

WELLS ISD DISTRICT of INNOVATION PLAN (HB 1842) 2021-2022
(RENEWAL)

HB 1842, of the 84th Legislative Session, allows public schools to have more flexibility. This provides districts with the opportunity to meet the needs of our students and community.

This plan would go into effect for the 2022-2023 school year. The plan could be amended at any time by the committee with approval by the board of trustees.

Committee Members:

Jill Gaston - Superintendent	Alison Thigpen – Elementary Teacher
Kristel Hise - Principal	Tammy Timmons – Elementary Teacher
Rhonda Redd - Assistant Principal	Joy Weber - Elementary Teacher
Friday Wright - Special/ Federal Programs	Jana Pool - Elementary Teacher
Kathy Ford – District Counselor	Bonnie Denmon – JH/HS Teacher
Slade Johnson – Technology Director	Mike Alberts - JH/HS Teacher
Krystal Tarrant - Reading Specialist/ Testing Coordinator	Nikki Hightower- JH/HS Teacher

District of Innovation Timeline

Tuesday, July 13, 2021- 7:00 PM, Board Room: The Wells ISD Board of Trustees approves a motion to renew a local District of Innovation Plan and to approve members of the District of Innovation Committee to develop that plan.

Wednesday, November 3, 2021 - 3:30 PM, Board Room: The District of Innovation Committee will meet to develop the District of Innovation Plan

- ★ Post the District of Innovation Plan on the District website for 30 days.

Thursday, December 9, 2021 - 7:00 PM, Board Room

- ★ Board approval of the District of Innovation Plan by a 2/3 majority vote at the regular meeting of the Wells ISD Board of Trustees.

Term of the Plan

The term of Wells ISD’s Innovation Plan will be five years. The plan will become effective upon approval of 2/3 vote of the Board of Trustees. This plan will go into effect with the 2022-2023 school year and conclude at the end of the 2027-2028 school year unless eliminated by the Wells ISD Board of Trustees. The District Innovation Committee will annually assess the effectiveness of the plan. If recommendations are made to amend the plan it would be done as required by law that includes public posting, approval by the committee, and the Board of Trustees.

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Proposed Actions of the Plan of Innovation

As a result of this plan, Wells ISD will apply the following innovative governance guidelines to the unique, local and instructional needs of its students and community.

1. **School Start Date** (*EB LEGAL*) (*Ed. Code 25.0811*)

Currently: *Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August.*

Local Innovation Strategy: To allow for a calendar that fits the local needs of our students and community, we would like to consider mandating a start date of no earlier than August 10 each year which will:

- ★ provide flexibility in developing calendars each year
- ★ provide more days of instruction before state assessment
- ★ afford teachers the opportunity to receive meaningful professional development during the school year instead of frontloading all of the staff development days prior to the beginning of school
- ★ The annual calendar will be submitted by the District Calendar Committee and approved by the board of trustees.

2. **Length of School Day** (*EC LEGAL*) (*Ed Code 25.082*)

Currently: *State law currently requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day in order to count for ADA calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.*

Local Innovation Strategy: Exempting from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Wells ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements.

This exemption will allow for local control regarding the early dismissal of students for various purposes. Early release days may be used for additional professional development, unique instructional arrangements, teacher collaboration, teacher/parent conferences, releasing prior to a holiday and other special occasions, or other school related activities.

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3. **Class Size Waivers** (EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.111) (Ed. Code 25.112) (Ed. Code 25.113)

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. Many times soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of the district and we are below the 22:1 ratio

Local Innovation Strategy: While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, we do not believe it has a negative effect when you only add 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.

- ★ Wells ISD will attempt to keep all K-4th core classrooms to a 22:1 ratio. However, in the event the class size exceeds this ratio, the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees.
- ★ If, during the school year, a K-4 homeroom exceeds 22:1, the administration will have 30 school days to consider:
 - The subject/age to be taught, the teaching methodology to be used and any need for individual instruction in the class;
 - Available space and resources;
 - Whether another teacher should be hired (thus creating a new classroom);
 - Whether a teaching assistant could be added to the homeroom class; or
 - Whether keeping the class intact is more advantageous than separating students, in which case the class size may slightly exceed 22:1.
- ★ Additionally, consistent with TEC §25.112, Wells ISD will not be required to seek consent from the Board of Trustees for a homeroom classroom that may exceed 22:1 during the last 12 weeks of the school year.
- ★ A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio, although the Wells ISD Board of Trustees must still consent and parents must still be notified.
- ★ Required parent notification will not be necessary until the class size has exceeded the 22:1 for a period of 4 consecutive weeks.

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4. **Implement A Local Teacher and Administrator Appraisal System** (DNA LEGAL, DNA LOCAL) (Ed. Code 21.352) (Ed. Code 21.3541)

Currently: New state-wide teacher appraisal systems, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-P ESS), are being introduced for the first time since 1997. While these systems are designed to meet the needs of the entire state, they do not adequately align with the standards and expectations in Wells ISD. These systems also require state standardized test scores be used as the primary evaluation measure for both teachers and administrators.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Wells ISD will develop a new localized appraisal system which will better align with the Wells ISD academic goals and objectives and local expectations. This exemption would allow local flexibility to evaluate various performance measures, including classroom observations, goal setting and tracking, and collective (not individual) student growth progress toward identified learning objectives.

5. **Teacher Certification** (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT) (Ed. Code 21.003) (Ed. Code 21.053) (Ed. Code 21.057)

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.

Local Innovation Strategy: In order to best serve Wells ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally:

- ★ The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach outside of their certified field. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which qualify them to teach this subject.
- ★ An individual with experience in a CTE, Fine Art, or Technology Applications field could be eligible to teach through a local teaching certificate. The principal must submit a request to the superintendent with the individual's credentials. The superintendent will approve the request if the individual will be an asset to students. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees. Local teaching certificates will be for one year, and reviewed annually based on continued need and teacher effectiveness. The teacher will be at-will.
- ★ In exceptional circumstances, when a certified educator is not found for a unique or innovative class, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow a non-certified yet highly qualified professional to teach OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field for which she or he is not credentialed by the state.

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- ★ In the event an uncertified yet highly qualified educator or professional is assigned to a course, the superintendent will inform and obtain consent from the board of trustees and will notify parents of students who benefit from this decision.

6. **Probationary Contracts** (*DCA LEGAL*) (*Ed. Code 21.102 (b)*)

Currently: 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.

Local Innovation Strategy: For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to Wells ISD that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, the probationary period will be two years.

- ★ This will provide sufficient time to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers as well as provide time for development and growth.

7. **Student Attendance and Course Credit** (*TEC 28.023*) (*FEC (legal and local)*)

Currently: Texas Education Code restricts a student from receiving credit or a final grade in a course of study in which the student was not in attendance for at least 90% of the days the course was offered. If the student attends the course at least 75% of the time, the student may be awarded credit if he/she successfully completes a plan of action determined by the principal. An established attendance committee must hear petitions for credit from students that failed to meet the plan of action. The committee may approve the award of credit based on extenuating circumstances.

Wells ISD does have rigorous course options with high expectations. Students are highly encouraged to stretch their academic capability by taking advanced level courses. If a student attempts to take a course, but it is later determined that a different course of study is most appropriate, we feel the principal should be allowed to approve a schedule change without regard to developing an individual plan of action. The student will be required to meet the instructional requirements of the new course in order to obtain an expected level of mastery of the curriculum.

Additionally, this would apply for a student that transfers to the district during the school year with a course of study that may not be offered at the campus.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Regardless of the percentage of days a student is in attendance, the principal may approve a schedule change and award course credit if it is determined that the student sufficiently meets the instructional requirements of the course of study.

If the principal does not award course credit for a student due to poor attendance (less than 90%) the student may petition for a review and decision by the Attendance Committee. If the committee denies the credit or final grade, then the student may appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees. The decision of the Board is final.

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8. Inter-district Transfers (FDA Legal, Local) (Ed. Code 25.001, Ed. Code 25.036)

Currently: A district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. A transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year. Wells 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.

Local Innovation Strategy:

Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules and regulations of the District. The District is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one year commitment in accepting transfer applicants for the following circumstances..

- ★ student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion.
- ★ student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard
- ★ student has not attended required interventions (as needed or assigned)

9. Teacher Contract Days (DCB Legal, DCB Local) (ED. Code 21.401)

Currently: Education law defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract equivalent to 187 days.

We would propose having the option to reduce teacher contract days from 187 to better align with the current required minutes of instruction with no effect on salaries. This plan would take effect beginning with the 2022-2023 school year.

Innovation Strategy

- ★ The reduction in contract days at our current salary schedule would make us more competitive.
- ★ This plan would increase the daily rate of pay for our teachers
- ★ In subsequent years it will be part of the calendar planning process to maintain the reduced number of contract days

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10. Site-Based Decision Making (TEC 11.251, 11.252, 11.253) (BQ, BQA, BQB Legal & Local)

Currently: The above provisions require a district and campus based committees with specific committee member make-ups and plans.

Wells ISD has decreased in enrollment over the last several years to 258 students. The decrease in enrollment has caused a greater stress on both employees and parents who want to be involved with school related activities. Wells ISD is seeking to combine the district and campus level committees and plans required.

Innovation Strategy

- ★ Wells ISD will replace the former district/ campus level committees and processes with one complete committee.
- ★ The district level committee will establish sub-level committees on an as needed basis to address specific grade level or grade range details. Sub-committees may have a lead from the district committee, but additional individuals who are not part of the district committee.
- ★ The committee will meet a minimum of three times per year.
- ★ The committee will report to the board at least once a year.
- ★ The committee make-up will be equivalent to the district committee as described in TEC 11.252.
- ★ The committee will create a plan that encompasses requirements as described in BQ(LEGAL) for both district and campus planning.