

West Hardin CCISD

District of Innovation Plan



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.

I. INTRODUCTION

The District of Innovation (DOI) is a concept passed by the 84th Texas Legislature through House Bill (HB) 1842 that gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to open enrollment charter schools, including exemption from many requirements mandated in the Texas Education Code.

As a District of Innovation, West Hardin CCISD will have (1) greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students; (2) increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and (3) power to innovate and think differently.

HB 1842 does not allow for exemptions from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements or academic and financial accountability.

II. OUR PROCESS

On December 5, 2016, the West Hardin CCISD Board of Trustees (Board) passed a resolution to initiate the process of a designation of a District of Innovation under HB 1842 to increase local control over WHCCISD operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. A public hearing to consider whether the District should develop a local innovation plan for the designation of the district as a District of Innovation was held on January 15, 2017. The Board appointed a District of Innovation Advisory Committee (Committee) comprised of diverse leaders representing a cross-section of WHCCISD's stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, community members, administrators, and others. WHCCISD District of Innovation Committee Members are as follows with changes effective for the school year 2017-18:

2017-2018

Jim Armstrong: Superintendent
D'Wanna Rasnick: Director of C&I
Amanda Atkinson--Counselor
Jim Crews--Teacher
Teresa Hughes--Teacher
Leisha Marshall--504 Coordinator
Tiffany Merriwether--Elementary Principal
Michael Smith: Principal
Jessica Payne--Parent
David Pickett--Teacher
Velisha Shoats--Teacher
Gina Strahan--Teacher
Michael Tucker--Teacher
Sheri Weaver--Teacher
Heather Williams--Teacher
Charlene Zwahr--Librarian

The Committee met on November 8, 2017 for an introduction and an overview of what the previous committee had reviewed. The committee decided to go through the process again with the addition of new members on the committee.

III. Term

The term of the plan is for five years, due to the changes it will begin January 8, 2018 and end January 8, 2023, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board of Trustees will appoint a committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment. Any amendment adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan. The WHCCISD may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

IV. INNOVATIONS

1. School start date (EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.0811)

Currently: Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August.

For many years this was the rule, however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to start earlier. The vast majority of districts applied for the waiver and would begin the 3rd Monday, some even going as early as the 2nd Monday.

The Texas tourism groups lobbied to have this stopped because they believed it was hurting their tourism business. Therefore, several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Proposed: To allow for a calendar that fits the local needs of our community, we would like to consider moving the mandatory start date back one week which would better benefit our students. **a.** Students will begin no earlier than the 3rd Monday of August. **b.** Teachers will begin no earlier than the 2nd Monday of August. **c.** This will allow the first and second semesters to be closer in the number of days of instruction. **d.** The goal is to improve the district attendance rate and student success through the flexibility in the calendar.

2. Submitting waivers for Kindergarten – Grade 4 class size (EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.111) (Ed. Code 25.112) (Ed. Code 25.113)

Currently: Kindergarten – 4 th Grade classes are to be kept at a 22 student to 1 teacher ratio according to state law. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose. Along with the waiver, it is required that a letter is sent home to each parent in the section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted. Many times soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of the district and we are below the 22:1 ratio.

Proposed: While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, we do not believe it has a negative effect when you only add one or two more students. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influence the learning environment. **a.** WHCCISD will attempt to keep all K-4 th core classrooms to a 22:1 ratio. However, in the event the class size exceeds this ratio, the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees. **b.** In the event a K-4 th core classroom reaches 25:1, the campus will notify the parents of the students in the classroom and inform them of the situation. **c.** A TEA waiver will not be necessary when a K-4 th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio. **d.** This gives WHCCISD the flexibility without having the bureaucracy of waivers within the Texas Education Agency.

3. Teacher certification (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT)

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, 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.

Proposed: The proposed flexibility in local certification indicated below will allow more flexibility in scheduling, more options in class offerings and more flexibility in teacher hiring in our rural setting.

After authentic attempts have been made to hire a certified teacher, the campus principal may...

(a) ...submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach one subject(s) out of their certified field if that teacher is willing. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what qualifications the certified teacher possesses to teach this subject. Current **WHCCISD example: Pickett, Baldwin**

(b) (new) ...submit to the superintendent a request to allow a degreed person enrolled in an alternate certification program to teach in the subject area/grade level of which they are seeking certification. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what qualifications the candidate possesses which qualify this individual to teach this subject/grade level. **Current WHCCISD example: Herr and 1 or 2 more**

(c) ...recommend an individual with experience in a CTE field to be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with all the individual's qualifications. **Current WHCCISD example: none of which I am aware**

(d) (new) ...submit to the superintendent a request to allow a degreed person who has completed a certification program except for passing the certification test to teach in the subject area/grade level of the certification program. **Current WHCCISD example: Wyatt**

In all the circumstances above, the superintendent will consider the recommendation and approve the request if s/he feels the individual could be an asset to students and staff. The superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual(s) beginning employment. Local teaching certificates will be for one year. The employee will be at-will.

4. . §21.401: Contract Days – (a)A contract between a school district and an educator must be for a minimum of 10 months' service. **(b)** An educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. i. Flexible Contract Days –WHCCISD may reduce the number of days of service from a minimum of 187 to a minimum of at most 182 for educators employed under a 10-month contract with no effect on salaries to increase the daily rate, enhance educator recruitment, and improve morale. This plan will also provide more opportunities to seek beneficial staff development related to their fields. a. Local Guidelines: This applies to 10-month educator contracts only without affecting stipend contract addendums.

Term and Implementation

The term for this plan is for five years unless terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas law. In the event WHCCISD feels other exemptions would benefit the district, the Board of Trustees will nominate a new committee and follow all procedures for amending this plan.

This innovation plan and specific implementation of the plan will be developed by the appropriate campuses and principals. Adjustments to WHCCISD Board Policy and other district policies will be researched, reviewed, and adopted by the Board of Trustees.