

ROCKDALE ISD

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The 84th Legislative Session passed House Bill 1842, allowing Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and thus permitting exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. In an effort to promote systematic improvement and allow for more local control, Rockdale ISD elected to become a District of Innovation. The current plan became effective July 1, 2017.

A District of Innovation plan may be renewed at any time if the action is approved by a majority vote of the District Education Council and two-thirds majority vote of the board of trustees. The term of the designation as a District of Innovation may not exceed 5 years.

District of Innovation Renewal Timeline

December 2020	District level personnel will review and update the current District of Innovation plan.
January 2021	The Rockdale ISD District Education Council will review the current plan and vote to renew. The DEC must pass the District of Innovation renewal plan by a majority vote.
February 2021	The Commissioner of Education will be notified of the Board of Trustees' intent to vote on renewing the Rockdale ISD District of Innovation Plan.
February 2021	The Rockdale ISD District of Innovation renewal plan will be posted on the district's webpage for 30 days.
March 2021	A public hearing will be held prior to the school board meeting. The Rockdale ISD Board of Trustees must approve the District of Innovation Renewal plan by a 2/3 majority vote.

DISTRICT EDUCATION COUNCIL

Name:	Role:
Ken Swiech	District
Dell Giles	District
Audrey Pelzel	Teacher - Elementary

Jenah Campsey	Teacher - Elementary
Lauren Williams	Teacher - Elementary
Sarah Bownds	Teacher - Elementary
Rachael Barker	Teacher - Intermediate
Julie Hutton	Teacher - Intermediate
Mark Smith	Teacher - Intermediate
Jessica Kreusel	Teacher - Intermediate
Anna Bland	Teacher - Junior High
Rhonda Suckow	Teacher - Junior High
Julie Adams	Teacher - Junior High
Brandon Bahara	Teacher - Junior High
Jeannie Alcalar	Teacher - High School
Paige Martinez	Teacher - High School
Harold Rideaux	Teacher - High School
Laura Stevenson	Teacher - High School
Paige Morris	Non-Teaching
Kelly Windham	Non-Teaching
Brittany Barchenger	Parent
Veronica Delgado	Parent
Jessica Hurd	Parent
Jason Barcak	Parent
Rebekah Hall	Community
John Seaton	Community
Nikki Nadeau	Business
Jennifer Rice	Business
Charles Miles	School Board
Amy Casas	School Board
Alesha Eoff	Principal - Elementary
Kathy Pelzel	Principal - Intermediate
Kelly Blair	Principal - Junior High
Brent Hasselbach	Principal - High School
Britina Pesak	DEC Chair
Pam Kaufmann	DEC Past Chair

PROCESS

On January 14, 2021, the District Education Council met to review the current District of Innovation plan and discuss any possible revisions. Upon review, the committee determined that the current plan met all the district needs and revisions were not necessary. The council voted unanimously to recommend approval of the plan as is with no changes.

The renewal plan was posted on the Rockdale ISD website for review on February 19, 2021. It was presented to the Rockdale ISD Board of Trustees on March 22, 2021 and was approved. The plan is submitted to the Texas Education Agency for posting and posted to the district website.

TERM

The term of the renewal plan is for five years, beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2026 unless terminated, amended or renewed by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The District Education Council and the Board of Trustees will review the plan annually. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Board of Trustees will appoint a committee to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment. Any amendment approved by the District Education Council and adopted by the Board will adhere to the same term as the original plan.

INNOVATIONS

Rockdale ISD proposes flexibility and seeks an exemption in the following areas:

First Day of Instruction

Board Policy: EB(Legal)

TEC §25.0811

A school district may not begin instruction before the 4th Monday in August.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- More professional development opportunities during the school year for teachers
- Flexibility with the first week of school; possibility for students to have a shorter first week
- The calendar would be more aligned with college schedules, providing our students with opportunities to start summer college classes in June
- More instructional days prior to State Assessment
- Increase of instructional days in the first semester to provide more balanced semesters

Proposed Innovation:

- RISD will no longer be required to delay the start of school to the fourth Monday in August. The district will determine annually an appropriate start day for students that does not occur before the third Monday.
- RISD will continue to seek stakeholder input as required by Board Policy EB(Local) as part of the yearly calendar development.

Note:

- Changing the first day of instruction does not alter the University Interscholastic League (UIL) restrictions for the first day of practice for athletic and fine arts programs. RISD will continue to comply with the UIL calendar for summer practices.

Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator

Board Policy: FO; Student Code of Conduct

TEC §37.0012

Requires that a person be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator who is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementation of TEC Chapter 37. This provision also allows duties imposed on a campus principal or other campus administrator to be performed by the campus behavior coordinator. Duties include, but are not limited to, promptly notifying parents by telephone and in writing when a student is suspended, removed to DAEP or taken into custody by the law enforcement.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- This exemption is to only allow for the interpretation of the role and responsibilities of a Campus Behavior Coordinator to be fulfilled by multiple administrators as it is unrealistic to have only one person in this role to serve all students.

Proposed Innovation:

- The district will maintain all the duties and responsibilities outlined for the Campus Behavior Coordinator and allow the role to be fulfilled by more than one administrator per campus.
- Will provide campuses the opportunity to allow campus administrators to fully understand and get to know the students in their caseload rather than having one employee handle all discipline. While it is imperative that all employees work together and be informed as to the discipline occurring on campus, it is just as crucial for student to depend on an administrator they know and trust. Each campus should have the freedom to designate more than one campus behavior coordinator to best meet the needs of their students.
- Maintenance of student discipline will be appropriately addressed in the Student Code of Conduct.

Teacher Employment Contracts

Board Policy: DCA

TEC §21.102(b)

States that 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. In this statute, "teacher" means a principal, supervisor,

classroom teacher, school counselor, nurse, or other full-time professional employee. This statute in the TEC provides a three-year probationary period for newly hired teachers and only a one-year probationary period for teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- This limited period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the employee's effectiveness since contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the end of the school year.

Proposed Innovation:

- Experienced teachers new to the District that have been employed in public education for at least five of the previous eight years may be issued a probationary contract for up to two years from the date of District employment.

Retire/Rehire Minimum Salary

Board Policy

Teacher Retirement Guidelines

TEC §21.402

Currently all districts, when hiring a retired teacher must pay their salary based upon TEA minimum salary pay scale; in addition, the districts are required to pay a TRS surcharge. "Teacher" refers to classroom teacher, full-time speech pathologist, full-time librarian, full-time school counselor, full-time school nurse.

Rationale for the Exemption:

- RISD believes that by hiring an eligible retired teacher our students, campuses, and district will reap the reward of having a veteran educator who is still involved and passionate in the education process.
- The district will be able to have an experienced educator at a significantly lower cost than paying the minimum plus the TRS surcharge.
- Besides adding value to our schools, this would be a sound fiscal decision for our district's stakeholders.

Proposed Innovation:

- Rockdale ISD would like the opportunity to hire an eligible retired teacher and pay them a negotiated salary which may drop below the TEA minimum pay scale while also paying the required TRS surcharge.

Class Size and Student/Teacher Ratio

Board Policy EEB

TEC §25.112

TEC §25.112 sets a limit of 22:1 student/teacher ratio for grades K-4.

Rationale:

- The District will begin the school year with staff based on projections of student enrollment.
- Due to fluctuating enrollment during the school year, teachers and/or students must be moved from class to class to meet the 22:1 requirement. This exemption would give the District flexibility with the inflexible 22:1 requirement and allow students to remain with the teacher and classmates that they began the year with, fostering continuity and stability that will support increased student achievement.
- Class sizes can be organized so that student groups who need specialized assistance, such as English Language Learners and those with IEP's, can have a reduced student/teacher ratio while remaining classrooms could accommodate the other students.
- The District will not be forced to hire new teachers not accounted for in the Boards adopted budget; also negating the need to apply for a state waiver with the Texas Education Agency.

Proposed Innovation:

- The District will continue to strive to keep class sizes at or below 22:1, with the flexibility to go above 22:1 if needed.
- Should the student/teacher ratio in a single class need to exceed 23:1, the Superintendent will meet with both administrator and the teacher to discuss.
- The student/teacher ratio in a single class will not exceed 24:1.
- The District will consider in the decision making process: the makeup and chemistry of the classroom, the potential for disruption to student learning from splitting a class, the expertise and opinion of the teacher and the approval from the campus administrator.
- The Board of Trustees will be informed each time a class exceeds 22:1.

Teacher Appraisal

Board Policy DNA

TAC §150.1003(g)

TEC §21.352

By written mutual consent of the teacher and the certified appraiser, the required minimum of 45 minutes of observations may be conducted in shorter time segments. The time segments must total at least 45 minutes.

Rationale:

- T-TESS is at least one 45-minute observation period.
- The Commissioner’s Rules issued for T-Tess require mutual written agreement between the educator and appraiser to conduct the 45-minute observation period in two or more shorter sessions that aggregate to 45 minutes.
- Some RISD campuses, primarily elementary and intermediate, have classes that are less than 45 minutes in length. The schedules were developed to best meet the instructional needs of students.
- Other instructional areas, such as electives, interventions and special education may not provide 45 minutes of continuous instruction.
- A split observation could result in a technical, procedural error in the observation process, even though the overall minutes of the observation period were conducted.

Proposed Innovation:

- RISD will continue to follow the Commissioner’s Rules for teacher appraisal that provide for a single 45- minute observation for most educators.
- For teachers whose instructional assignment does not allow for a meaningful observation period of 45 minutes, the appraiser may use his/her discretion to conduct the required observation in two or more shortened periods without written agreement from the educator.
- During the preconference, the appraiser will notify the educator if the 45-minute observation period will be conducted in two or more time periods.
- This innovation applies to the 45-minute observation and does not alter the expectation that each appraiser also conduct frequent walk-through observations.

Teacher Certification

Board Policy DBA, DK

TEC §21.003(a)

States a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, education 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.

Rationale:

- Rockdale is committed to providing an excellent learning experience and values the need for certified teachers. However, the district experiences difficulty in hiring certified educators in certain areas.
- Teachers with industry certification and native Spanish speakers with qualified experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certificate.
- Flexibility could also allow a certified teacher to teach outside their field in order to avoid the disruption of an instructional path for students allowing RISD to reduce scheduling conflicts.

Proposed Innovation:

- The district will establish local requirements, such as years of experience, qualifications, and industry certifications.
- The district will utilize this exemption in the areas of Career and Technical Education, Languages other than English, dual credit, and hard to fill electives.
- For core classes, this exemption will be considered a last resort working first to hire a certified teacher.
- A currently certified teacher being asked to teach outside their certified field will be informed as soon as possible in order to plan accordingly.
- Principals will submit candidates to the superintendent who will then determine whether it is in the best interest of the District to certify the individual. The School Board will be notified prior to beginning employment.
- Teachers employed under this exemption will receive extra training in classroom management and pedagogy.