

Yoakum ISD Innovation Plan

School Board Approved on 5/8/2023

Introduction

House Bill 1842 was passed during the 84th Legislative Session in 2015 which created Texas Education Code Chapter 12 A about the District of Innovation concept. School districts would be able to access many flexibilities that have been available to open enrollment charter schools in Texas.

Term

The District of Innovation Plan was renewed by the Yoakum ISD Board on May 8th, 2023, and will become effective June 1, 2023, and will remain on effect for five years, through the 2027-2028 school year, unless terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees in accordance to the law. The District Site-Base Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board of Trustees any suggested modifications to the Plan.

Innovations

1. First Day of Instruction

Current Limitation:

TEC 25.0811 states that the first day of instruction for students may not begin before the fourth Monday in August. The current process allows no flexibility in the design and balancing of instructional semesters to meet the needs of students or wishes of the local teachers, administrators and School Board who represent community interests in this matter.

Innovation Strategies:

- A. Yoakum ISD proposes to have the flexibility to begin instruction no earlier than the 2nd Monday of August for students. Teachers will report for duty no earlier than the 1st Monday of August. This change will create better flexibility in the creating of the district calendar, as well as, allowing more opportunities in scheduling meaningful and balanced staff development days.
- B. The start date will allow the district to provide more instructional minutes before state assessments.
- C. This will give Yoakum ISD flexibility to better align calendars and balance instructional minutes during the first and second semester of instruction. This will also allow the district to better align its starting date to accommodate the start and end date of colleges in which the district uses for dual credit courses. The flexibility will also allow the schools to look at starting classes as a short week which can ease the transition of students entering kindergarten, junior high, and high school.
- D. This strategy will provide for more concentrated professional development in key areas during instruction instead of planning before needs are realized

2. **Probationary Contract [TEC 21.102] [DCA (LEGAL)]**

Current Limitation:

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 years of the eight years preceding employment with the district. This period of time is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the availability of end of year classroom and student data.

Innovation Strategy:

For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to Yoakum ISD, that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, the probationary period when becoming employed by Yoakum ISD shall be for a period of two full years with probationary contracts issued for each of the two years. Partial years will not count toward the full year requirement.

3. **TEC §21.003 Certification - (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT) TEC 21.003(a)**

TEC 21.003(a) States a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, educational 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. TEC21.057 requires districts to provide written notice to parents when an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year.

Current limitation

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 submit a request to the Texas Education Agency. TEA then approves or denies this request. There is a lot of bureaucracy and unnecessary paperwork involved in the process.

Innovation Strategy

In order to best serve the students of Yoakum ISD, decisions on certifications will be handled at the district level. Due to a limited applicant pool and teacher shortage, this exemption will allow greater flexibility in staffing.

Yoakum ISD will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible due to shortages of applicants and difficult to fill positions, 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.

Local Guidelines

- a. Yoakum ISD will continue to seek and hire highly effective educators to deliver quality instruction to its students.
- b. To best serve Yoakum ISD students, all decisions on teacher certification and assignments will be managed locally.
- c. An individual with certain qualifications who is not certified as a teacher can be eligible to teach in hard to fill positions including, but not limited to, TEA approve shortage areas such as special education, mathematics, science, Languages other than English (LOTE) Career & Technical Education (CTE)
- d. This will allow more flexibility in our scheduling and more options for our students in class offerings.
- e. All non-certified individuals seeking certified positions must have board approval and meet all other certified criteria before working with students.
- f. Exception: Special Education and ESL/Bilingual teachers must be SBEC certified
- g. All uncertified teachers will be working towards obtaining the teaching certification.
- h. All uncertified teachers will have the same appraisal system as certified teachers and will adhere to the same professional standards, ethics, and requirements of all certified teachers.

4. Teacher Certification (TEC 21.003, 21.053, 21.044, 21.051, and 21.057)

Current Limitation:

Due to learners having the opportunity to personalize their graduation plans and earn endorsements in areas of student such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) business and industry, public services, arts and humanities, there is a need for educators to have multiple certifications. It is particularly difficult to find educators who meet certification specifications in order to teach classes in the endorsements areas. Texas Education Code, sections 21.003, 21.053, 21.004, 21.051, and 21.057 limit the District's ability to hire educators to teach hard to fill positions. Flexibility in this areas will assist in finding quality candidates to teach certain course in order to avoid cancelling classes in the future.

Innovation Strategies:

This District is seeking flexibility in hiring professionals in certain vocations such as career and technical courses. The exemption from Texas Education Code 21.005 (d.1.) will enable the District to establish local criteria for such courses when hiring quality personnel. With the exemption, the District will not have to cancel classes that students are dependent upon in order to fulfill their certifications and graduation requirements.