

SUMMARY POINTS: A DISTRICT PLAN FOR INNOVATION AND LOCAL CONTROL

“Innovation is creativity in action.”

- The 84th Texas 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 processes.

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

- The Center ISD Board of Trustees resolved in March 2017 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, represented by a majority of classroom teachers. The committee has been at work since March 23, 2017.

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

- In this case, innovation does not necessarily mean ambitious new initiatives beyond the school district’s current goals and objectives that emphasize literacy. Instead, it would signify Center ISD has achieved the privilege and flexibility to exercise more creative local control over existing quality programs become more creative in our preparation of students for their future without some statutory constraints. Furthermore, the flexibility will advance a new visioning mission that is currently underway.

The proposed plan would:

- Determine a flexible school start date. Center ISD will determine on an annual basis its 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. Center 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.

CENTER ISD PLAN FOR INNOVATION & LOCAL CONTROL

INTRODUCTION

Center 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.

Center ISD maintains to intentionally and strategically design a school system that: engages the digital generation; embraces accountability to our community; transforms our school into a learning organization; and advocates local control to be restored to community schools.

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 outlined 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, about 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 March 21, 2017, the Center 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 to provide an overview of the process, concepts, and benefits of such a designation.

The Board also appointed a District of Innovation Committee on March 21, 2017 with a charge to begin the process of drafting a local innovation plan. The committee consisted two teachers from each of the five campuses, each campus principal, and two parents from the 2016-2017 DEIC committee. The committee began work on March 23, 2017, to draft a plan for innovation.

The proposed plan was posted to the district website for public comment in April and remained posted for well over the 30-day requirement. The DEIC committee voted unanimously to approve the proposed plan.

On March 31, 2017, the District did notify the Commissioner of Education regarding the Board's intent to vote on the proposed plan.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

FLM Primary:

Liz Rowlett – teacher
Stephanie Fults – teacher
Kurt Radnitzer – principal

Parents:

Latrisa Barkins
Mayra Solis
Alison Scull
Ben Wulf

Center Elementary:

Amber Mathews - teacher
Amanda Radney - teacher
Shelly Norvell - principal

Center Intermediate:

LeAnn Masterson - teacher
Danielle Emmerling – teacher
Heath Hagler - principal

Middle School:

Sommer Herndon – teacher
Kathy Massey – teacher
Jake Henson - principal

High School:

Chris Draper-teacher
Jennifer Fausett-teacher
Matthew Gregory-principal

Curriculum and Instruction:

Tammy Lemoine-Assistant Superintendent of C & I & Special Programs

Proposed Actions of the Plan of Innovation

1. **DETERMINE A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL START DATE**

(TEC §25.0811a) (EB LEGAL)

The 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 start-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 interests in this matter.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Center ISD will determine on an annual basis the local starting date of the first semester, not to precede the second Monday in August of any given year.
- B. The annual calendar will be submitted by the collective support of school district staff and approved by the Board of Trustees.

2. **ALLOW ALTERNATIVES TO EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION FOR DISTINCTIVE SUBJECTS**

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

The 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 certificate 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 is not found for a unique or innovative 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 OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field for which she or he is not credentialed by the state.
- 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 the uncertified yet highly qualified educator will be developed or provided in partnership with certified teachers in the same field.
- 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.

3. ADJUST INSTRUCTIONAL MINUTES AND SCHOOL DAY LENGTH (TEC §25.081) (TEC §25.082) (EB LEGAL)

The manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Codes define the length of the instructional day as “420 minutes of instruction” or “seven hours each day including intermissions and recesses.” The intent of this code is to standardize across all districts the amount of time students are engaged in classroom learning. The school code 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 another calamity.

Center ISD believes flexibility in use of minutes as well as the length of the school day will support teachers and staff who participate in relevant professional development, perfecting their craft, deepening their content knowledge and analyzing student data. Also – particularly at the elementary level – flexibility in both instructional minutes and the length of the school day will protect all-important parent-teacher conferences especially in the event of inclement weather days, which may impact cumulative instructional minutes allocated over the course of a school year.

Center ISD will serve students through a very unique, dropout recovery program. The alternative campus has been recently established and is set for full operation beginning with the 2017-2018 school year. This program will require very flexible scheduling due to the personalized nature of the students' instructional plan. Release from this statute will help maximize the effectiveness of the program.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Center ISD will make an effort to maintain the total of 75,600 minutes of instruction per year but seeks an exemption from these statutes as necessary, so it may approach the 75,600-minute goal in a more creative manner without being confined to either 420 minutes or seven hours of instruction every day. This will offer campuses greater flexibility in creating daily/weekly instructional schedules that better meet the needs of the students we serve.

- B. 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.