

District of Innovation Designation:
Creating Choice to Ensure Student Success

***House Bill 1842 (84th Session of the Texas Legislature) in part
Amended Chapter 12 of the Texas Education Code (TEC)***

West Independent School District
David Truitt, Superintendent



Approved by the West ISD Board of Trustees on May 10, 2017

Term of Designation: 2017-2022

Statutory Requirements

House Bill 1842 (2015) created the law that allows for the designation of Districts of Innovation (DOI). The law can be found in Chapter 12A of the Texas Education Code (TEC). This chapter provides that a traditional school district that is rated acceptable or better may create a district-level innovation plan, potentially including exemptions from the vast majority of the TEC, which constitutes the state's regulatory framework and statutory safety net for public schools.

Districts of Innovation may be exempted from a number of state statutes and will have:

- Greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students;
- Increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

House Bill 1842 specifies that “a local innovation plan must provide for a comprehensive educational program for the district, which may include:

- Innovative curriculum, instructional methods, and provisions regarding community participation, campus governance, and parental involvement;
- Modifications to the school day or year;
- Provisions regarding the district budget and sustainable program funding;
- Accountability and assessment measures that exceed the requirements of state and federal law; and
- Any other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees.”

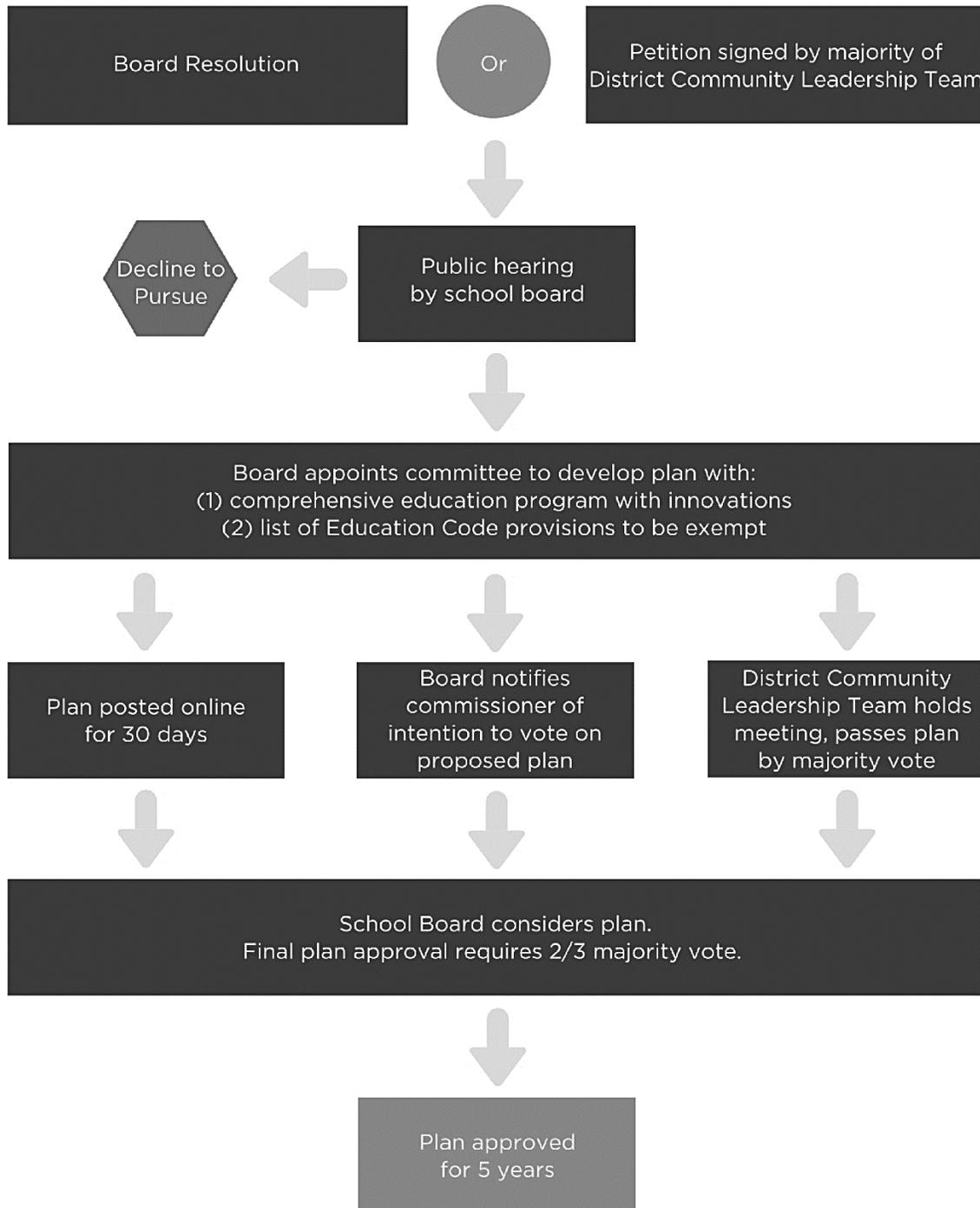
A district may become a DOI by following these steps as laid out in statute:

1. The district's Board of Trustees adopts a resolution to consider becoming a DOI, or receives a petition signed by a majority of the members of the district-level planning committee established under TEC §11.251.
2. The Board holds a public hearing to consider becoming a DOI.
3. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Board either:
 - Declines to pursue the designation or
 - Appoints a committee to develop a local innovation plan in accordance with TEC §12A.003.
4. The committee then drafts a local innovation plan that must provide for a district-wide comprehensive educational program.
 - Identify requirements imposed by the TEC that inhibit the goals of the plan from which the district should be exempted; the exemptions sought by the district cannot include statutes that are identified as non-exemptible under TEC §12A.004.
5. The final version of the proposed innovation plan must be posted on the district's website for 30 days.

ELEMENTS OF BECOMING A DOI

- **Local control:** Districts decide what exemptions best suit their needs.
- **Customization:** Districts can create an innovation plan for a level of school, grade level or a single campus.
- **Autonomy:** Submit a plan to TEA, but approval is not required.
- **Flexibility:** Can seek exemptions from the 90 percent attendance rule, student discipline provisions and more.

6. The Board must notify the Commissioner of its intention to vote on adoption of the proposed innovation plan.
7. The district-level planning committee established under TEC §11.251 must consider the final version of the innovation plan in a public meeting and approve it by a majority vote.
8. Upon conclusion of the 30-day posting period and after the affirmative vote of the district-level planning committee, the full Board may adopt the proposed plan by a two-thirds vote.



West ISD DOI Advisory Team

- David Truitt, Superintendent
- Donna Burrow, West Elementary School Teacher
- Sara Crow, West Elementary School Teacher
- Gina Hrabal, West Elementary School Teacher
- Jonathan Shaw, West Middle School Teacher
- Candace Eubanks, West Middle School Teacher
- Julie Caspers, West Middle School Teacher
- Kim Woodard, West High School Teacher
- Shawn Rejcek, West High School Teacher
- Tanya Snook, West High School Teacher
- Toni Borrás, Brookhaven Youth Ranch Teacher
- Jacque Souders, Brookhaven Youth Ranch Teacher
- Debbie Vrba, Brookhaven Youth Ranch Teacher
- Roy Janek, Community Member
- Stephanie Kucera, Community Member
- Jeni Janek, Parent
- Sheree Corn, Parent
- Rusty Johnson, Parent
- Jeff Holloman, Parent
- Ricky Adams, Parent



District Advisory Members (Non-Voting Roles): Carla Sykora, Director of Special Education, Amanda Adams, Executive Director for Teaching and Learning, and Charles Mikeska, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, Cari Detlefsen, West Elementary School Principal, Michele Scott, West Middle School Principal, Don Snook, West High School Principal, and Theresa Soukup, Brookhaven Youth Ranch Principal.

West ISD DOI Timeline of Events

During the January 11, 2017, Regular Board Meeting, the West ISD Board of Trustees approved the Resolution to begin the District of Innovation process and work. The Board approved the Resolution 7-0.

During the February 8, 2017, Regular Board Meeting, the West ISD Board of Trustees held the Public Hearing and formed the District of Innovation Advisory Team. On February 21, 2017, Mr. David Truitt, Superintendent, notified the Commissioner of Education via email of West ISD's intent to study and possibly create a DOI plan.

The District of Innovation Advisory Team met on the following dates:

- Monday, March 20, 2017, at 6:30 PM at West Middle/High School
- Monday, March 27, 2017, at 6:30 PM at West Middle/High School
- Thursday, April 6, 2017, at 6:30 PM at West Middle/High School

During the April 6, 2017, District of Innovation Advisory Team Meeting, the proposed West ISD DOI Plan was approved by a 20-0 vote by the DOI Advisory Team. Each team member signed off on the plan.

Per TEC §12A.005 (a)(1), the DOI Plan was posted to the West ISD website at www.westisd.net for 30 days. The plan was posted from Friday, April 7, 2017, through Monday, May 8, 2017.

On Wednesday, May 10, 2017, a Public Hearing was held during the Regular Board Meeting to present and answer questions about the DOI Plan. Also on this night, the West ISD Board of Trustees approved the DOI Plan by a vote of 7-0. David Truitt, Superintendent, notified the Commissioner of Education via email of West ISD's intent to vote on the proposed DOI Plan. This plan will go into effect for the 2017-2018 school year.

West ISD Belief Statements

Vision: The West Independent School District, with children as its first priority, strives to provide a safe, rigorous, stimulating academic environment in which students find both challenge and support to exceed state and federal standards while acquiring skills to make life long choices.

Mission: West Independent School District is a community of learners. We strive to provide a rigorous, stimulating academic environment in which students, our first priority, find both challenge and support. We nurture a sense of curiosity, connection, and love of learning that extends beyond school years. We believe that exceeding state and federal academic standards is a non-negotiable. With equal regard, we support the development of social skills by encouraging a fundamental respect for oneself, our environment, and the larger world.

We believe that all students deserve to be surrounded by adults who believe they are capable of high achievement. We believe that every child deserves to be surrounded by a culture of high expectations and a rich array of options for the future. We believe that every child deserves dedicated educational and career guidance in order to define the pathways to the options he or she chooses. We believe that every child deserves quality curriculum, instruction, and services to be able to realize his or her personal aspirations by making well informed choices.

For the West ISD mission to succeed, a cooperative effort must exist among all stakeholders: community, parents, school staff, administrators, and the Board of Trustees.

Portrait of a West ISD Graduate: At West ISD, we confirm attainment of our mission and vision when West ISD graduates are academically prepared for college or post-secondary opportunities and possess the skills and habits needed to be prepared for life and career in the 21st century world they will encounter.

West ISD graduates are:

- **PREPARED ACADEMICALLY**
 - Skilled in math, science, and technology
 - Engaged in the humanities, arts and other disciplines of choice
 - Possess a sense of history, geography, global politics
 - Prepared, eligible for, and accepted to college/post-secondary
- **AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR**
 - Proficient writer, reader, speaker, and listener
 - Proficient in the vocabulary and language of academic disciplines

- Proficient in two or more languages
- PREPARED FOR LIFE AND CAREER
 - Responsible and trustworthy
 - Work effectively with others
 - Confident and motivated to set and achieve goals
 - Possess personal financial literacy
 - Prepared to take the next step in life
 - Dedicated to school/community engagement and service

Areas of Innovation

West 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 DOI exploratory work was to expand the possibilities by applying innovative strategies in areas of state regulation that restrict local control while maintaining the strong educational principles and practices that have been the standard in West ISD for decades.

This local innovation plan identifies requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) that inhibit the goals of the plan from which West ISD should be exempted on adoption of the plan. This local innovation plan specifies the manner in which a particular statute inhibits one or more goals of the plan.

West ISD understands that any exemption claimed in the plan apply only to the specific provision of the Texas Education Code cited, which may or may not be governed by a separate legal requirement. The exemption does not relieve West ISD of any requirement imposed by other state or federal law or a duty imposed under federal regulation, grant compliance, agency rule applicable to a charter school or a legal requirement.

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

- **Seven Hour School Day or Minutes of Instruction [TEC §25.082]**
- **First Day of Instruction [TEC §25.0811]**
- **Campus Behavior Coordinator [TEC §37.0012]**
- **Required Certification [TEC §21.003, §21.0031, and §21.051]**

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.

Seven Hour School Day

Requirement: House Bill 2610 amended Texas Education Code §25.081 by eliminating the required 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with the requirement that schools provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction annually and 420 minutes of instruction daily. While the bill allowed schools to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disaster, flood, extreme weather conditions, fuel curtailment, or another calamity; it eliminated any

options to pursue state waivers to reduce the minimum number of minutes per day to provide teachers with professional learning time beyond an early release waiver currently used by the District.

Additionally, Texas Education Code §25.082(a) requires that each school day be at least seven hours long including intermissions. Historically, West ISD has used Early Release state waivers for Parent Conference time, UIL events, professional learning and planning time, and district-wide assemblies or trainings. On these days, the school days is reduced to four hours of instructional time.

Rationale: The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction within a designated school day will assist with personalizing learning to better meet student and staff 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. As a component of the annual school district calendar development process, West ISD will carefully analyze the needs of students and staff 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 staff. It is recommended that future District Advisory Team (DAT) 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.

In addition, West ISD offers an alternative education program designed to meet the needs of nontraditional students. This program provides an alternative route to graduation for students who have not been successful in the traditional school setting due to special challenges. These challenges include parenting students, and family hardships created by economic situations that result in the student having to work instead of attending school. These and other life situations leave these students being credit deficient. Therefore, being exempt from the minimum minutes requirement will permit the District to offer alternative programming with fewer minutes that focuses on quality programming designed to fit the needs of these at-risk students without having to apply for an annual state waiver.

This exemption could also provide West ISD a means to accelerate credit attainment, acquiring credits at a faster rate through a new alternative education program.

First Day of Instruction

Requirement: Texas Education Code §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction prior to the fourth Monday in August.

Rationale: The flexibility of start date will allow the district to determine on an annual basis what best meets the needs of the students and local community. Having the flexible start date will allow the district to balance the amount of instructional time in each semester, which will improve the ability to implement special programs and nontraditional school models. It will also support our college and career readiness efforts by aligning with local college calendars. Ending the school year earlier will create a more favorable schedule for summer enrichment to ease documented summer learning loss. A flexible start will also allow the district to go back to the tradition of starting the school year with a short week, which has previously proven to foster a smoother, less tiring transition back to the school year.

Campus Behavior Coordinator

Requirement: Senate Bill 107 requires via Texas Education Code §37.0012 the designation of a Campus Behavior Coordinator on each campus. In West ISD, the campus Assistant Principals are assigned the role of the Campus Behavior Coordinator.

Rationale: The flexibility of exemption from the statute requiring each school to have a designated Campus Behavior Coordinator will allow a team-approach to discipline across West ISD. The relationships that are established between the campus administrator, counselor, student, and parent are the foundation for promoting and maintaining positive behavior. Utilizing a local district process allows the administrator who currently has a relationship with the parent and student to be the person to make parental contact. The administrator or counselor could then notify the parent of discipline or behavior concerns, rather than waiting to have contact from the Campus Behavior Coordinator. In West ISD, the administrative team all works and meets with our students. From the Superintendent to the counselors to the Assistant Principals to the Principals, everyone assists with the district's Discipline Management Plan.

Required Certification

Requirement: Texas Education Code §21.003 mandates that districts that wish to hire an uncertified staff member must submit a request to TEA and wait on approval or denial. Section 21.0031 provides that an employee's probationary, continuing, or term Chapter 21 contract is void for failure to maintain certification in certain circumstances. Section 21.051 provides that before a school district may employ a candidate for certification as a teacher of record, the candidate must complete at least 15 hours of field-based experience in which the candidate is actively engaged in instructional or educational activities.

Rationale: To adequately supply programs with qualified candidates, the district requires the flexibility to hire community college and university professors, business professionals, as well as current or new staff members who would qualify for placement in assignments outside of their traditional certification areas and to retain them. This innovation has the potential to enrich applicant pools in specialized course offerings and afford more students the opportunity to take courses if state certified teachers are not available to teach those courses.

The district will establish local qualification and training requirements for professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of state requirements. The district will make decisions on certification needs for the various special programs. These exemptions are of particular importance for hard-to-fill and high-demand courses. The district will ensure that professional development plans are in place to train non-certified personnel in pedagogy and to provide needed support.

Positions for Consideration: Dual Credit Professors, Career and Technology Education (CATE) Teachers, Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Teachers, and District Librarian.

Span of Local Plan

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

Legal Review

This DOI Plan was reviewed by Joey Moore with Walsh, Gallegos, Trevino, Russo, & Kyle, P.C.