

# Gruver Independent School District Local Innovation Plan

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**Approved 10/23/2018**

## **District of Innovation Advisory Committee Members:**

Troy Seagler – Superintendent  
Nita Hudson – High School Principal  
James Bryant – High School Principal  
Wade Callaway – Junior High Principal, Superintendent  
Lexy Glass – Junior High Principal  
Amber Holland – Elementary Principal  
Matt Messer – Business Manager  
Holly McLean – Teacher  
Kelly Hart – Librarian  
Kimberly Irwin – CTE Teacher  
Kristi Williams – Teacher  
Melissa Shelley – Teacher

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Codes. On June 15, 2016, the Gruver Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") passed a Resolution to Adopt a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of the students and the community.

## **II. TERM**

The term of the Plan is five years, beginning August 1, 2016 and ending July 31, 2021, 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 will nominate a new 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 District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

## **III. INNOVATIONS**

The District proposes flexibility in the following areas:

- A. Certification Required** (TEC 21.003) (TEC 21.053) (TEC 21.057) (DK LEGAL) (DBA Legal) (DBA Local)

TEC 21.003 states that “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.” The current certification requirements inhibit the District from hiring professionals with industry experience to teach Career and Technology Education (CATE) and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) and foreign language courses. In order to provide more students the opportunity to take such courses and obtain possible professional certifications, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. The District does not wish to be exempted from any existing laws relating to teacher contracts or teacher benefits. Flexibility to establish its own teacher certification requirements affords the District the following advantages:

- Industry certified and/or trade professionals to teach specialized certification courses
- Greater number of CATE courses offerings resulting in more opportunity for students
- Realistic requirements for professionals transitioning from industry to teaching
- Ability to employ part-time professionals to teach specialty courses
- Allows the school district to utilize technology to implement on-line courses (CTE, foreign languages, general courses)

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 teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC 21.057 requires that the District provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

**B. Uniform School Calendar** (TEC 25.0811) (TEC 25.0812) (EB Legal) (EB Local)

Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday in August. Texas Education Code Section 25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. Local control of the instructional calendar affords the District the following advantages:

- Elimination of imbalanced 6 weeks and semester schedules while still ending the first semester prior to the holiday break.
- Alignment of calendar with Advanced Placement Exams and STAAR/EOC timelines
- Ensure hour/seat time requirements are met for Certification courses.
- Creates flexibility for the District to pursue year round school of choice for identified populations.

**C. Class Size Ratio** (TEC 25.111) (TEC 25.112) (EEB Legal)

Texas Education Code 25.111 states that each school district must employ a sufficient number of teachers certified under Subchapter B, Chapter 21, to maintain an average ration of not less than one teacher for each 20 students in average daily attendance. Texas Education Code 25.112 state that a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first,

second, third, or fourth grade class. The District seeks to establish its own local ratio requirements and provides the following advantages:

- More flexibility when teaching
- Creative ways of delivering instruction
- Ability to manage increases in class sizes

**D. Teacher and Principal Evaluations (TEC 21.352) (TEC 21.3541) (DNA LEGAL) (DNB LEGAL)**

The state uses the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). 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.

Districts currently have the authority to only formally appraise teachers once every five school years. Gruver ISD teachers are formally evaluated every three years.

Principals are evaluated annually on a locally developed plan.

A committee of administrators would have the option to develop a teacher evaluation system that would be a combination of PDAS, T-TESS, and other best practices to develop a local instrument and/or process that fits the needs and goals of GISD.

Gruver ISD will utilize a locally developed teacher and principal evaluation tool.

- This instrument will be developed with input from central administration and campus administration, as well staff input, PDAS, T-TESS, T-PESS, and any other relevant best practice.
- All teachers must be formally evaluated at a minimum of once every three years.
- All teachers will have an annual summative conference to discuss the year and set classroom goals for the next instructional year.
- A local plan will be developed to evaluate both certified and non-certified instructional staff, as well as non-instructional staff.
- Principals will continue to be evaluated annually on a locally developed plan.

**E. Instructional Minutes/Length of Instructional Day/PK Program (TEC 25.081) (EB LEGAL) (EC LEGAL)**

House Bill (HB) 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amends the Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.081, by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring districts and charter schools to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess). The bill also allows school districts and charter schools to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disaster, flood, extreme weather conditions, fuel curtailment, or other calamity. State law currently requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day in order to count for ADA calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.

- Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement would allow GISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum number for the school year. The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction will assist with personalizing learning to better meet individual student needs. It also has the added benefit of allowing the possibility of an altered length of a school

day, which may include, for example, a later start/early release time which will accommodate additional professional development/collaboration opportunities.

- GISD PK Program: The state requires 75,600 minutes for full day programming. For half-day programs such as PK and PPCD the required minute requirement would be 37,800 minutes. There is not enough time in the day to be able to accommodate 37,800 minutes for both a morning and afternoon group of students. We would like to request that we be allowed to offer a 180-minute half-day Pre K programs. This will allow each teacher to have a morning and an afternoon group of students along with a conference period and duty free lunch within the regular school day.

**F. 90 % Attendance Rule (TEC 25.092) (FEC LEGAL)**

State law currently requires students attend class 90 percent of the school days in order to earn credit. The law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on content mastery.

- The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. It will also allow GISD administrators to award credit to students because they can show they understand the concepts, rather than because they've attended a certain number of school days.
- The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the District by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, which reduces dropouts, increases the number of qualifying graduates. GISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate mastery, given this exemption. This exemption supports overarching goals in the strategic plan to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers.
- Relief from Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28,( )214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

**G. Number of College Days Attendance Rule (TEC 25.087 (b-2)) (FEC LEGAL)**

State law allows a school district to excuse a student from attending school to visit an institution of higher education accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization during the student's junior and senior years of high school for the purpose of determining the student's interest in attending the institution of higher education, provided that: (1) the district may not excuse for this purpose more than two days during the student's junior year and two days during the student's senior year; and (2) the district adopts: (A) a policy to determine when an absence will be excused for this purpose; and (B) a procedure to verify the student's visit at the institution of higher education.

- Gruver ISD has a very isolated location in relation to a number of schools that GISD students express interest in. Limiting students to only 2 days does not allow for students to travel round trip as well as visit a campus.

- GISD will waive the 2-day limit per year and adopt a policy allowing seniors to miss 4 days per year, juniors to miss 4 days per year, sophomores to miss 2 days per year and freshman to miss 2 days per year.
- Gruver ISD will expand its college and career readiness program by allowing students 9-12 to be excused to visit colleges that they interested in. This will allow students to gain a greater understanding of the steps needed to achieve their college/career goals at an earlier age, before it is too late.

**H. DAEP Teacher Certification Requirement (TEC 37.006) (37.008(7)) (FOCA LEGAL) (FOB LEGAL)**

TEC 37.006 states that an elementary student may not be placed in a DAEP with any other student who is not an elementary student. However, students younger than 10 may only be placed in a DAEP if they commit an expellable offense under 37.007.

Sec. 37.008. DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS. Requires each school district to provide a disciplinary alternative education program that provides for the students who are assigned to that program to be separated from students who are not assigned to the program. (a) Each school district shall provide a disciplinary alternative education program that: (7) employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subchapter B, Chapter 21;

- While Gruver ISD would make every attempt to comply with the existing education code, exemption from this requirement would allow the district to better utilize staff and facilities by allowing junior high and high school DAEP students to attend the same classroom as In School Suspension students when necessary.
- Exemption from this requirement would allow the district to make common sense decisions about which students are age appropriate to be in the same room together and allow the district to better utilize existing staff and facilities in the event of an elementary DAEP placement.
- Gruver ISD has a very limited number of students assigned to DAEP and often classes will be provided using computer-based instruction and/or a blended instructional model. It is not necessary to have certified teachers on site. Gruver ISD is a rural district and often does not have certified teachers available when DAEP is needed. The Campus administrator will ensure that the staff of the DAEP has the support necessary to properly supervise the students assigned to the program and will lend assistance of teachers with specific certification as needed.

**I. Transfer Students (TEC 25.036) (FDA LOCAL)**

Under Texas Education Code 25.001, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

Gruver ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (LOCAL) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements and the rules and regulations of the District. TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one year commitment by the District. The District is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one year commitment in accepting transfer applications for the following circumstances:

- Student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion;
- Students has not attended required interventions (if needed.)
- Student attendance falls below the TEA truancy standard.

**J. Depository Contract (TEC 45.205-45.209) (BDAE LEGAL)**

TEC §45.205 requires that depository bank contracts not exceed a two-year term. This section provides school districts the authority to extend a depository contract for two additional two-year terms.

In such a small community with limited bank availability, the current statute requiring a Request for Proposal (RFP) promotes disruption to district operations and increases the administrative burden.

- The Gruver ISD will only send depository services out for bid if the district determines contract pricing becomes uncompetitive or there is some operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out for bid.
- Relief from TEC §45.205 allows the district to ensure that its resources are concentrated on student achievement and that campus operations are not disrupted.
- Texas Education Agency Forms will be altered to meet the needs of the GISD

**IV. IMPLEMENTATION**

This Innovation Plan is designed to create parameters within which the District will operate, in order to provide additional student opportunities. Specific implementation plans will be developed by the appropriate campuses and principals. Adjustments to Board Policy will be researched and adopted where appropriate.