



*District of Innovation Designation:*  
Creating Choice to Ensure Student Success

Amendments

Board Approval August 9, 2021

Board Approval August 31, 2020

Board Approval: May 13, 2019

Original

Board Approval: March 20, 2017

Term of Designation: 2017 through 2022

## Waxahachie ISD's Vision

Waxahachie ISD will support and empower our community of learners for success in the 21st century.

## Waxahachie ISD's Mission Statement

Continuing our tradition of "Excellence in Education," the mission of the Waxahachie Independent School District is to develop, through a cooperative effort with the home and community, well-educated, responsible citizens who can excel in a complex world.

## Waxahachie ISD's Beliefs

During the fall of 2016, WISD designed a strategic plan for the future that allows all learners to step confidently into their futures, equipped to contribute and thrive in a dynamic world. In WISD, we believe that:

- meaningful engagement and relationship building are essential for student success.
- students have *unique* qualities and deserve a *unique* education.
- parents, educators, and the community guide each student in designing and fulfilling his/her educational vision.
- every student deserves the opportunity to learn through success, failure and discovery.
- change and growth best occur in a stimulating and innovative learning environment.
- students learning to voice their individual thoughts is imperative for progress in both themselves and the community.
- all students deserve to be taught by highly effective teachers who are committed to professional growth and passionate about learner success.

## Beginning a Time of Choice

In the summer of 2015, the 84th Texas Legislature passed HB 1842, allowing public school districts to become Districts of Innovation in order to gain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code that apply to Texas public schools. In order to be eligible for the District of Innovation designation, a district must have a "met standard" rating or higher for the current school year. As a district that has continuously maintained an accountability rating at or above state expectation, Waxahachie ISD qualifies for this designation.

On Monday, October 10, 2016, the Waxahachie ISD Board of Trustees became familiar with the benefits of gaining the District of Innovation status under HB 1842 and began to study the benefit of securing this designation for the district under TEC §12A.002. On November 14, 2016, the Waxahachie ISD Board of Trustees held a public hearing during the regularly scheduled board meeting to gather input on becoming a District of Innovation from community stakeholders. The unanimous decision to pass a resolution was made by the Board of Trustees to establish an Innovation Plan committee to explore district needs and develop a plan for innovation that best fit the needs of Waxahachie ISD.

## WISD Timeline for Seeking District of Innovation Status

- October 10, 2016, Waxahachie /SD Boardroom*
  - o Board of Trustees received information related to District of Innovation process
- November 14, 2016, Waxahachie /SD Boardroom*
  - o Regular Board Meeting
  - o Board of Trustees approves a resolution to hold public hearing for District of Innovation
  - o Public hearing held for District of Innovation
  - o Board of Trustees unanimously approved appointment of local District of Innovation committee
- November 2016 - March 2017, Waxahachie /SD*
  - o District completes strategic planning process
- January 26, 2017, 4:15 - 6:15 PM, WISD Administration Building*
  - o Initial meeting of the District Innovation Committee
  - o Review plan options and determine areas for research
- February 9, 2017, 4:15 - 6:15 PM, WISD Administration Building*
  - o 2nd meeting of the District Innovation Committee
  - o Develop district plan focused on innovation needed to provide high quality education
- February 17, 2017, Waxahachie /SD Website*
  - o Post the District of Innovation plan on the district website for 30 days for public commentary and review
- February 21 - March 20, 2017, Waxahachie, Texas*
  - o Present plan to district and community stakeholders
  - o Promote plan and encourage review of resources by all stakeholders
- March 20, 2016, Waxahachie /SD Boardroom*
  - o Public Meeting will be held to present Waxahachie ISD District of Innovation Plan by Innovation committee members
  - o Regular Board of Trustees Meeting
    - Review and consideration to approve District of Innovation Plan
    - Review and consideration to approve 2017-2018 WISD Academic Calendar

## Amendment

- May 13, 2019, Waxahachie /SD Boardroom*
  - o Regular Board Meeting
  - o Board of Trustees approves a resolution to hold public hearing for District of Innovation
  - o Public hearing held for District of Innovation Amendment
  - o Board of Trustees unanimously approved appointment of local District of Innovation committee

## Span of Local Plan

This Comprehensive Local Innovation Plan shall remain in effect for a period of five years, to include a span of years from 2017-2022 unless terminated by the commissioner pursuant to TEC §12. A.008.

## Waxahachie ISD Innovation Committee Members

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Relationship to District</u></b>
Viana Armstrong	Bilingual and ESL Coordinator
Shelle Blaylock	Assistant Superintendent of Leadership and Academics
Theresa Burkhalter	Principal, Shackelford Elementary
Amy Carpenter	Teacher, Waxahachie High School
Allison Frary	Secondary Math Coordinator
Debbie Gish	Asst. Principal, Waxahachie High School
Melanie Harbour-Pope	Dyslexia Coordinator
Carrie Kazda	Principal, Felty Elementary
Paul Kuhn	Grandparent, Howard Jr. High PTO President
Rollin Mayes	Teacher, Global High School
Jennifer Meinzer	Teacher, Clift Elementary
Lisa Mott	Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Jacob Perry	Principal, Howard Junior High Teacher,
Michelle Scott	Challenge Academy
Madeline Trevino	Parent

## Areas of Innovation

Waxahachie ISD is committed to the continued academic success and well-being of every student and strives to provide a choice to families seeking an educational destination for their children beyond traditional "one-size fits all" educational experiences. The focus of this exploration was to expand the possibilities by applying innovative strategies in areas of regulation that restrict local control while maintaining the strong educational principles and practices that have been the standard in Waxahachie ISD.

The following statutes were found to be of benefit to the students and staff of the district by enhancing the local decision-making process and maintaining a focus on the community:

- Minute s of Instruction [TEC §25.081)
- First Day of Instruction [TEC §25.0811)
- Seven Hour School Day [TEC §25.082)
- School Day Interruptions [TEC §25.083)
- Teacher Appraisal Process [TEC §21.352)

Below is a summary of the goals for each category. A detailed explanation of the specific components and the Texas Education Code that corresponds to the category follow.

### Minutes of Instruction §25.081

*Current:* Texas Education Code requires that each school district must operate so that the district provides for at least 75,600 minutes of instruction, including intermissions and recesses, for students.

*Proposed:* WISD strives to educate students in a manner that accentuates learning in a diverse learning environment. Although this expectation will remain the operating standard for the majority of campuses in the district, the committee has determined an immediate need to alter instructional formats for areas such as pre-kindergarten and alternative education campuses and to make learning personalized for students. Relief from this expectation is critical to allow local decision making toward creative solutions that best meet students' diverse learning needs.

### First Day of Instruction §25.0811

*Current:* Texas Education Code requires that a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August, unless a year round school program is offered.

*Proposed:* Through the district of innovation investigation process, our community has communicated a desire to have flexibility in deciding when the school year begins. By having a flexible start date, students will experience more balanced semesters, alignment with higher education entities, and varied options for valuable time away from school to support a community and family focus. In addition, the committee will explore the benefits of a shortened transition into the school year to allow students, families and staff to best prepare for the year ahead.

### Seven Hour School Day §25.082

*Current:* Texas Education Code requires that a school day shall be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

*Proposed:* WISD strategic planning committee discovered local needs for timely professional development that is provided throughout the year, rather than loaded at the beginning and end of the academic calendar. Through staff and community feedback, this is found to be an unfavorable method of training, when used as the sole method of delivery, with a reduced impact on instruction and student achievement. In addition, the district seeks local control to adjust the length of the school day to accommodate additional professional development and innovative learning opportunities not accomplished within a traditional seven-hour school day. The district seeks to have alternatives in planning instructional days for students while still maintaining a standard of 75,600 minutes during a school year.

### School Day Interruptions §250.83

*Current:* Texas Education Code requires that a board of trustees must develop a policy that must limit announcements other than emergency announcements to once during the school day. In addition, the district may not remove a student from a regularly scheduled class for remedial tutoring or test preparation if, as a result of the removal, the student would miss more than 10 percent of the school days on which the class is offered, unless the student's parent or another

person standing in parental relation to the student provides to the district written consent for removal from class for such purpose.

*Proposed:* For greater flexibility and opportunities to make decisions on how best to structure school days and individualize instruction, WISD seeks to award this discretion to campus and district administration in an effort to ensure that decision points put students' and campus needs first. WISD seeks to provide settings where student growth can occur in an innovative environment. To accomplish this expectation, the committee seeks opportunities to provide altered instructional days and to create flexible scheduling opportunities. Both results allow instructional decisions to be made in response to current student performance data; therefore, reducing learning gaps.

### Teacher Appraisal Process §21.352

*Current:* Texas Education Code requires the commissioner to adopt a recommended appraisal process and criteria on which to appraise the performance of teachers. The criteria must be based on observable, job-related behavior, including: (1) teachers' implementation of discipline management procedures; and (2) the performance of teachers' students. In appraising teachers, each school district shall use the appraisal process and performance criteria developed by the commissioner.

*Proposed:* The district is seeking flexibility within the recommended appraisal process and performance criteria for teachers and staff evaluated using the appraisal system Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). The district seeks to continue to utilize T-TESS as the teacher appraisal instrument, while seeking exemption from the Student Growth Measure. Data provided from district and campus local assessments will continue to be utilized following the current district assessment model.

May 2019

## Amendment to WISD District of Innovation Plan

Background:

Waxahachie ISD is committed to the continued academic success and the well-being of every student and strives to provide comprehensive course instruction throughout the duration of the school year. At this time, the District is seeking to amend the current plan as stated below by following the required state timelines and committee process.

### Amended Area of Innovation

Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade (90 % Rule)

[FEC LOCAL] [TEC §25.092]

*Current:* TEC § 25.092 states that a student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade twelve may not be given credit or final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.

A district of innovation may replace the 90 percent attendance rule with a more localized standard for issuing class credit or final grade. Attendance in each class is critical to ensure that students master the standards of instruction to the level required by the state. (Note: This does not release the district from compulsory attendance **laws**.)

*Proposed:* The district is requesting an exemption to the current requirement for students to meet the 90 percent attendance rule. This flexibility is critical to the success of high school students in the classes of 2019 and 2020. It will ensure that each student has the best opportunity to meet state expectations and to achieve graduation based on mastery rather than seat time. This will allow the district the opportunity to best address each students' needs at the local level.

July 2020

## Amendment to WISD District of Innovation Plan

### Background:

As the district is preparing for in-person and on-line instruction this fall, we foresee the need for additional flexibility within K-4 classrooms. We anticipate students moving back and forth between on-line and in-person instruction. There may be times when our on-line classrooms will exceed 22 students in K-4 as we transition students. The district will strive to remain within the current guidelines as much as possible; however, we would like flexibility to meet the instructional needs of our students and staff. The DEIC committee received communication about the proposed amendment on July 16. The committee had time to provide feedback and vote for or against the proposal through July 23, 2020. The committee approved the amendment by a 2/3 majority vote. The original DOI plan and proposed amendment was posted on the district website for 30 days beginning July 28, 2020. On August 31, 2020, the WISD school board voted to approve the amendment to the DOI plan.

### Amended Areas of Innovation

#### Class Size TEC §25.112

*Current:* Texas Education Code limits the number of students in grades Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 22. While the maximum number of students in K-4 classrooms may be addressed by a state waiver, the waivers must be applied for annually.

*Proposed:* By seeking the exception from TEC §25.112, the district would have flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation Designation and would not be required to seek waivers annually. While the District intends to remain within the guidelines of the current education code as much as possible, the District seeks flexibility to provide the best learning environment for our K-4 students, including more flexibility when teaching, creative ways of delivering instruction, different types of instructional delivery and the ability to manage increases in class sizes.

#### Notice of Class Size TEC §25.113

*Current:* Texas Education Code requires districts to notify each parent in the class section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, and inform them when a waiver has been submitted.

*Proposed:* In the event a classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio in grades K-4, the class sizes will be reviewed by appropriate district and campus administration. The Board of Trustees will be informed of K-4 classes that exceed 22:1. TEA waivers and parent notification for class sizes in grades K-4 exceeding 22 will not be required.

June 2021

## Amendment to WISD District of Innovation Plan

### Background:

At this time, the District does not have flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all Waxahachie ISD employees. The District is prohibited from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. The District is seeking to amend the current District of Innovation plan as stated below by following the required state timelines and committee process.

### Amended Area of Innovation

#### Preclusion from Providing Alternative Uniform Group Coverage TEC §22.004

Current: Texas Education Code precludes the District from providing alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program once the program of coverages under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code is implemented.

Proposed: By seeking the exemption from TEC §22.004, the district would have increased local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee needs.

## December 2021

### Proposed Amendment to WISD District of Innovation Plan

#### Background:

The current certification requirements impede the District's ability to hire professionals with industry experience to teach Career and Technical Education (CTE Courses). In order to provide more students the opportunity to take such courses and 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.

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 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 specialty courses.

### Proposed Area of Innovation

#### Teacher Certification TEC §21.003

Current: 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.”

Proposed: By seeking the exemption from TEC §21.003, a person may be employed as a CTE teacher by a school district without an appropriate certificate or permit issued by Subchapter B of Texas Education Code Chapter 21, if the person, in the subject matter to be taught, has relevant work experience, formal training and/or education, and licensure, certification or registration.