer Gomez, Teacher | Kaleigh Coleman, Teacher Felix Reyes, Teacher Shannon Stewart, Parent/Business Manager Kayla Sanchez, Community Member |
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SBISD Board of Trustees

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| Robert Gomez, President Tyler Elam, Vice-President Alicia Walker, Secretary Annette Ramirez, Member | Martin Bustamante, Member Mary Lewis, Member America Pinela, Member |
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| Date | Action |
|----------------|--|
| Feb 23, 2023 | Discussion on possible designation of Sierra Blanca ISD as a District of Innovation under House Bill 1842 using a previous considered plan with updates prior to SBISD Board Meeting Consideration |
| March 9, 2023 | Public hearing on designation of Sierra Blanca ISD as a District of Innovation under House Bill 1842 prior to SBISD Board Meeting Consideration of resolution by the SBISD Board of Trustees declaring SBISD a District of Innovation Consideration of approval of District of Innovation Plan Committee by the SBISD Board of Trustees |
| March 20, 2023 | District of Innovation Plan Committee Meeting to revise old plan and finalize proposed plan. District of innovation prior version with revisions presented to the board for open discussion. |
| March 21, 2023 | Post the proposed plan on the SBISD website for 30 days. |
| March 23, 2023 | Board notifies the Texas Commissioner of Education of intention to vote on plan |
| April 24, 2023 | Public Hearing on Proposed District of Innovation plan considered for vote by the District of Innovation Plan Committee. Proposed District of Innovation plan considered for vote by the SBISD Board of Trustees (2/3 vote needed) and a 2023-2024 school calendar |
| May 2, 2023 | Board of Trustees formally notifies Texas Commissioner of Education of approved plan. |
| May-June 2023 | Update all policy changes with TASB |

Texas Education Code Exemptions

District staff in conjunction with the District of Innovation Committee reviewed the subchapters of the Texas Education Code to determine which permissible exemptions currently inhibit the district from maximizing the educational opportunities of the students who attend Sierra Blanca ISD. They considered all previous plan exemptions and any new ones they felt might apply to the district with current conditions.

Uniform School Start Date

(EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.0811)

Currently

The District may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the 4th Monday of August.

Proposed

The flexibility provided by permitting an earlier start date will allow Sierra Blanca ISD to annually determine, at the local level, the start date that best meets the needs of the students and the community. This exemption will enable us to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, balance the amount of instructional time per semester, and provide more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff. Removing the uniform start date would allow Sierra Blanca ISD to start classes on a Wednesday or Thursday to ease the transition to schooling for students entering pre-k/kindergarten, as well as transitioning throughout the upper grade levels.

Students will start to school no earlier than the 2nd Monday in August.

Minimum Minutes of Instruction and Length of School Day

(EC LEGAL & EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.081)

House Bill 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amended Texas Education Code TEC §25.081 by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring the District to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess) each school year.

Proposed

Exemption from the 420 minute school day requirement would allow Sierra Blanca ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum number of days for a school year.

Exempting Sierra Blanca ISD from the 75,600 minutes annual requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling without diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to be out of compliance with the annual minute requirement. This would allow the district the flexibility to schedule non-instructional days into the schedule to allow for teachers to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development.

Sierra Blanca ISD does not intend to shorten the school day on a regular basis or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days will be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar which is approved by the Board of Trustees and published and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year and continuously published using school media.

Class Sizes and Student-Teacher Ratios

(EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.111) (ED. Code 25.112) (ED. Code 25.113)(ED. Code 25.114)

Currently Texas Education Code § 25.111 requires each school district must maintain an average student-teacher ratio of no more than 20 to 1 for average daily attendance. Texas Education Code §

25.112 requires enrollment in Kindergarten through 4th Grade classes to no more than a student-teacher ratio of 22 to 1. Texas Education Code § 25.113 For physical education, the student-teacher ratio cannot be greater than 45 to 1 without maintaining a specific plan for student safety. If maintaining this limit creates an undue hardship, the District may request a waiver from the Texas Education Agency. Texas Education Code § 25.114 requires written notice to be sent home to parents each time a waiver is granted for student-teacher ratios.

Proposed

The Sierra Blanca ISD student population is typically relatively small, but on occasion there is a larger class size. While we believe that a small class size may play a positive role for students, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff while also considering the best teacher to student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. It must also be noted that it is not the number of students in a classroom but the dynamics of the classroom that most influence the learning environment. Research has shown that the teacher in the classroom has the greatest impact on student learning as opposed to absolute class size. An exemption from the class size ratio requirements of Texas Education Code § 25.112 will allow the district the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs when applicable without adding ongoing filings of waivers. As a small district this allows the flexibility for local decision in class sizes according to student needs.

90 Percent Attendance Rule

(FEC LOCAL) (Ed. Code 25.092)

Currently

Texas Education Code § 25.092 requires students to attend class for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered in order to earn class credit or be given a final grade for the class.

Proposed

The 90 Percent Rule is an arbitrary standard, which means that school districts award credit based upon seat time rather than based upon content mastery. Abstaining from the requirement means the district will no longer be required to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This exemption will allow the district to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development by encouraging more students to participate in such activities. It will also allow Sierra Blanca ISD administrators to award credit to students based upon student mastery of the content rather than student attendance. The proposal would allow administration to refocus efforts on students who are truly at-risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the district by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students. Exemption to the 90

Percent Attendance Rule supports the district's overarching goals and provides the flexibility needed to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers.

Exempting Sierra Blanca ISD from the 90 Percent Attendance Rule does not impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League rules. Furthermore, opting out of Texas Education Code § 25.092 does not limit or modify a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code § 28.0214, and it does not restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with the district grading policy adopted pursuant to Texas Education Code § 28.0216.

Teacher Contract Days

(DCB LEGAL, DCB LOCAL) (Ed. Code 21.401)

Currently

Texas Education Code § 21.401 currently requires a contract between the District and an educator to be for a minimum of 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10 month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Proposed

This proposal reduces teacher contract days from 187 without reducing teacher salaries. This exemption is an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days. Exemption from this requirement allows Sierra Blanca ISD to increase the daily rate the district pays teachers, enhances teacher recruitment, improves teacher morale, and provides teachers more opportunities during the year to seek beneficial staff development that specifically relates to their teaching field.

Teacher Certification

(DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT) (Ed. code 21.003) (Ed. code 21.053)(Ed. code 21.057)

Currently

In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of their certification, a district must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency and provide notification to parents of each student assigned to a classroom taught by a non-certified teacher.

Proposed

Sierra Blanca ISD is committed to placing a certified teacher in every classroom. In order to best serve

students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the district's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill and high demand courses as well as dual credit and career and technical courses. Sierra Blanca ISD is located in a rural area which limits course offerings and utilizes creative instructional methods district wide. These requirements also inhibit the district's ability to hire teachers moving in with out-of-state credentials. Allowing the district local control over teacher qualification requirements and teacher training requirements, will better enable students to obtain educational benefits of course offerings. By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, Sierra Blanca ISD will have the flexibility to hire internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area for full and/or part-time course loads and increase opportunity for dual credit and career and technical courses allowing professionals in these fields to be hired. . This will enrich the applicant pool in specific content areas and afford more students the opportunity to take dual credit courses if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses. In addition, this exemption will afford the district the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades or vocations to teach the crafts of those trades or vocations (such as welding, fine arts, health sciences, law, and etc.) if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses, or their quality of expertise would benefit the students in that area.

Probationary Contracts

(DCA LEGAL) (Ed. Code 21.102(b))

Currently

Under current guidelines, probationary periods for newly hired teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one year.

Proposed

This limited time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Exemption from Texas Education Code § 21.102 will permit Sierra Blanca ISD the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to 3 years for experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses newly hired in Sierra Blanca ISD.

Planning and Preparation Time

(DL LEGAL) (Ed. Code 21.404) (Ed. Code 21.451)(Ed. Code 21.458)

Currently

Texas Education Code § 21.404 currently states that teachers are entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for preparing to teach, conducting parent conferences, and evaluating students' work. Texas Education Code § 21.451 and Texas Education Code 21.458 address the professional development and mentoring requirements per TEA.

Proposed

Exemption from the planning and preparation time requirement would allow flexible scheduling. Having flexibility in planning and preparation time helps in creating schedules where select teachers can reach more students and have more planning time on teacher teams. All teachers will have appropriate planning and preparation time, but flexibility is requested. Also, the decision on professional development of all staff including that of mentors should be a local decision. The district strives to support all teachers with the staff development and training needed regardless of the years of service in education.

Term and Implementation

This District of Innovation Plan will reduce restrictions and help Sierra Blanca ISD to better support our students, employees, families, and community. Moving our district toward the locally customized learning environment our students deserve will enable us to better prepare them according to their individualized needs and their unique traits and talents.

The implementations of exemptions from the Texas Education Code will require Sierra Blanca ISD to revise policies. We will utilize a local policy development process that includes stakeholder input. This District of Innovation Plan will be in effect for five years from the date of implementation. As necessary, the superintendent of schools will promulgate regulations, policies, and procedures to govern areas for which local flexibility has been sought.

We appreciate the opportunity to incorporate innovative strategies into our district, and we will implement this plan to the best of our ability to provide exceptional educational experiences for our students.