

Waskom ISD

2017-2022

**A DISTRICT PLAN FOR
INNOVATION & LOCAL CONTROL**

Designed in accordance with Texas HB 1842

"Innovation is creativity in action"

SUMMARY POINTS: A DISTRICT PLAN FOR INNOVATION AND LOCAL CONTROL

“Innovation is creativity in action.”

The 84th Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in Spring 2015, providing public school districts the opportunity to become Districts of Innovation. To qualify, an eligible school district must adopt a five-year innovation plan according to the Texas Education Code.

Districts of Innovation may be exempt from state statutes to:

- Take greater local control in decision-making about the educational and instructional model for students;
- Have increased autonomy from state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Be empowered to innovate and plan differently – to create and implement transformative process.

Why is Waskom ISD seeking the state’s official designation as a District of Innovation?

- The Waskom ISD Board of Trustees resolved in December 2016 to seek designation as a District of Innovation.
- This plan supports exemplary practices and local decision-making processes to improve student learning.
- The board appointed a District of Innovation Committee, representing classroom teachers and administrators. The plan was drafted, placed under 30-day public review, approved by the district committee and approved by the board of trustees.

Under this plan, what might innovation look like at Waskom ISD?

- In this case, innovation does not necessarily mean ambitious new initiatives beyond the school district’s current 21st Century Plan. Instead, it would signify Waskom ISD has achieved the privilege and flexibility to exercise more creative local control over existing quality programs without some statutory constraints.

The approved plan will:

- Maintain reasonable class sizes in grades K-4. Except in unique and extenuating circumstances and only with the board of trustee’s consent, Waskom ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to preserve an important student-to-teacher ratio of 23:1 per K-4 homeroom class.
- Determine a flexible school start date. Waskom ISD will determine on an annual basis its own local starting date for the first semester, not to precede the second Monday in August of any given year, instead of the Texas statute that requires districts to begin a new school year on the fourth Monday of August.
- Allow alternatives to educator certification for distinctive subjects. When a certified educator is not found for a unique circumstance or innovative class, the school district may allow a non-certified professional to teach OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field without the traditional state credentials.

- Adjust instructional minutes and school day length. Waskom ISD will make every effort to meet the goal of 75,600 instructional minutes per year, but may want to approach this total more creatively without being confined to either 420 minutes or seven hours of instruction every day.
- Allow the board to make adjustments to teacher contract days for purposes of school closures, etc.
- Allow for additional flexibility regarding student attendance and course credit.

WASKOM ISD PLAN FOR INNOVATION & LOCAL CONTROL

INTRODUCTION

Waskom ISD is committed to providing high quality instruction in an environment conducive to learning. The district believes that the current state assessment alone is a poor measurement of student learning, and it only serves as a single data point among many more reliable indicators of academic measurement. Waskom ISD is one of a few districts that has truly embraced the value of a quality educational approach as envisioned by the Public Education Visioning Institute.

Waskom ISD continues to intentionally and strategically design a school system that: engages the digital generation; assesses student progress and growth using multiple, appropriate measures of assessment; embraces accountability to our community; transforms our school into a learning organization; and advocates local control to be restored to community school.

House Bill 1842 passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in Spring 2015 provides Texas public school districts the opportunity to be designated as *Districts of Innovation*. To qualify and access allowable exemptions, an eligible school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Texas Education Code, Chapter 12A.

Districts of innovation may be released from several statutes to have:

- Greater local control in making decisions about the educational and instructional model for students;
- Increased autonomy and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

**Districts are not exempt from statutes that address curriculum, assessment and graduation requirements as well as academic and financial accountability.*

THE PROCESS

On December 12, 2016, the Waskom Independent School District's board of Trustees passed a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation. Immediately following the resolution adoption, the district held a public hearing on March 6, 2017 to provide an overview of the process, concepts and benefits of such a designation.

The board also appointed a District of Innovation Committee on February 12, 2017 with a charge to begin the process of drafting a local innovation plan. The committee consisted of classroom teachers with the remaining members being campus and district administrators. The committee began work on March 20, 2017 to draft a plan of innovation.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Elementary:

- Barbara Harp – teacher
- Lisa Jones – teacher
- Treva Sanders – teacher
- Shay Thompson – principal

Middle School:

- Yolonda Durley – teacher
- Melinda Bowden – counselor
- Lauren Boone – elem/ms assistant principal
- Bonita Cherry – principal

High School:

- Jean Kellough – teacher
- Carol French – teacher
- Karen Merritt – teacher
- Kassie Watson – principal

District:

- Jimmy E. Cox – superintendent
- Rae Ann Patty – Assistant Superintendent of CIA
- Lavaughn Fields – district technology director
- Nancy Dillard – business manager

****43% Classroom Teachers / 57% Administration***

Approved actions of the Plan of Innovation

As a result of this plan, Waskom ISD will apply the following innovative governance guidelines to the unique, local and instructional needs of its students and community.

1. **MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES IN GRADES K-4**
(TEC 25.111)(TEC25.112a-g)(TEC 25.113a-b)(EEB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Code requires districts to maintain 22 students or less in kindergarten through 4th grade classes. A school district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for each class that exceeds the limit. These waivers are rarely rejected by TEA, making the process primarily for awareness purposes and to preserve a more personal instructional environment.

State law also requires districts to notify parents of waivers or exemptions to class size limits. Sometimes during the course of a school year, due to shifting enrollments, a class may return to a smaller student-to-teacher ratio before or after the waiver is formally granted, thus negating the notice or causing parents and staff unnecessary concern.

Waskom ISD certainly recognizes reasonable class size plays a positive role in classroom, and acknowledges the intent of the state requirements. However, class size must balance with the logistics and timing of adding staff, available campus resources or space, and the optimal teacher-to-student ratio given the total number, age and needs of students. Often, it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which creates a more personal instructional environment. Most importantly, research shows the teacher in the classroom has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. This exemption does not disregard the intent of class size ratio requirements, but rather, allows Waskom ISD the local control to determine class size.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. In accordance with TEC §25.112, Waskom ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 per K-4 homeroom class. Also consistent with TEC §25.113, if, after consideration of the factors outlined below, any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will inform the board of trustees and will notify parents of affected students.
- B. If, during the school year, a K-4 homeroom exceeds 22:1, the administration will have 30 school days to consider:
 1. The subject/age to be taught, the teaching methodology to be used and any need for individual instruction in the class;
 2. Available space and resources;
 3. Whether another teacher should be hired (thus creating a new classroom);
 4. Whether a teaching assistant could be added to the homeroom class; or

5. Whether keeping the class intact is more advantageous than separating students, in which case the class size may slightly exceed 22:1.
- C. Consistent with TEC §25.112, TEC §25.114 and TEA guidance, the 22:1 ratio does not apply to physical education or fine arts classes. In such subjects, Waskom ISD will consider student/teacher ratios appropriate to implement the curriculum and ensure student and staff safety.
- D. A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio, although the Waskom ISD Board of Trustees and parents must still be notified.
- E. The district will not allow the average class size per grade level (K-4) to exceed 23:1, if a suitable teacher is available. If a suitable teacher is not available, the class size will be at the administration's discretion.

2. DETERMINE A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL START DATE

(TEC §25.0811a)(EB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Code states a school district may not begin student instruction before the fourth Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to begin earlier, even as early as the second Monday in August.

The state-date waiver was eventually removed when the legislature determined school districts should begin the first semester no earlier than the fourth Monday of August, with no exceptions. The current process allows no flexibility in the design and balancing of instructional semesters to meet the needs of students or the wishes of the local board of trustees, who represent community interest in this matter.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Waskom ISD will determine on an annual basis the local starting date of the first semester, not to proceed the second Monday in August of any given year.
- B. The annual calendar will be submitted by the district calendar committee and approved by the board of trustees.

3. ALLOW ALTERNATIVES TO EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

(TEC §21.003a)(TEC §21.057a-e)(DBA and DK LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Codes state a person may not be employed as an educator by a school district unless the individual holds an appropriate certification or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. In the event a school district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position, or a teacher is teaching a subject outside her or his certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or the 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, especially for innovative classes where certification may not exist or educators with those credentials may not be readily available.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. In exceptional circumstances, when a certified educator cannot be found for a class, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow a non-certified yet highly qualified professional to teach, a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field for which she or he is not credentialed by the state, or allow an educator to teach who is certified in a state other than Texas.
- B. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what qualifications the individual possesses to teach the proposed subject. Emergency or financial situations creating the need for this assignment should also be noted.
- C. Whenever possible, lesson plans or curriculum guides to support an uncertified yet highly qualified educator or professional will be developed or provided by the district.
- D. In the event an uncertified yet highly qualified educator or professional is assigned to a course, the superintendent will inform the board of trustees and will notify parents of students who benefit from this decision.
- E. A teacher certification waiver, state permit applications or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency.

5. Teacher Probationary Contracts

(TEC 21.102(b)) (DCA (Legal and Local))

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Code currently states that a probationary contract period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district.

Under the current statute, when a teacher or administrator is new to the district who qualifies under the 5 of 8 rule, after the first year, the district must either offer them a term contract or terminate their contract. Waskom ISD feels that this one year period is not long enough to adequately assess if the teacher or administrator is a good fit in their position and in the district.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Waskom ISD would like to have the flexibility to renew the probationary contract of a teacher or administrator employed under the 5 of 8 rule for one additional year period, for a maximum of two school years for all teachers and administrators who are new to the District.

This will give the principal and/or district more time to effectively evaluate and assess the teaching, interpersonal, and/or management skills of the incoming teacher or administrator to make sure they are a good fit for the district.

6. Interdistrict Transfers

(TEC 25.036) (FDA(Legal and Local))

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Code states that a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. This statute has been interpreted to mean that a transfer agreement lasts for one year.

Waskom ISD has a transfer policy at FDA(LOCAL) requiring nonresident students to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the Superintendent will consider the availability of space and instructional staff and the student's disciplinary and attendance records. Transfers students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules and regulations of the District.

Local Innovation Strategy:

The district seeks to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, transfer students may exhibit behavior that warrants suspension, placement in a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP), expulsion or have attendance that falls below truancy standards.

Waskom ISD seeks exemption from the requirement that a transfer must be a commitment for one year. The district will be allowed to rescind a transfer mid-year upon review of the student's disciplinary and attendance records within the district.