

WACO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

**Approved by the Waco ISD Board of Trustees on May 19, 2022.*

**Amended by the Waco ISD Board of Trustees on October 26, 2023*

1. School Calendar

Statutory Citation: Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 25.0811 (First Day of Instruction) and TEC Section 25.0812 (Last Day of School)

WISD will be exempt from the first day of instruction requirements listed in TEC 25.0811 and the last day of instruction requirements listed in TEC 25.0812.

WISD will develop and seek board approval of a localized school calendar which best meets the needs of the Waco Independent School District's students, parents, staff, and community. The WISD calendar development process will be localized with central administration assisting the WISD Quality District Advisory Committee (QDAC) in the development of one or more school year calendars. The calendars will then be submitted to the district staff and community for a vote and the calendar with the most votes will be presented to the Board of Trustees for their review and consideration for approval. Final calendar approval including when the WISD school year starts and ends will be made by the locally elected WISD Board of Trustees.

Rationale

- Provides flexibility to customize the WISD school calendar and change the TEC mandated first and last days of the school year if needed.
- DISTRICT GOAL: Number of required teaching days and student minutes per day do not change.
- EXAMPLE: If WISD teachers requested beginning the school year two days earlier so faculty could have a day at the end of each six weeks for entering grades/parent conferences/work days, the calendar could be adapted.
- Administration and QDAC would develop multiple district calendars, and District Staff would vote on one to submit to the Board of Trustees for approval.

2. Minutes of Instruction and Length of the Instructional Day

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 25.081 (Operation of Schools – 75,600 minutes of instruction) TEC 25.0811 (First Day of Instruction) and TEC 25.083 (School Day Interruptions).

WISD will meet or exceed the 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recesses) as required in TEC Sec. 25.081. In addition, WISD will continue to meet or exceed the Texas Education Agency Student Attendance Accounting Handbook Subsection 5.5 CTE (Contact-Hour) attendance codes V1, V2, V3, V4, V5, or V6.

The district will be exempt from the requirements regarding the first day of school (TEC 25.081) and school day interruptions (TEC 25.083).

The exemption will provide local campuses greater flexibility on the length of the instructional day, the first day of school, and school day interruptions. WISD will be able to customize student schedules as needed in order to best meet the needs of students while ensuring that the 75,600 minutes of instruction are completed.

Rationale

- Provides flexibility on the length of the instructional day, the first day of school, and school day interruptions.
- DISTRICT GOAL: Not an attempt to lengthen or shorten days.
- EXAMPLE: Allows WISD to let half days count as long as TEC total minutes of instruction (75,600) is met for the year.
- Conference Periods and Duty-Free Lunch: Teachers will continue to have at least 450 minutes of planning time within each two-week period in increments of not less than 45 minutes within the instructional day (TEC Sec. 21.04). Teachers will continue to have duty free lunch (TEC Sec. 21.405)

3. Class Size Ratio

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 25.112 (Class Size Ratios) and TEC 25.111 (Student/Teacher Ratios)

WISD will continue to meet the TEC 25.112 required 22 to 1 class size ratio for Kindergarten through fourth grades during the first six weeks (30 instructional days) of the school year. WISD will be exempt from requirements of TEC 25.112 and TEC 25.111 after the first six weeks of instruction. WISD central administrators will work with the campus principal and the teacher(s) to determine if a class exceeding 22 to 1 should be divided or allowed to exceed the TEC limit. The exemption would allow WISD flexibility and not require the district to seek class size waivers from the Texas Education Agency. WISD will continue to utilize locally developed class size staffing guidelines for kindergarten through grade four classes. Parental notification as required in TEC 15.113 will continue to be provided by WISD.

Rationale

- (Applicable only after the first six weeks of classes) WISD would like the flexibility in K through 4th grades to increase class sizes from 22 to 1. WISD staffing guidelines for classes which exceed 22 to 1 will continue to be followed. The district will continue to work diligently to keep class sizes at 22 to 1 and a teacher may be added at any time during the school year if the Superintendent determines it to be in the best interest of the students.
- Students could ONLY be added with the approval of BOTH the principal and the teacher whose class has exceeded the 22 to 1 ratio.
- The WISD Board will receive during their monthly open meeting a report listing any K through 4th grade classes which have exceeded the 22 to 1 ratio.
- Parents with students in a class which exceed the 22 to 1 ratio will continue to be notified in writing by the campus.
- DISTRICT GOAL: This is NOT an increase in class size across the board.
- EXAMPLE: In the 5th six-week period, a new student moves to a campus that has four 4th grade teachers and 22 students in each class. Current TEC guidelines and administrative requirements would require one of the classes be split into two smaller classes, or a waiver be requested.

4. Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 25.092 (Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade)

WISD will be exempt from the restriction that seat time (90 percent attendance) must be met in order for a student to receive class credit or a final grade as required in TEC Sec. 25.092. In order to be eligible to meet the exemption, a student must maintain a grade of 80 or greater in the course. The teacher of record and campus principal must approve an individual student's exemption from the TEC Sec. 25.092 attendance requirements.

It is noted that WISD's exemption is not a substantive exemption from compulsory attendance or UIL rules. In addition, teachers will continue to fully assign or determine grades in accordance with TEC Sec. 28.0214 (Finality of Grade) and 28.0216 (District Grading Policy).

Rationale

- Currently all students are limited in the number of days they may miss for school related activities.
- Class work missed by the student will have to be made up and all grades for the course will be determined by the student's teacher.
- The exemption provides opportunities for WISD students with less than 90 percent attendance and a class grade average of 80 or greater to receive credit for a course upon approval.

5. Absences for College/University Visits

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 25.087 (b-2) (Excused Absences for Higher Education Visits)

WISD will be exempt from the higher education student two-day excused absence limit listed in TEC Sec. 25.087 (b-2).

WISD will establish the number of days that a student may receive an excused absence while visiting an institution of higher education. The current limit of two days does not allow time for a student to travel to an out-of-state or some in-state institutions. WISD high school principals, counselors, and central staff will propose a policy change to the Board for their consideration for approval. (Board Policy FEA Local)

Rationale

- Currently students are allowed to miss only two days for college visits, limiting how many campuses they can visit.
- DISTRICT GOAL: Allow more than two, but only with administrator approval, and the Board of Trustees would have to approve a policy change.

6. Teacher Instructional Assignment(s)

Statutory Citation: TEC §21.003(a) TEC §21.053, TEC §21.055

The district will maintain its current expectations for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certifications for the position in question. However, where that is not reasonably possible, 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 question. Waco ISD would like the

ability to locally certify teachers in areas of high demand, to better meet the educational needs of our students. These areas would include, but are not limited to CTE, bilingual education, and languages other than English. Teachers with industry certifications and native speakers with qualified experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certification. This process will allow more flexibility in our scheduling, and provide more options for our students in class offerings leading to industry recognized certifications.

Rationale

- **TEC §21.003(a)** 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. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.
- **TEC §21.053** requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the District from paying an educator for a teacher if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.
- **TEC §21.055** states that if a teacher is not certified, the district may issue a teaching permit to employ the individual. This process requires notice to the Commissioner and its usefulness is extremely limited. Additionally, the language of this section could be construed to prohibit the employment of a teacher without a teaching certificate or a school district teaching permit obtained under this section.
- Additionally, Waco ISD will notify parents if a locally certified teacher is employed for their child's class.
- An employee working under a District Teaching Permit (local certification) will not receive a contract, but will work on an at-will basis.

7. New Teacher Probationary Contracts

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 21.102 (Probationary Contracts)

WISD will be exempt from the TEC Sec. 21.102 (b) and (c) beginning in January 2017. WISD will extend the maximum number of years that a teacher may be extended a probationary contract to:

- For a first-year teacher with zero years of experience, the district may extend the one-year probationary contract for a maximum period of five years. (Allows up to five one-year probationary contracts from the current statute which allows for a maximum of three years.)
- For an experienced teacher who is new to WISD, the district may extend the one-year probationary contract for a maximum period of three years. (Changes to up to three one-year probationary contracts from the current statute which allows for a maximum of one year.)

The WISD exemption will allow the district greater flexibility to determine if a new teacher will be effective in the classroom. A teacher may be offered a term contract or employment not extended earlier with administrative recommendation and board approval. The exemption is for teachers hired after January 1, 2017 and does not apply to staff members hired before this date.

Rationale

- Waco ISD would like to extend probationary contracts for first-year teachers up to five years and for experienced new teachers up to three years and base the term length on performance.
- DISTRICT GOAL: With challenges the District faces, this allows teachers more time to develop professionally before a long-term decision on their employment is determined.

8. Student Attendance – Truancy Prevention Measures (TPM)

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 25.0915 (TPM)

Waco ISD will allow each campus site-based committee to determine the appropriate official attendance time/period for their campus. Each campus site-based committee will review attendance data and make an attendance time/period recommendation to the administration for WISD Board approval. WISD will utilize Texas Education Agency Student Attendance Accounting Handbook Section 3.6.2.2 along with 19 TAC 129.21(h) (3) and 19 TAC 129.21 (h). For student attendance funding eligibility, the district will utilize Texas Education Agency Student Attendance Accounting Handbook Section 3.2.2 referred to as the “two-through-four-hour rule.”

Waco ISD’s at-risk students are often in school, but may be late and tardy to class. Several factors may account for their tardiness to school, which include but are not limited to:

- Assisting their younger siblings to get ready for school.
- Walking their siblings to their school and then walking to their campus.
- Limited options for private transportation to school if they missed the school bus.
- Homeless or living in different locations during the week.

Many times, the students are listed as absent due to their missing the WISD designated attendance period. The absences accumulate and may place the student in jeopardy of failing and/or truancy. In order to meet the local needs of WISD at-risk students, the district will develop guidelines for the minimum number of minutes a student must be in attendance during the day to be counted present. The official Average Daily Attendance (ADA) time/period will be determined by each campus site-based committee and approved by the WISD Board. The attendance exemption will provide one TPM measure to assist the district’s students.

Rationale

- WISD is asking to be exempt from documenting attendance across the District only at 9:30 a.m., and instead allow campus site-based committees to determine the appropriate attendance time/period.
- DISTRICT GOAL: Without this exemption, a student who arrived for class at 9:45 a.m. and completes the rest of the school day would be counted absent. With this proposed exemption, the student would be credited for attending school that day provided they were in attendance for at least 4 hours.
- Campuses would still have their own guidelines for tardiness.

9. Student Discipline

Statutory Citation: TEC Sec. 37.0012

Currently, Senate Bill 107 requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

Waco ISD will be exempt from TEC Sec. 37.0012 related to the designation of a (singular) campus behavior coordinator for each campus. WISD utilizes a multi-administrator team process for student discipline which includes the campus principal and assistant principal(s). WISD will designate all campus administrative personnel assigned to a campus as the behavior coordinator for their campus.

Rationale

- WISD is asking for an exemption from the TEC guidelines that require one person to sign all discipline paperwork on a campus.
- WISD will continue to follow Texas Education Code Chapter 37 for student discipline procedures including a teacher's right to remove a student from class (TEC Sec. 37.002).
- DISTRICT GOAL: Allows administrators to be part of a discipline team, and the responsibility for paperwork would depend on the administrator's assigned grade level and their relationship with the student and family.

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION SUMMARY

Exemptions are NOT locked in for five years. They can be evaluated each year and amendments can be made with QDAC and Board approval.