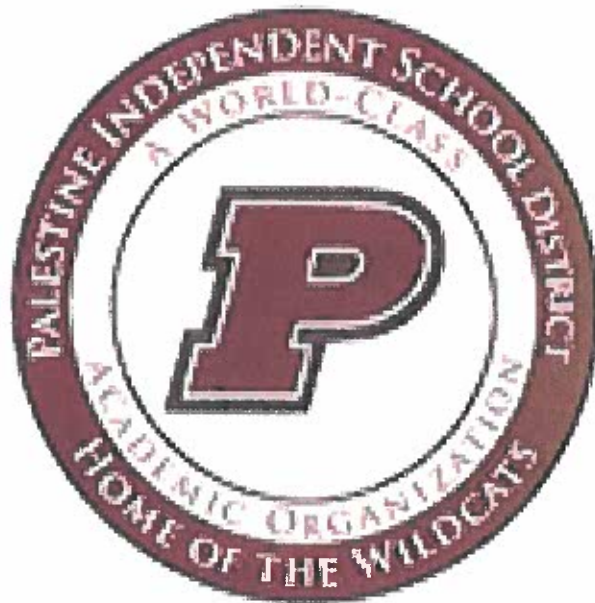


Palestine ISD

District of Innovation Plan



District of Innovation Renewal and Amendment, 2021

The District of Innovation plan, as passed by the 84th Legislative Session and adopted in 2016, has allowed the District to customize the operation of campuses in areas that have been beneficial for students and staff. The flexibility in these areas, including the extension of probationary contracts, the ability to change the start date of the school year, and no longer being required to file a waiver for class size ratios, has proven to meet the needs of Palestine ISD.

The District will continue the implementation of the DOI with an amendment to address the alignment of teacher contract days to the required instructional and attendance time for students.

Introduction

The 84th legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allowed traditional independent school districts the ability to access flexibilities which had previously been reserved for Texas' open enrollment charter schools. In order for an independent school district to obtain these flexibilities, districts must seek designation as a "District of Innovation." On Monday, October 17, 2016, the Palestine ISD Board of Trustees initiated the process by adopting a resolution to pursue a "District of Innovation" designation.

Timeline of Events for DOI

September, 2016	Begin planning process for District of Innovation status
September, 2016	Create DOI Committee
October 11, 2016	Community Meeting (TACE event)
October 3-12, 2016	Campus meeting for each campus via Lunch in the Lounge
October 19, 2016	DOI Meeting
October 24, 2016	Public Hearing at October Board Meeting
November 2, 2016	DOI Meeting
November 9, 2016	District Action Team Meeting
November 10, 2016	DOI Plan posted on PISD Website
December 14, 2016	Present final plan to PISD Board of Trustees

Committee Members

Jason Marshall	Superintendent
Suzie Eiben	Human Resource Department
David Atkeisson	Finance Department
Tammy Jones	Instructional Services
Dr. William Stewart	High School Principal
Stephen Cooksey	Junior High Principal
Jaime Clark	Story Principal
Melissa Molandes	Southside Principal
Barbara Dutton	Northside Principal
Sheila Bradley	Washington Principal
Dyna Tutt	School Board Member
Tiffany Durham	PHS Parent
Tracie Ratliff	PJH Parent
Tammy Wedin	AM Story Parent
Laura Looney	Southside Parent
Rachel Menjivar	Northside Parent
Carolina Dominquez	PHS Teacher
Olivia Henry	PJH Teacher
Chad Everhart	Story Teacher
Melanie Meza	Southside Teacher
Dru Forward	Southside Teacher
Stacy Britt	Northside Teacher

1.

Student Discipline Provisions

Currently

Senate Bill 107 requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

Proposed

The proposal is for the District to abstain from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. PISD's approach to discipline is becoming more collaborative, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration in regard to student discipline, as outlined in the PISD Student Code of Conduct.

2.

Probationary Contracts

Currently

For experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years. This time period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

Proposed

For experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years from the last date of district employment. For any teacher returning to PISD that was previously employed by PISD, the same rules will apply for the length of the probationary contract. A teacher hired to return to the district would be on a probationary status for two school years.

3.

School start date

Currently

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Proposed

PISD students will start class no earlier than the 2nd Monday in August. Our primary goal is to create flexibility in our calendar which will be beneficial to all stakeholders.

4.

Class Size Ratio

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. There are times when the classes are below the 22:1 ratio after the waiver process has been completed due to students moving out of the district.

Proposed

PISD has filed for waivers on a yearly basis because of our unpredicted growth. While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff, and the best teacher to student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. We do not believe it has a negative effect when a district adds only

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. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. In the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio for Kindergarten – 4th grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, but the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees for approval. The board will be provided an update of class size numbers at the end of the 1st six week and at the end of the 4th six weeks. This exemption only allows PISD the local control over class size ratios, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements. This plan also emphasizes the importance of flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passions and needs. This grants flexibility in class size at all times- regrouping for success, small groups, large groups, etc. It also works to minimize paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place additional focus on student success. An exemption in meeting Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112, will allow the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waivers when the need arises.

5.

Teacher Certification

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.

Proposed

PISD is committed to placing a life changer in every classroom. In order to best serve PISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard to-fill, high demand dual credit, and career and technical/STEAM (applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts & Mathematics) courses. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training of professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. This exemption directly supports the move from “highly qualified”

requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, the District will have the flexibility to hire internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area. In addition, this exemption will afford the District the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades or vocations to teach the crafts of those trades or vocations (such as welding, fine arts, health sciences, law, etc.) if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses.

6.

90 Percent Attendance Rule

Currently

State law currently requires students attend class 90 percent of the school days in order to earn credit. The law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on content mastery.

Proposed

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Abstaining from the requirement means the district won't have to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This exemption will allow the District to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities. It will also allow PISD administrators to award credit to students because they can show they understand the concepts, rather than because they've attended a certain number of school days. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the District by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates. PISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate mastery, given this exemption. This exemption supports overarching goals in the strategic plan to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers. Relief from Section 25.092 does not in

any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

7.

Teacher Contract Days

Currently

A change in Texas state law has converted the days of required instructional and attendance time for students to 75,600 minutes. The change has resulted in the possibility of decreasing the number of days that students must attend school. However, this change does not address a similar need to decrease the number of work days required for teachers and professional staff if a district deems it appropriate.

Proposed

The Texas Education Code Section 21.401 defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract, which is equivalent to 187 days in Palestine ISD. The proposal would reduce teacher contract days from the 187 days minimum required service to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. Additionally, the exemption will assist in the alignment of the 75,600 minutes required of students.

Benefits of the exemption:

- Increase the daily rate of teachers' pay
- Enhance teacher recruitment
- Improve teacher morale