

WELLS ISD DISTRICT of INNOVATION PLAN (HB 1842) 2017-2018

HB 1842, of the 84th Legislative Session, allows public schools to have more flexibility. This provides districts with the opportunity to meet the needs of our students and community.

This plan would go into effect for the 2017-2018 school year. The plan could be amended at any time by the committee with approval by the board of trustees.

District Committee Members:

Jim Moore - Superintendent	Dr. Gary Applewhite - JH/HS Principal
Blake Smith - Elementary Principal	Kathy Ford – District Counselor
Tammy Timmons – Elementary Teacher	Alison Thigpen – Elementary Teacher
Jami Clark - Elementary Teacher	Tonya Truett - Elementary Teacher
Joy Weber - Elementary Teacher	Jason Ashworth – JH/HS Teacher
Carrie Langham - JH/HS Teacher	Mike Alberts - JH/HS Teacher
Alison Taylor - JH/HS Teacher	Slade Johnson – Technology Director

District of Innovation Timeline

Thursday, February 16, 2017: The Wells ISD Board of Trustees approves a motion to pursue a local District of Innovation Plan

Thursday, February 23 2017: Staff meeting to discuss the District of Innovation Plan

Thursday, March 9, 2017: Public Hearing to discuss District of Innovation and Board approval of District of Innovation Committee members.

Wednesday, March 22, 2017: Administrative meeting to discuss further options available with District of Innovation Plan.

Thursday, March 23, 2017: District of Innovation Committee meeting to approve plan.

Monday, March 27, 2017: Post the District of Innovation Plan on the District website for 30 days.

Term of the Plan

The term of Wells ISD’s Innovation Plan will be five years. The plan will become effective upon approval of 2/3 vote of the Board of Trustees. This plan will go into effect with the 2017-2018 school year and conclude at the end of the 2021-2022 school year unless eliminated by the Well’s ISD Board of Trustees. The District Innovation Committee will annually assess the effectiveness of the plan.

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If recommendations are made to amend the plan it would be done as required by law that includes public posting, approval by the committee, and the Board of Trustees.

Proposed Actions of the Plan of Innovation

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

I. School Start Date (*EB LEGAL*) (*Ed. Code 25.0811*)

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

Local Innovation Strategy: To allow for a calendar that fits the local needs of our students and community, we would like to consider mandating a start date of no earlier than August 10 each year which will:

- provide flexibility in developing calendars each year
- provide more days of instruction before state assessment
- afford teachers the opportunity to receive meaningful professional development during the school year instead of frontloading all of the staff development days prior to the beginning of school
- The annual calendar will be submitted by the District Calendar Committee and approved by the board of trustees.

2. Length of School Day (*EC LEGAL*) (*Ed Code 25.081*) (*Ed Code 25.082*)

Currently: *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.*

Local Innovation Strategy: Exempting from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Wells ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements.

This exemption will allow for local control regarding the early dismissal of students for various purposes. Early release days may be used for additional professional development, unique instructional arrangements, teacher collaboration, teacher/parent conferences, releasing prior to a holiday and other special occasions, or other school related activities

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3. Class Size Waivers (EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.112 a-g) (Ed. Code 25.113a-b)

Currently: 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

Local Innovation Strategy: 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.

- Wells ISD will attempt to keep all K-4th 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.
 - 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.
 - If the student/teacher ratio averaged across a grade level needs to go over 22:1 it must have both administrator and teacher approval.
 - If the student/teacher ratio averaged across a grade level needs to go over 24:1 it must have both administrator and teacher approval: Parents of all students in each affected class and the School Board will be notified.
 - Additionally, consistent with TEC §25.112, Wells ISD will not be required to seek consent from the Board of Trustees for a homeroom classroom that may exceed 22:1 during the last 12 weeks of the school year.
 - A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio, although the Wells ISD Board of Trustees must still consent and parents must still be notified.

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4. Implement A Local Teacher and Administrator Appraisal System (*DNA LEGAL, DNA LOCAL*) (*DNB LEGAL*), (*DNB Local*) (*Ed. Code 21.352*)

Currently: New state-wide teacher appraisal systems, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), are being introduced for the first time since 1997. While these systems are designed to meet the needs of the entire state, they do not adequately align with the standards and expectations in Wells ISD. These systems also require state standardized test scores be used as the primary evaluation measure for both teachers and administrators.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Proposed A committee of administrators and teachers 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 WISD.

- a. Wells ISD will utilize a locally developed teacher and principal evaluation tool.
- b. This instrument will be developed with input from central administration, campus administration, and teachers. It will use staff input, PDAS, T-TESS, T-PESS, and any other relevant best practice.
- c. A minimum of 50% of a campus's teachers must be formally evaluated every year. All teachers must be formally evaluated at a minimum of every third school year. Every teacher will receive a minimum of six, informal walk-throughs per year.
- d. All teachers will have an annual summative conference to discuss the year and to set classroom goals and a staff development plan.
- e. Principals will continue to be evaluated annually on a locally developed plan.
- f. These locally developed plans should reflect the strengths, areas of concern, and goals for Wells ISD.

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5. Teacher Certification (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT) (Ed. Code 21.003) (Ed. Code 21.053) (Ed. Code 21.057)

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.

TEC Sec. 21.003 requires 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.

TEC Sec. 21.053 mandates a teacher must present his or her certificate to the District before their employment contract will be binding and prohibits the District from paying an educator if he or she does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC Sec. 21.057 requires that a school district provide parental notification if the district assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year.

Local Innovation Strategy: In order to best serve Wells ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally:

Non-CTE Subjects Grades 6-12

In order to best serve Wells ISD students by allowing more flexibility in scheduling and more course offerings, decisions on certification will be handled locally. For grades 6-12, in all subjects except Special Education and ESL/Bilingual, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for a local certification that will allow a certified teacher to teach one subject in a related field of their current certification but for which he/she is not certified. All teachers at grades PK-5 will be fully certified.

Related Fields

English: English, Reading, Speech, Debate, Journalism, any other English course accepted by SBOE for graduation credit in English.

Social Studies: History, Government, Economics, Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, any other Social Studies course accepted by SBOE for graduation credit.

Science: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Biology, Earth Science, Physics, Chemistry, any other Science course accepted by SBOE for graduation credit in Science.

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Fine Arts: Art, Music, Theater Arts, Dance, any other Fine Art course accepted by SBOE for graduation credit in Fine Arts.

Mathematics: Mathematics, Engineering, Statistics, Accounting, any Mathematics course accepted by SBOE for graduation credit in Mathematics.

The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document the credentials the certified teacher possesses that would qualify the individual to teach the proposed subject in the related area. The Superintendent must approve all requests. To assist the teacher that a local certificate is enacted, lesson plans for the uncertified teacher will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field, whenever possible.

CTE Subjects Grades 6-12

The current certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire professionals with industry experience to teach Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, & Mathematics (STEM) courses. In order to provide more students the opportunity to take such courses and promote students' ability to obtain professional certifications, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. In addition, if teacher meets the applicable local certification requirements, the teacher will not be required to present certification before being hired. Flexibility to establish its own CTE teacher certification requirements affords the District the following advantages:

- Industry certified and/or trade professionals to teach specialized certification courses.
- Greater number of CTE course offerings resulting in more opportunities for students.
- Realistic requirements for professionals transitioning from industry to teaching.
- Ability to employ part-time professionals to teach CTE courses.

The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the individual possesses that would qualify the individual to teach the proposed CTE subject. The Superintendent must approve all requests.

As long as a teacher meets the applicable Non-CTE or CTE requirements above, the district will not be required to provide parental notification.

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6. Probationary Contracts (DCA LEGAL) (Ed. Code 21.102 (b))

Currently: A probationary contract 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 with the district.

Local Innovation Strategy: For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to Wells ISD that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, the probationary period will be two years.

- This will provide sufficient time to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers as well as provide time for development and growth.

7. Student Attendance and Course Credit (TEC 25.092) (FEC (legal and local))

Currently: Texas Education Code restricts a student from receiving credit or a final grade in a course of study in which the student was not in attendance for at least 90% of the days the course was offered. If the student attends the course at least 75% of the time, the student may be awarded credit if he/she successfully completes a plan of action determined by the principal. An established attendance committee must hear petitions for credit from students that failed to meet the plan of action. The committee may approve the award of credit based on extenuating circumstances.

Wells ISD does have rigorous course options with high expectations. Students are highly encouraged to stretch their academic capability by taking advanced level courses. If a student attempts to take a course, but it is later determined that a different course of study is most appropriate, we feel the principal should be allowed to approve a schedule change without regard to developing an individual plan of action. The student will be required to meet the instructional requirements of the new course in order to obtain an expected level of mastery of the curriculum.

Additionally, this would apply for a student that transfers to the district during the school year with a course of study that may not be offered at the campus.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Regardless of the percentage of days a student is in attendance, the principal may approve a schedule change and award course credit if it is determined that the student sufficiently meets the instructional requirements of the course of study.

If the principal does not award course credit for a student due to poor attendance (less than 90%) the student may petition for a review and decision by the Attendance Committee. If the committee denies the credit or final grade, then the student may appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees. The decision of the Board is final.

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8. Inter-district Transfers (*FDA Legal, Local*) (, *Ed. Code 25.036*)

Currently: A district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. A transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year. Wells 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.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Wells 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, 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 applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, Wells ISD seeks exemption from the one year transfer commitment.

Local Innovation Strategy Cont.:

Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

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9. Teacher Contract Days (*DEA Legal, DEA Local*) (*ED. Code 21.401*)

Currently: Education law defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract equivalent to 187 days.

We would propose having the option to reduce teacher contract days from 187 to better align with the current required minutes of instruction with no effect to salaries. This plan would take effect beginning with the 2017-2018 school year.

Innovation Strategy

- The reduction in contract days at our current salary schedule would make us more competitive.
- In subsequent years it will be part of the calendar planning process to maintain the reduced number of contract days
- The number of days worked for “teachers” would never be less than 184.