

Renewal of Dripping Springs ISD Innovation Plan

RENEWAL PLAN

District of Innovation and Exemptions from Provisions of the Texas Education Code under House Bill 1842

During the renewal process for the District of Innovation Plan, the District of Innovation Committee determined that minimal adjustments would be made to the DSISD Innovation Plan at this time. In the future, as allowed by 19 TAC §102.1313(a), additional modifications may be considered as DSISD embarks on a new strategic planning process. If at some point it is decided that changes or additional exemptions should be considered, as per the Districts of Innovation process, the district will reconvene the District of Innovation Planning Committee to explore the request. This plan is specific to the exemptions as outlined. The district intends to follow the Texas Education Code in all other areas.

House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session, provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of their unique student populations, in order to prepare them for success and lifelong learning. As a District of Innovation, Dripping Springs ISD has been able to implement our Strategic Plan with the increased flexibility and freedom of unnecessary bureaucratic steps and processes. An essential tenet of our Strategic Plan is that every child experiences school differently. Thus, we must have the ability to make important educational decisions for our students and maintain control of the processes at the local level.

As we developed our Strategic Plan alongside the original Innovation Plan, our community has been involved throughout the process, giving ongoing feedback on what parents want for their children in order to prepare them to be positive contributors to the world ... a world that is constantly changing. Our Strategic Plan requires DSISD to evolve and think radically differently about such critical systemic components as how we are organized, how we deliver instruction, how we recruit and retain top talent, how we engage and support our families, what experiences we provide, and how we grow continually as a learning organization.

Under HB 1842, districts may identify certain requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) “that inhibit the goals of the plan and from which the district should be exempted on adoption of the plan. . .” Because of DSISD's Strategic Plan and its local Innovation Plan are comprehensive and touch numerous areas in the TEC, and because DSISD seeks to maximize local control of educational decisions for students, DSISD seeks to renew the District of Innovation Plan with exemption from the following permissible provisions of the TEC, as allowed in the statute:

**UNIFORM SCHOOL START DATE
(Ed. Code §25.0811) (EB LEGAL)**

Manner in which statute inhibits the plan

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.

Category of Innovation

Admission, Transfer, and Attendance- Operation of Schools and School Attendance

Innovation Strategies

This flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and local community. This empowers us to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, and balance the amount of instructional time per semester. In addition, by having the flexibility in the start and end of the school year, 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 let the DSISD start classes as a short week, easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school. This will also allow for more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff.

CLASS SIZE RATIO

(Ed. Code §25.111, §25.112, §25.113) (EEB LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the plan

Kindergarten–4th 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.

Category of Innovation

Campus governance

Innovation Strategies

As a fast-growth district, it has become a yearly need to apply for a class size waiver. While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff, and the best teacher-to-student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. We do not believe it has a negative effect when a school adds only one or two more students. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom that influence the learning environment. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. In the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio for Kindergarten–4th grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, but the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees for approval. This exemption only allows DSISD the local control over class size ratios, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements.

This plan also emphasizes the importance of flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passions and needs. This grants flexibility in class size at all times-regrouping for success, small groups, large groups, etc. It also works to minimize paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place additional focus on student success. An exemption in meeting Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112, will allow the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waivers when the need arises.

STUDENT DISCIPLINE PROVISIONS
(Ed. Code §37.0012) (FO LEGAL & LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the plan

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.

Category of Innovation

Discipline, Law, and Order

Innovation Strategies

The proposal is for the District to abstain from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. DSISD's approach to discipline is becoming more collaborative, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration in regard to student discipline, as outlined in the DSISD Student Code of Conduct.

TEACHER CERTIFICATION
(Ed. Code §21.003, §21.057) (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT)

Manner in which statute inhibits the plan

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.

Category of Innovation

Educators- Subchapter General provisions

Innovation Strategies

DSISD is committed to placing a life changer in every classroom. In order to best serve DSISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high-demand dual credit, and career and technical/STEAM (applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts & Mathematics) courses. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training of professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law.

By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, the District will have the flexibility to hire community college instructors, university professors, or internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area. This exemption is not applicable to special education or bilingual teachers, as they must be continue to be SBEC certified.

TEACHER, STAFF, PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL SYSTEM

(Ed. Code §21.203, §21.352, §21.3541) (DNA LEGAL, DNA LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the plan

The state of Texas has used the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) teacher appraisal system since 1997. The state is issuing a new teacher appraisal system in 2016-2017, called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). The domains within these systems are developed by the state to meet the needs of the entire State of Texas. These systems require that state-standardized test scores be used as one of the evaluation measures for teachers and administrators.

Category of Innovation

Educators- Subchapter H- Appraisals and Incentives

Innovation Strategies

A committee of district and campus administrators and teachers from DSISD already has developed a teacher evaluation system, principal evaluation system, and a system of evaluation for non-certified instructional staff, as well as

non-instructional staff. This new appraisal system is aligned with the four broad goals from the Strategic Plan (see page 5) and focuses on local areas emphasis. From the results of staff appraisals, Personalized Professional Learning Plans (PPLPs) are developed. In order to promote professional development that focuses on individual growth, the District needs to maintain local flexibility to continue its current practice of using various measures, including multiple observations, goal-setting and tracking, and student growth progress toward learning objectives, as evaluation measures on teacher and administrator appraisals.

INSURANCE OFFERINGS

TEC §22.004 (i) (CRD LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the plan

TEC 22.004(i) Group Health Benefits for School Employees states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees pursuant to TEC §22.004(b) after the date a district implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all district employees. This provision prohibits the district from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverage for its employees at a lower cost. This provision does not give the district the flexibility needed to acquire benefits packages that would potentially be more attractive to prospective employees.

Category of Innovation

Innovation Strategies

TEC §22.004 is not included in any of the prohibited exemptions that can be included in a District's local innovation plan pursuant to TEC §12A.004 or the list of the Commissioner's prohibited exemptions in the Texas Administrative Code Title 19 Chapter 102, subchapter JJ, Section 102.1309. Therefore, in order to have the option to offer additional benefits options to employees and to increase local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs, the District of Innovation Plan includes an exemption from the health insurance requirements in TEC §22.004(i).

Summary

The renewal of Dripping Springs District of Innovation Plan is an important step forward to ensure DSISD continues to develop and support our students, employees and families in a more personalized, more effective and strategically aligned way. Continuing the work of creating the personalized environment our students deserve enables us to better prepare them according to their individualized needs and their unique passions, gifts, and talents. Through HB 1842, DSISD is continuing to be positioned to leverage increased flexibility to make the best decisions for our children because we will make those decisions locally.

Through the renewal process and in discussions with the District of Innovation Committee, minimal changes and updates were made to the existing District of Innovation Plan approved in June of 2016 and amended in 2020. The updates to the plan during the renewal process include the following:

1. Remove the Minimum Minutes of Instruction exemption- Reducing instructional minutes will proportionately reduce funding if the minute minimum requirement is not maintained. There are other exemptions that can be utilized in the instructional calendar, and professional learning waivers submitted through the state to increase time for professional development and collaboration without the negative consequences to funding.
2. Remove the 90 Percent Rule exemption- While a District of Innovation may replace the 90 percent attendance rule with a more localized standard for issuing class credit or a final grade, compulsory attendance laws still apply. The original exemption sought to provide flexibility to traditional seat time for credit. All campuses utilize an attendance committee to ensure student mastery of content to determine if a student should be promoted/placed in the next grade level, which creates the flexibility needed for individualized circumstances.
3. Added “Staff and Principal” wording to Teacher Appraisal System along with reference to education code.

We are committed to the children of our community and pledge to implement this plan with their best interests at heart.