

# IOLA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Secondary Principal

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## Local Innovation Plan for Iola ISD

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allows public school districts to declare exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code by becoming a designated District of Innovation. We feel this is a great opportunity for our local district to create a plan based on the needs of our students and community that could remain in effect for up to five years.

On March 27, 2017 during the regularly scheduled board meeting, the Iola ISD Board of Trustees voted 6-1 to adopt a resolution to pursue becoming a District of Innovation. On April 6, 2017, after a public meeting, the Board of Trustees voted to approve pursuing designation as a District of Innovation and appointed the Local Innovation Planning Committee to begin development of the plan. The committee met on April 11, 2017 to review, discuss, and begin development of the local innovation plan and met again on April 20, 2017 to finalize the proposed plan. The proposed plan was posted online for public viewing on April 21, 2017 and remained online until May 22, 2017. The Local Innovation Committee then met on May 22, 2017 to review the plan and gain feedback in a public meeting. The final version of the plan was approved by the Local Innovation Planning Committee on May 22, 2017, with a majority of committee members voting in the affirmative. On May 22, 2017 the Board of Trustees reviewed the plan and voted to approve the local innovation plan with a vote of 6-1. Iola ISD will be designated a district of innovation upon adoption of the local innovation plan, beginning May 22, 2022-May 22, 2027. On February 2, 2022, the District Advisory Committee met to discuss the current plan and voted 11-0 to pursue the renewal of the plan. On March 25, 2022, the District Advisory Committee held a public meeting and voted to approve the Local Innovation Plan for recommendation to the Board of Trustees. On January 24, 2023, the District Advisory Committee held a meeting and voted to approve the amendments to the Local Innovation Plan for recommendation to the Board of Trustees. On February 20, 2023, the Board of Trustees voted to approve the amendments to the plan.

### District of Innovation Timeline

- March 27, 2017 - Board Meeting to consider the resolution. Approved a motion to pass a resolution with a vote of 6-1
- April 6, 2017 - Public Meeting to review District of Innovation with community
- April 6, 2017 - Board Meeting to vote to approve pursuing designation of District of Innovation. Approved a motion with a vote of 6-0
- April 11, 2017 - Local Innovation Planning Committee Meeting
- April 20, 2017 - Local Innovation Planning Committee Meeting

- April 21, 2017 - Post Iola ISD Local Innovation Plan for minimum of 30 days
- May 22, 2017 - Public Meeting to discuss and vote on Local Innovation Plan
- May 22, 2017 - Board Meeting to approve/reject the Local Innovation Plan
- May 30, 2017 – Iola ISD Board of Trustees notified the commissioner
- February 2, 2022 – District Advisory Committee meeting voted to pursue renewal of the current plan
- February 10, 2022 – Board of Trustees voted to pursue renewal of the current plan
- February 11, 2022 – Proposed plan posted on district site & intent to renew emailed to TEA
- March 25, 2022 – Public meeting to discuss and vote on Local Innovation Plan
- March 28, 2022 – Board of Trustees voted to approve the renewed plan
- January 24, 2023 - District Advisory Committee meeting voted to approve amendments to the plan.
- February 20, 2023 - Board of Trustees voted to approve the amendments.

**Local Innovation Planning Committee/District Advisory Committee**

Jeff Dyer, Superintendent/Committee Chair  
 Monica Hurst, Director of Technology  
 Kristin Sajewski, Elementary Principal  
 Brian Fowler, Secondary Principal  
 Luke Bradicich, Business Representative  
 Jamie Gressett, Business Representative  
 Kayla Ellis, Community Representative  
 Jennifer Scasta, Community Representative  
 Rachel Raley, Secondary Paraprofessional  
 Jessica Lemley, Parent

Katie Compian, Parent  
 Christy Jurney, Parent  
 Hillary Gustavus, Teacher  
 Brittney Wubbenhorst, Teacher  
 Christy Steinmann, Teacher  
 Colt Sharpton, Teacher  
 Paige Finke, Teacher  
 Ashley Doucet, Teacher  
 Jenna Conner, Teacher  
 Corey Ferguson, Teacher

**Iola ISD Board of Trustees**

Jason Gooch, President  
 Tammy Harvey, Secretary  
 Dedra Nevill, Member  
 Alec Pointer, Member

Jody Evans, Member  
 Mark Cunningham, Member  
 Carolyn Mallett, Member

**Texas Education Code Exemptions**

The Local Innovation Committee reviewed the subchapters of the Texas Education Code to determine which permissible exemptions may benefit Iola ISD students and staff.

**Uniform Start Date (TEC §25.0811)**

Current Law

State law currently prohibits school districts from starting class before the fourth Monday in August, unless they are year-round districts.

Proposed

Iola ISD would like to exempt TEC 25.0811, thus allowing us to start school prior to the fourth

Monday of August. For 2023-2024 school year, Iola ISD would not start school before the second Monday of August and teachers would not have to report before the first Monday in August. However, normally Iola ISD would not start school before the third Monday of August and teachers would not have to report before the second Monday of August.

#### How does this benefit Iola ISD Children?

Starting one week earlier adds more instructional days prior to state testing in the spring. It balances the fall and spring semester minutes and allows periodic breaks throughout the school year. It ensures the school year will end before the Grimes County Fair in June. It also allows our calendar to better align with local colleges so our graduating class has time to prepare for their upcoming summer college courses. Professional development for teachers throughout the school year can be focused directly on what the students need at that point in time.

#### How does this benefit Iola ISD Teachers?

Professional development will be spread throughout the year, rather than having all of it before school starts. This way, professional development can be designed to meet the needs of teachers at various points during the year.

#### Rationale for Exemption

The restriction of flexibility in the annual calendars prohibits the balance of days in the academic calendar. The flexibility to begin instruction earlier in August, based on the needs of the district and community, will allow a better balance between semesters, as well as more instructional days in the fall semester. The exemption would allow the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students, the school, and the community. Iola ISD would also have the flexibility to align the academic calendar to accommodate those students in dual credit courses, thus working with our local colleges.

### **Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.053, and §21.057)**

#### Current Law

State law states 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. In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of their certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification.

#### Proposed

Iola ISD would like to have flexibility to hire teachers in Career Technical Education (CTE), Technology, Engineering, and Arts courses who are not certified in situations in which a suitable, certified applicant cannot be found. All teaching positions in these areas shall be posted for a minimum of two weeks and interviews shall be conducted of certified applicants first. If no suitable applicant is found or if none apply, administration will place an agenda item for the next Board meeting to seek permission to interview non-certified applicants with a background in that specific profession/industry. If a suitable candidate is identified, administration will recommend that person for approval to the Board of Trustees. Any non-certified hires will be required to attend professional development in classroom management, components of effective instruction, and differentiating instruction for learners. They will also be assigned a mentor teacher with a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience. Any non-certified hires will be required to meet the

same requirements of all employees (background checks, reference checks, etc.)

How does this benefit Iola ISD Students?

This exemption will allow flexibility to add coherent sequences using local practitioners and business people as instructors. Therefore, students would benefit from the knowledge and expertise of an instructor with real-life professional or industry experience. Additionally, students may have the opportunity to earn certifications or internships through their CTE, Technology, Engineering, or Arts experiences in Iola ISD.

How does this benefit Iola ISD Teachers?

Teachers who are certified in a specific content area may have professional experience from another field, prior to their teaching experience. This exemption would possibly allow these teachers to share their expertise with students in our district and add to our course offerings. The added benefit of hands-on experiences will open discussion between students and teachers, allowing the teacher to exemplify the relevance of their instruction in all classes.

Rationale for Exemption

As a rural community and school, the current requirements for certification inhibit the District’s ability to hire personnel with professional and/or industry experience to teach academic courses that have limited certified applicants, Career Technical Education (CTE) course, and Technology, Engineering, & Arts courses. In order to provide more students the opportunity to take such courses and obtain professional certifications, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses.

**Contract Service Days (TEC §21.401)**

Current Law

Current education law located in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract equivalent to 187 days.

Proposed

Iola ISD would like to more closely align teacher contract days with the student calendar by reducing the number of teacher days, by up to seven days, from 187 with no effect on teacher salaries. The exact number of days would be dependent upon the specific calendar for that school year, but would not exceed 187 days.

How does this benefit Iola ISD Students?

The number one predictor of student success is an outstanding classroom teacher, and this added benefit will assist with the recruitment and retention of outstanding teachers. The added stability in instructional staff is beneficial to student learning.

How does this benefit Iola ISD Teachers?

This proposal will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers. This will enhance teacher recruitment and retention, therefore putting the district on a more level playing field with

surrounding districts. It will also align the required number of teacher days more closely with the number of required student minutes.

Rationale for Exemption

With the passage of §25.081 which changed the required days of instruction to minutes the law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees. The determination of how many days are required to fulfill an employee's contract should be a local decision.