

District of Innovation

By David Truitt, Superintendent

“Innovation is a process, not a product.” – George Couros

Currently in West ISD, a team of dedicated teachers, principals, district administrators, parents, community members, and business leaders are studying a new initiative for Texas public school districts called Districts of Innovation, or DOI. Districts of Innovation is a concept passed during the 84th Legislative Session via House Bill 1842, effective immediately, that gives traditional school districts most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open enrollment charter schools. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan as set forth in Texas Education Code Chapter 12A. To be eligible for designation as a District of Innovation, a school district's most recent academic performance rating must be at the state's "Met Standard" level.

Districts looking to pursue this new opportunity may be reviewing ways to gain exemption from many Texas Education Code requirements. These specific innovations include the areas of curriculum, instruction, governance, parent or community involvement, school calendar, budgeting, or other ideas. To date, Hillsboro ISD, Mart ISD, and China Spring ISD have approved DOI plans in our area. Across the state, over 130 school districts have approved plans as well, and hundreds more are currently working on DOI plans.

Essentially, these DOI plans are about local control. Each school district is pursuing designation as a District of Innovation for different reasons, and no two plans may look the same. Community members should note that each innovation plan will be unique to the local school district. The experiences of other school districts may be informative, but may not directly relate to the purpose or progress of a plan in another location. In West ISD, our DOI work began via some questions we had about the start date for school in August, 2017. We desired to start school before Monday, August 28, 2017, but state law said that we could not start school before the fourth Monday in August.

Through our work, we have learned that Districts of Innovation may adopt a plan that includes exemptions from most of the same state laws that are not applicable to open enrollment charter school districts. These laws could include:

- District and Campus Site-based Decision Making Processes and Committee Structure
- First Day and Last Day of School Dates
- Minimum Minutes of Classroom Instruction for Early Release or Alternative Education Programs
- 90% Student Attendance Rate Rule for Course Credit
- Student Discipline Provisions for Serious and Persistent Misbehavior; Inter-District Student Transfers too
- Teacher Certification for Hard-to-Fill Positions within Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Currently, our DOI team is reviewing all possible exemption options that align with our work in West ISD. Our team is not considering or even discussing exemptions in class size, budget, teacher contracts, teacher daily schedules or benefits. The team's goals center on reviewing exemption ideas that will help further the vision, mission, and goals of our District. Our work includes trying our best to clearly articulate the purpose of the plan, and then communicate the plan to all stakeholders. Our Board of Trustees cannot even consider approving the plan until the final plan has been posted online for 30

days, the Commissioner of Education has been notified, our District-Level Advisory Team (DAT) has held a public meeting to consider the final plan, and the DAT has approved the plan by a majority vote. The plan may have a term of up to five years, and it may be amended, rescinded, or renewed at any time by a majority vote of the DAT.

From my first week in West, I knew West ISD was a special place. I quickly discovered that West was a supportive, passionate community deeply committed to its children. In turn, our community values our school district and our dedicated staff members. These two assets truly help make our community great. I know I am fortunate to serve a community that values education, is empowered to ask tough questions, and expects and encourages continuous improvement. For me, I quickly realized the potential in West ISD possibly becoming a District of Innovation. To date, our planning meetings have represented some of the best thinking and “what if” moments that I have been a part of with our staff, parents, community and business leaders. This plan could truly represent our commitment to every child, every family, and every staff member in West ISD as we boldly reconsider and think outside the box of what education can and should be for our children. I believe our children deserve our best efforts in exploring this work, and I hope that our final plan and product will make our community proud and excited about the future of West ISD.

For more information about our DOI work, please go to the West ISD website at www.westisd.net. Click on the “District of Innovation” link!