Wharton ISD

District of Innovation Plan

2023-2024 through 2027-2028



Wharton ISD

District of Innovation Committee Members 2017

Monica Rath	Dean of Instruction, Sivells Elementary; Community Member
Sheila Taylor	Drill Team Instructor, Wharton High School; Community Member
Donna Grissom	District G/T Coordinator; Community Member
Ashley Ivy	Math Instruction Facilitator, Wharton Elementary
Pam Barnes	Educational Aide, Wharton High School
Kim Williams	Response to Intervention Teacher, Sivells Elementary; Community Members, Parent
Cindy Mahalitc	Wharton ISD Director of Student Services, Federal Programs, and Testing Coordinator
Lisa Kutach	District Dyslexia Coordinator, Community member, parent
Fred Johnson	Behavior Teacher, Sivells Elementary/Director of Wharton Boys' and Girls' Club
Jeffrey Blair	Community Member
Pat Blair	Community Member

Gayle Parenica	Executive Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability
	WISD 2022 District of Innovation Committee Members
Venitra Senegal	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
Richard Chandler	Principal , Wharton High School
Desurae Matthews	Community Member
Diane Kalina	First Grade Teacher, Sivells
Dalia Marroquin	PK-4 Bilingual Teacher, Slivells
Joann Montgomery	Second Grade Teacher, Wharton Elementary
Michele Crabb	Teacher, Wharton High School
Monica Rath	Principal, Wharton Elementary School
Crista Norris	Instructional Aide, Wharton Junior High
Kristina Gaona	Seventh Grade Teacher, Wharton Junior High
Chief Edward Salcum	Teacher, Wharton High School
Marissa McCoy	Wharton High School Parent Representative
Sheena Barbee	Sivells Parent Representative

Kay Gilley	Sivells Parent Representative

Wharton ISD
District of Innovation Timeline

- March 28, 2017—Resolution passed by Wharton ISD School Board to explore designation as a District of Innovation
- April 20, 2017—Public Hearing to provide information to stakeholders about seeking designation as a District of Innovation
- May 23, 2017—School Board appoints committee to develop local innovation plan
- June 8, 2017—First meeting with 11 members present
- July 20, 2017—Second meeting with 9 members present
- August 10, 2017—Third meeting with 10 members present
- September 21, 2017—Fourth meeting with 7 members present
- October 5, 2017—Fifth meeting with 7 members present
- October 19, 2017—Sixth meeting with 7 members present
- October 24, 2017—Status update presented to School Board ·
- November 2017-February 2018—Updates and Revisions to Plan ·
- February 23, 2018-March 24, 2018—Required posting to Wharton ISD website
- March 26, 2018—District Education Improvement Committee Public Hearing
- March 27, 2018—School board vote to approve final plan
- October 28, 2021- District Education Improvement Committee Met to Amend TEC §25.036. All 11 present members voted yes.
    - *HB 1842, of the 84th Legislative Session, allows Texas districts to qualify as a District of Innovation. Districts of Innovation are able to*

gain local control of certain operations that are currently under the control of the Texas Education Agency.

- October 5, 2022 – District Education Improvement Committee met to amend and renew plan. All 13 members present voted yes.
- March 20, 2025 – Wharton ISD Board of Trustees approved the amendment to add the School Districts Depository Contract (BDAE Legal & Local) (TEC Subchapter G. 45.206) Once member absent and six members present. All six voted yes.

Goal 1: The Wharton ISD Board of Trustees and Wharton ISD Administration will make teacher certification decisions based on district qualifications that meet the unique needs of the district's students and community.

1-1. Teacher Certification – General

● TEC §21.003 (b) CERTIFICATION REQUIRED

● TEC §21.053 PRESENTATION AND RECORDING OF CERTIFICATES ●

TEC §21.057 PARENTAL NOTIFICATION (TEC §21.003a) (DK LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

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 (b) An educator who does not hold a valid certificate may not be paid for teaching or work done before the effective date of issuance of a valid certificate.

TEC §21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation Strategies

Wharton 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; languages other than English; Science, Technology, and Math. Special Education and Bilingual teachers will continue to be required to hold a standard teaching certificate. Wharton ISD

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, when 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. Once hired, where applicable, the district will encourage teachers to obtain their appropriate certification. This flexibility will allow the District to hire individuals who best meet the needs of the students and provide the content knowledge our students need to enter an increasingly innovative world.

By claiming exemption from TEC §21.003(a), TEC §21.053(b), and TEC §21.057, the Wharton ISD leadership team, including district-level administrators, principals, and human resource department members, shall determine whether it is in the best interest of its students to certify individuals based on these factors. Further, the district shall establish local criteria for training and locally certifying individuals rather than adhere strictly to mandates outlined in Sec. 21.053(b). In doing so, parental notification of "inappropriately certified or uncertified teachers" under Sec. 21.057 would no longer be necessary. Regardless of whether any adjustments or changes are made to the certification laws, Wharton ISD believes this issue to be a local decision as opposed to a state mandate.

Goal 2: The Wharton ISD Board of Trustees and Wharton ISD Administration will make governance decisions based on the unique needs of the district's students and community.

2-1. School start date

· (TEC §25.0811(a))

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August.

Innovation Strategies

Allowing Wharton ISD to locally determine the flexibility of the school start date will allow the district to best meet the needs of the students and local community on an annual basis. This exemption will allow the district to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, and balance the amount of instructional time per semester. It will also allow the district to provide more instructional time prior to the statewide assessment for both the spring and summer administrations. Additionally, by having an earlier start and finish date, students will be able to enroll in college courses that start in

early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Removing the uniform start date could also allow Wharton ISD to start classes as a short week and allow more time for professional development opportunities for our staff. Wharton ISD proposes to begin the school year for teachers no earlier than the second week of August and no earlier than the third week of August for students.

2-2. DAEP Grouping

· TEC §37.006

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §37.006 states that *elementary students may not be placed in a disciplinary alternative education program with any other student who is not an elementary student.*

Innovation Strategies

Due to the significantly small enrollment of elementary students in the DAEP and limited staff, students will be better served by allowing flexible grouping with certain older students. To provide the most effective learning environment for students in the DAEP, Wharton ISD DAEP will use flexible grouping to accommodate learning within upper elementary and lower secondary grade levels, as appropriate. The classroom teacher will continue to differentiate instruction to meet all student needs.

2-3. Innovative Curriculum

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.083(b), §25.092(b) The board of trustees of each school district shall adopt and strictly enforce a policy limiting the removal of students from class for remedial tutoring or test preparation. A district may not remove a student from a regularly scheduled class for remedial tutoring or test preparation if, as a result of the removal, the student would miss more than 10 percent of the school days on which the class is offered, unless the student's parent or another person standing in parental relation to the student provides to the district written consent for removal from class for such purpose

Innovation Strategies

The foundational purpose of education in Wharton ISD is to provide challenging, meaningful instruction in each classroom. However, a contradiction in policy and practice arises from the policies referenced above. The State of Texas requires all students to pass STAAR Reading and Math assessments during their 5th and 8th grade years (Student Success Initiative)

and 5 End of Course (EOC) assessments to be eligible for graduation. Students that either fail to meet the passing standard or show a trend (based on data) towards not passing one or more of the high stakes tests are required to receive intense remediation. Therefore, in specific situations, students need the assistance of instructional specialists during the school day. Exemption from the policies referenced above will provide students the opportunity to register for classes of their choice, while at the same time receiving the necessary supplemental instruction needed for academic success. The exemption will provide Wharton ISD the opportunity to ensure that our students are prepared for transition to subsequent grade levels, and ultimately to obtain eligibility for high school graduation.

**These actions in no way alter policies related to compulsory attendance requirements.*

2-4 Transfer Students

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.036 TRANSFER OF STUDENT. (a) Any child, other than a high school graduate, who is younger than 21 years of age and eligible for enrollment on September 1 of any school year may transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in this state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian or person having lawful control of the child jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer.(b) A transfer agreement under this section shall be filed and preserved as a receiving district record for audit purposes of the agency.

Innovation Strategies

Transferring a child from his or her home district to another district is a serious consideration. Wharton ISD reserves the right to refuse admission of any transfer student whose presence in the school would not be in the best interests of the students of Wharton ISD. However, TEC 25. 036 state law requiring transfers to be for a one-year period does not honor the aforementioned. Therefore, Wharton ISD, in the best interest of students, can revoke a student transfer at any time during the school year for attendance, academic, and or behavior purposes. Wharton ISD will establish standards for a transfer student's behavior, academics, and attendance. Wharton ISD will update transfer form agreements and the student handbook in order to make these expectations clear to students and parents.

2.5 Planning and Preparation Period

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of 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.

Innovation Strategies

- To best serve the students of Wharton ISD, we propose flexibility in meeting the needs of our students by affording teachers an opportunity to voluntarily provide temporary classroom coverage for other classes during their planning time, on an as-needed basis.
- The District would afford those teachers additional compensation for voluntarily opting to participate in assisting the campus with their ongoing needs to provide constant, appropriate supervision for all students.
- 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.

2.6 Teacher Suspension for Good Cause

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

DFAA(LEGAL) and DFBA (LEGAL) Texas Education Code sections 21.104(b) and 21.211(b) state that for a good cause, as determined by the Board of Trustees, the Board may suspend a teacher without pay for a period not to extend beyond the end of the school year: (1) pending discharge of the teacher; or (2) in lieu of terminating the teacher. Texas Education Code 21.211(c) states a teacher who is not discharged after being suspended without pay pending discharge is entitled to back pay for the period of suspension.

Innovation Strategies

Relief from this status will allow the following opportunities:

- Flexibility from some of the provisions of Chapter 21 of the Education Code will allow the District to approach some employment issues in ways that best meet the needs of the district and take quick action to protect students when necessary. Specifically, the District seeks the flexibility to not pay employees for administrative leave for suspected violations of the Texas Educator Code of Ethics should the result of the investigation for which an employee was placed on administrative leave result in the termination or resignation of the employee.
- Flexibility from provisions that address employment issues as they apply to the administrative leave and salary to protect the best interests of the District.

2.7 SCHOOL DISTRICT DEPOSITORIES CONTRACT

(BDAE Legal & Local) (TEC Subchapter G. 45.206)
TERM OF CONTRACT. (A) Except as provided by Subsection (b), the depository bank when selected shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified. (B) A school district and the district's depository bank may agree to extend a depository contract for two additional two-year-terms. An extension under this subsection is not subject to the requirements of Section 45.206. (C) The contract term and any extension must coincide with the school district's fiscal year.

Proposed
By gaining exemption from these statutes, GUSTINE ISD would be able to allow the district's existing bank contract to be extended beyond the total 8-year allowable contract term if the district determines contract pricing remains competitive and there is no operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out to bid. This exemption would lessen the administrative burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP) when there is are no other banking institutions within district boundaries available to bid on the district's business. In addition, this would further mitigate any impact to employees that would have to alter their direct deposit instructions and afford district flexibility with respect to local banking relationships.