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Westphalia ISD District of Innovation Plan

In January 2017, the Westphalia ISD Board of Trustees charged the administration to work with the District Site Based Decision Making Committee to develop a “District of Innovation Plan” as permitted by the Texas Legislature under HB 1842 (TAC Chapter 102). The District of Innovation Plan, as developed, is intended to enhance the educational environment in Westphalia ISD. The SBDM Committee that developed this plan is substantially composed of teachers. The ultimate goals of the plan are to advance innovative curriculum, instructional methods, community participation, governance of campuses, and parental involvement by eliminating onerous compliance requirements and focusing district resources on what matters most.

Term

The term of the plan is for five years beginning August 1, 2017 and ending July 31, 2022, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The committee will monitor the effectiveness of the plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications.

Immediate Advantages Resulting From the Exemptions Sought

- Hiring the best teachers / staff available.
- Providing greater flexibility in assigning teachers in hard-to-fill areas.
- Providing greater flexibility in ensuring new teachers will be effective in the classroom.
- Providing greater flexibility over the school calendar ensuring that it reflects the preferences of the local committee and the Board of Trustees.
- Eliminating requirements in half-day programs that are in conflict with other TEC mandates.
- Eliminating state reporting that takes time but delivers no advantage to the district.
- Eliminating unnecessary local notices that takes time but delivers no advantage to the district.
- Providing greater flexibility in meeting the requirements of mandated committees.
- Eliminating redundant requirements that serve no purpose.
- Improving teacher morale by eliminating bureaucratic rules.
- Streamline processes to allow local planning efforts take precedence over state compliance activities eliminating hours of work that could be better spent on the needs of the district’s students.

District of Innovation Plan: Areas of State Law Considered for Exemptions

Westphalia ISD will consider ALL permitted exemptions as described in the District of Innovation legislation (TAC 102) of 2015. The following items identify exemptions that the District will seek immediately. Westphalia ISD reserves the right to examine and approve exemptions in all areas identified in statute or Commissioner Rules.

Chapter 21: Educators

Teacher Certification

Statutory Citation: TEC 21.003, TAC Title 19 Part 7 Chapter 231, Subchapters A-G, DK Legal, DK Local, DK Exhibit

Westphalia ISD will be exempt from the requirements which limit the district's ability to hire the best candidate for a job based solely on certification issues.

There are rare instances when an uncertified person is the best individual for the job. There are professionals from various academic or vocational fields that can be the best candidate to teach a particular course even if they are not yet certified to teach. WISD will continue to seek and employ fully certified teachers.

Teacher Instructional Assignment

Statutory Citation: TEC 21.003, TEC 21.044, TAC Title 19 Part 7 Chapter 231, Subchapters A-G

Westphalia ISD will be exempt from the requirements which limit the district's ability to assign staff to meet local needs. Current requirements sometimes limit the ability of WISD to staff hard-to-fill positions. While WISD will continue to seek and employ fully certified teachers, exemptions from these requirements will allow the district to meet its staffing needs. Examples of these exemptions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Allow an elementary certified teacher with expertise in early grades (ie 1st/2nd grade) to teach kindergarten.
- Allow a teacher certified to teach through 6th grade to teach courses in grades seven and/or eight.
- Allow a teacher certified to teach elementary reading to be the reading teacher of record for middle and/or high school students.
- Allow a teacher certified in middle school and/or high school mathematics to teach elementary grades such as fourth and/or fifth.
- Allow a teacher to teach one or two classes out of their certified field in an area or areas that the teacher has college course work and/or expertise.
- Allow for greater flexibility in determining appropriate CTE experience in order to teach a CTE course. District of Innovation Plan: Areas of State Law Considered for Exemptions
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Teacher Contract Days

Statutory Citation: TEC 21.401, DCB Legal, DCB Local

Current education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract equivalent to 187 days. Proposal would reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. This would be an attempt to better align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students.

- a) Will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers
- b) Enhance teacher recruitment
- c) Improve teacher morale

Chapter 25: Admission, Transfer, and Attendance

School Calendar

Statutory Citation: Texas Education Code (TEC) Section 25.0811 and Section 25.0812:EB Legal

Westphalia ISD will be exempt from the first day of instruction requirements listed in TEC 25.0811 and the last day of instruction requirements listed in TEC 25.0812.

Current law mandates a school start date of the 4th Monday of August or later. This requirement creates unequal semesters, poor decisions on scheduled holidays, and a school year that ends in June. Westphalia ISD, using educator and community input, should be allowed to develop a school calendar that best meets the needs of our students, parents, staff, and community. Multiple calendar options will be developed for consideration. The calendars will be presented to district staff for a vote. The calendar with the majority vote will be presented to the Board of Trustees for their review and consideration. Final calendar approval, including when the WISD school year begins and ends, will be made by the locally elected WISD Board of Trustees.

Length of School Day

Statutory Citation: TEC 25.081 and 25.082

Westphalia ISD will be exempt from the length of school day as listed in TEC 25.081 and 25.082.

The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction within a designated school day will assist with personalizing learning to better meet student needs. This flexibility has the added benefit of allowing the possibility of an altered length of a school day, which may include, for example, a later start/early release time which will accommodate professional learning/collaboration opportunities for teachers. Additionally, the flexibility from this requirement would enable the District to continue to offer Pre-Kindergarten to the maximum number of eligible students through half-day sessions. As a component of the annual school district calendar development process, WISD will carefully analyze the needs of students and employees to determine which dates should be modified. Modification to the length of certain dates will be recommended when there is a clearly identified purpose, such as professional learning, focused on meeting the needs of students and employees. It is recommended that future SBDM calendar sub-committees fully explore the flexibility found within this exemption by reviewing the current practice of modifying the length of school days and fully consider options that will provide the maximum benefits to students, teachers, and families. The action steps listed below represent the calendar development process which allows for input from all areas of the school district:

Inter-District Transfers

Statutory Citation: FDA LOCAL, TEC 25.036

Currently, under Texas Education Code 25.036, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC 25.036, has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year.

Westphalia ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules, and regulations of the district. TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one-year commitment by the district. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, Westphalia ISD seeks exemption from the one year transfer commitment.

Local Guidelines

Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

Chapter 28: Courses of Study; Advancement

School Health Advisory Council

Statutory Citation: TEC 28.004

Westphalia ISD will be exempt from the requirement to hold a minimum of four meetings per year. The WISD SHAC committee shall meet at least once per year. The district's size and the stability of the membership of the SHAC committee ensures that committee members are aware of the needs of the district's students and are often able to review, advise, and revise plans in fewer than four meetings. The WISD Board of Trustees and the members of the SHAC committee should determine how often the committee should meet.

Chapter 37: Discipline; Law and Order

Campus Behavior Coordinator

Statutory Citation: TEC 37.0012

Westphalia ISD will be exempt from the requirement to designate a campus behavior coordinator for each campus.

The requirements in TEC 37.0012 are redundant. WISD utilizes a multi-administrator approach for student discipline. The campus principals and assistant principals already serve as "behavior coordinators" and it is unnecessary to designate one of them as such.

