

Proposed District of Innovation Plan

Forsan ISD

What is a District of Innovation?

During the 84th Session of the Texas Legislature (Spring 2015), the legislature passed an amendment to Chapter 12 of the Texas Education Code (TEC). The amendment created Districts of Innovation (DOI) and outlined specific processes for becoming a DOI. Only Districts who have at least an “acceptable performance” on the most recent performance rating are eligible. Each DOI plan is unique to that specific District and is created through a process which includes a public hearing, involvement by a committee (FISD chose to include community members as well as staff members), a public posting of the proposed plan for 30 days, and approval of the plan by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of the board. The plan may be in place up to five years. The designation allows the District to be exempt from certain sections of the Texas Education Code (similar to a Charter School). This designation will allow FISD to make adjustments in some procedures which directly or indirectly hinder our purpose of providing the very best education.

What is Forsan ISD trying to accomplish?

The specific rules from which FISD is seeking relief are listed below. Generally, FISD hopes to provide a school calendar which provides traditional holiday breaks for families, and which maximizes the amount of educational time prior to state mandated testing. FISD is also looking to make adjustments in state requirements in order to return decision making to the local school board so that unique student and community needs may be met. (See notes with each exemption listed below).

What are the specific exemptions proposed?

1. School Calendar (TEC 25.0811)

The Texas Education Code states that, “...a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.” For the 2017-18 school year, this would mean the first day of instruction for students would be on August 28, 2017. The FISD proposal allows for an earlier start date in each of the next five years in order to meet the needs of the

District. The exact start date will be determined annually through the normal process of establishing a school calendar. The requested flexibility will allow:

- A more balanced number of days in the fall and spring semesters.
- Fall semester tests prior to the Christmas vacation.
- Allow high school dual credit students to meet with high school staff for a brief period prior to the start of their dual credit classes. (Coordinating start dates with the institute of higher learning partner.)
- Maximize the number of instructional days prior to state-mandated testing in May.

2. Class Size K-4 (TEC 25.112, 25.113)

The Texas Education Code states that a school may not enroll “more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class...” Due to the ebb and flow of the economy in our District, the enrollment numbers may shift quickly. FISD desires to prevent a disruption caused by reshuffling classes or the need to seek a waiver if classes grow beyond 22 students after the start of the school year. This exemption would allow us the ability to make the best decisions for meeting the needs of our students, staff and District. Parents will be notified of the possibility of classes enrolling more than 22 students in a K-4 classroom. The intent is to stay as close to 22:1 as possible in any class that goes over that mark.

3. Teacher Certification (TEC 21.003)

Forsan ISD believes that hiring certified teachers is a priority. However, there are situations where the current certification requirements limit the ability of this small district to meet the needs of our students. This exemption would allow us to find the best teacher for the positions and use our current staff in an efficient manner. The use of industry experts in CTE areas would benefit our students. This flexibility would allow FISD to more easily partner with colleges/universities for dual credit courses. The ability to expand course offerings is also beneficial to our community. Although not limited to designated shortage areas, fine arts, LOTE and CTE, those are the primary areas of concern. The following process will be utilized for this exemption:

- Campus principals may submit a request for approval of an “Innovation Permit” to the superintendent to allow:
 - A certified teacher to teach a subject or subjects out of the teacher’s certified field, or
 - A non-certified individual with proven credentials and/or experience in a field of study to teach in a subject area specific to those qualifications.

- Supporting documentation to include the credentials and qualifications of the candidate to teach the designated subject must be included with the request.
- Upon superintendent approval of the teaching assignment, the board will receive notification of the assignment.
- The “Innovation Permit” for non-certified personnel will require an employment agreement rather than a chapter 21 contract.

4. Teacher Appraisal System [TEC 21.352, 21.354 (c) (d), 21.3541 (f) (g)]

The T-TESS system for evaluating or appraising the teaching staff has been implemented at FISD. The T-PESS system for principal evaluations has also been implemented. This system calls for the addition of a component which ties student achievement to the appraisal of each teacher. This exemption will allow the District to continue to use the State’s evaluation system of teachers minus the student achievement requirement. FISD uses various methods for breaking down student data and for disaggregating it. Data from many sources is critical in making educational decisions. However, the specific T-TESS approach to connecting student STAAR scores to teacher evaluations is not our goal. This exemption would allow FISD to implement locally-developed systems aligned with district goals and strategic plans. The District sees the following issues with the State’s “student progress and growth measure” sections of T-TESS.

- The use of test scores creates disparity between teachers who teach core subject areas tested in STAAR versus non-core testing area teachers.
- Finalized state standardized test scores are not received until after teacher appraisal deadlines.
- FISD teachers and administrators are still trying to assimilate the new appraisal systems of T-TESS and T-PESS.
- Current uncertainties with legislative decisions and processes concerning testing and accountability systems make the student performance factor unreliable.

5. Teacher Contract Days (TEC 21.401)

The Texas Education Code defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract with 187 days. Recent legislative changes to the law regarding the length of a school year from 180 instruction days to a minimum of 75,600 minutes allows for substantial calendar changes. The calendar committee and school board may alter the number of student days from year to year based on the needs of the students, the community and the District. The number of student days may change based on the length of each school day and this exemption will allow for the board to reduce the number of teacher days as appropriate without a reduction in salary.

6. Length of School Day (TEC 25.081; TEC 25.082)

“A school day shall be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recess.” FISD is asking for an exemption from this (and the 420 minute definition of a day) in order to allow for various flexible scheduling opportunities throughout a school year. It is our intention to meet or exceed the required 75,600 minutes required. The flexibility of various lengths in school days will allow for everything from increased staff development to targeted instruction with small groups of students.