

ELKHART I.S.D.

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

Revised for Final Board Adoption on January 22, 2018

TERM:

The term of the Elkhart I.S.D. District of Innovation Plan will be the five-year span, commencing in the Spring of 2018, and concluding in the Spring of 2023, pending approval of the Board of Trustees and the Commissioner of Education.

PROGRAM:

This District of Innovation Plan was developed in alignment with the Goals and Vision of the Elkhart ISD Board of Trustees. It supports the belief that effective education is not possible through a “one size fits all” program. EISD prepares each student to thrive in a rapidly changing world by providing personalized learning and multiple pathways to success in accordance with the guidelines of House Bill 5.

EISD has historically promoted student engagement through learner-focused instruction, partnerships with Institutions of Higher Learning and Parental and Community Involvement. Now our school has a wonderful opportunity to create a District of Innovation Plan that will further enhance and broaden the scope of its educational program through the increased Local Control Options defined by the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842.

PLAN FORMULATION:

This District of Innovation Plan was set into motion by a unanimous Vote of Resolution by the Board of Trustees of the Elkhart Independent School District. It has been developed by the Superintendent of Schools and the District Site-Based Advisory Committee. It reflects prioritized plans which best meet the needs of Elkhart ISD students.

ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

1. SCHOOL START DATE

Current Law: Texas Education Code (25.0811) and Board Policy (EB Legal) prohibit starting school before the fourth Monday in August.

Proposal: Develop a more flexible school calendar that better meets the needs of Elkhart students, staff members, and the community.

Students will begin on the Third Monday in August. This start date will:

- Provide more instructional days prior to state testing dates
- Allow the first and second semesters to be more equal in number of instructional days

- Afford teachers the opportunity to receive meaningful professional development during the school year instead of frontloading all staff training during the August in-service period
- Expand opportunities for student success through the benefits of a more balanced school calendar

2. TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Current Law: Texas Education Code (21.003) and Board Policies (DK Legal, DK Local, DK Exhibit) place very stringent requirements on teacher certification.

In the event that a district cannot locate a fully certified teacher for a specific subject area or grade level, it must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency for a special permit or probationary certificate. TEA approves or denies the request based on the qualifications of the best non-certified candidate the district can produce. Most permits have one to three year limitations with no renewal options. These rules severely limit school districts in hiring highly skilled individuals to fill important teaching slots and they contribute to an increased staffing turnover rate.

Proposal: Handle Teacher Certification decisions through a locally developed process to meet the needs of Elkhart ISD students.

Note: Special Education and Bilingual teachers must continue to be SBEC certified.

The local teacher certification decision process shall include the following steps:

- The Campus Principal shall submit to the Superintendent in writing a request to allow a TEA certified teacher to teach outside the area of his or her certification, or, to allow an otherwise qualified, but not TEA certified, individual to teach in a specialized trade and/or vocational field or another critical need area.
- The Campus Principal shall specify in writing the reason for the request and document the qualifications and/or credentials the candidate possesses.
- The Superintendent shall report such requests to the Board of Trustees for approval of employment.
- With Board approval the candidate shall be placed on a local teaching certificate.

Example: An individual with an industry certification in a Career and Technology Education field (i.e. welding) could be eligible to teach this vocational skill to Elkhart ISD students without full Texas Education Agency Certification.

The goals of this proposal are:

- To provide more course opportunities and options for students

- To provide the district with additional flexibility in hiring individuals credentialed in specific content areas or with certain skill sets who lack TEA Certification
- To afford more students the opportunity to take dual credit courses when TEA certified teachers are not available.

3. DESIGNATION OF CAMPUS BEHAVIOR COORDINATOR

Current Law: 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 37.0012.

Proposal: Abstain from the SB 107 requirement that each campus have a designated behavior coordinator.

EISD's approach to discipline is collaborative in nature, with multiple personnel (primarily teachers) providing these disciplinary services to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will:

- Allow district staff to focus on establishing classroom protocols and utilizing school culture to foster the development of individual responsibility
- Promote extensive use of positive behavioral interventions and supports
- Encourage the social and emotional development of each student
- Increase the students' sense of responsibility toward the school and the community

4. PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS

Current Law: Under current guidelines (Texas Education Code 21.102), probationary periods for newly hired teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one year.

Proposal: Issue probationary contracts for a period of up to two years for newly hired experienced teachers.

A one-year time period, in some instances, is insufficient to determine a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Relief from TEC 21.102 will:

- Permit the District the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two years for newly hired experienced teachers
- Provide adequate time for teacher growth and development in the EISD system.

5. TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATIONS

Current Law: Texas Education Code 21.203, 21.352, and 21.3541, and Local Policies DNA Legal and DNA Local call for Districts to utilize the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) for teachers and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) for principals as professional appraisal systems.

Proposal: Utilize locally developed teacher and principal evaluation tools which combine the objectives of the PDAS and T-TESS instruments, competency-based learning, and best practices.

Evaluation instrument features:

- The Evaluation Instrument will be developed with input from the superintendent, administrators, and teachers
- The Evaluation Instrument will be approved by the Board of Trustees
- All teachers will be evaluated at least once annually
- Every teacher will receive multiple walk-through observations
- Principals will be evaluated once annually
- All employees of the District will have an annual summative evaluation
- All evaluations shall reflect employee strengths and areas of concern related to the goals of the District

6. CLASS SIZE WAIVERS

Current Law: Texas Education Code 25.111, 25.112, and 25.113 and Board Policy EEB Legal mandate that Kindergarten through 4th Grade classes be kept to a minimum of 22 students. When a class size exceeds 22 students, the District is required to apply for a waiver from T.E.A.

Proposal: Abstain from applying the TEC 22-1 student/teacher ratio.

Smaller class sizes play a positive role in the classroom, and smaller teacher-student ratios lead to optimal instruction and improved student results. Exemption from seeking annual class size waivers per instance will:

- Eliminate unnecessary paperwork
- Grant flexibility in need-based class grouping.

Elkhart I.S.D. will strive to keep all classes at or below the 22-1 ratio. However, financial constraints or fluctuating enrollments could dictate temporary overages in certain classes. These concerns must be balanced with the logistics and timing of staff availability. Parental notification will be adhered to per 25.113.

7. LENGTH OF SCHOOL DAY

Current Law: Texas Education Code 25.082 and EC Legal required that all school days must be 420 minutes long to count for Average Daily Attendance (ADA) calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes totaling 75,600 minutes per school year.

Proposal: Abstain from applying the TEC 420 minute day requirement. The annual 75,600 minute requirement will be met to comply with funding requirements.

Exemption from the 420 minute day requirement would:

- Allow Elkhart I.S.D. the flexibility to alter the school day schedule whenever it is deemed locally necessary or beneficial to the District and its stakeholders (i.e. for safety purposes due to weather, extracurricular travel needs, etc.).
- 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.

SUMMATION

The Elkhart ISD District of Innovation Committee has developed this flexible local control plan with the approval of the Board of Trustees. The plan underscores district-wide commitment to providing the finest of learning opportunities and the very best education possible for all students.

Our motto is “Student Centered and Results Driven.”

The Mission Statement of Elkhart I.S.D. is as follows: “In partnership and collaboration with parents and community members, Elkhart Independent School District dedicates its efforts and resources to the benefit of all students by providing an integrated educational program of quality, equity, challenge, and “Academic Excellence Through Innovative Instruction.”