

Introduction

House Bill 1842, passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session provides public school districts the opportunity to seek designation as a District of Innovation to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. On Thursday, January 19, 2017 the Abernathy Board of Trustees adopted a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation.

Term

The term of the District of Innovation Plan, as outlined by the Texas Education Agency, is active for five years from the passage of the approved District of Innovation Plan, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The District of Innovation Committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the Plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications as needed to address innovative disruptions.

Teacher Certification
Exemption from: : TEC §21.003; TEC§ 21.057

TEC §21.003(a) states a person may not be employed as a teacher by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. 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 request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification. TEC§ 21.057 requires that a school district provide parental notification if the district assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation:

Abernathy ISD will continue to seek highly effective educators in all positions. In order to provide more students the opportunity to take specialized and or advanced courses, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in statute. Flexibility to establish teacher certification requirements in some specialized area would allow the district to possibly employ high quality educators that might not ordinarily qualify under the traditional teacher certification pathway. Examples of this could be an experienced university professor being allowed to teach an upper level academic course, a local technician with master level skill teaching students in a Career and Technology class, or a teacher already certified in one subject being allowed to teach a different subject as long as he/she possessed sufficient university hours in the different subject.

In order to best serve students, all decisions on teacher certification and assignments will be handled locally, and notification of District Teaching Permits (local certification) shall not be necessary.

The principal may submit to the superintendent and/or the superintendent's designee a request for District Teaching Permit (local certification) outlining the individual's credentials/qualifications.

Qualification for local certification could include, but is not limited to:

- professional work experience
- formal training/education in the content area
- active/relevant professional industry certification/registration
- a combination of work experience, training, and education
- demonstration of successful experience working with students.

The superintendent or his/her designee will then approve the request if they believe the individual possesses the knowledge, skills and experience required of the position and feel the individual could be an asset to students. Employment is dependent upon Board approval.

An employee working under a District Teaching Permit (local certification) will be appraised under the same teacher appraisal system as required of all certified teachers and will adhere to the same professional standards, ethics, and requirements of all certified teachers.

Uniform School Start and End Date
Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812

TEC §25.0811 states a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC §25.0812 states a school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15

Innovation:

Abernathy ISD believes that increased flexibility in determining the start and end of the instructional calendar will increase student achievement, improve attendance, and better allow the district to meet the social and emotional needs of the students. Setting the local limits for starting school no earlier than August 1 and ending no earlier than May 1 will have the following benefits:

- The instructional days of the fall semester (finishing before the Christmas holidays) could be increased, making the number of days closer to equal the days of the spring semester. This allows for a more balanced approach to the scope and sequence of all classes, but greatly benefits single semester courses.
- Allows for a more equal distribution of the number of days in each grading period
- Allows students and teachers to participate in summer courses offered by post-secondary institutions
- Allows for more flexibility in scheduling professional development during the school year

Class Size requirement

Exemption from: TEC §25.112; TEC §25.113
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TEC §25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes. TEC §25.113 requires district to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. Districts are required by state law to maintain a 22:1 student to teacher ratio for Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes

Innovation:

Abernathy ISD recognizes that smaller class sizes are beneficial and will continue to use the 22:1 student/teacher ratio for Kindergarten-4th grade in projecting the number of staff needed for future school years. We also recognize that this fact must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff and continuing to employ the best qualified teachers. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influence the learning environment. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. Abernathy ISD would like local control in allowing a principal to get permission from the superintendent and School Board if a classroom has one or two students over the ratio that appealing to the Texas Education Agency.

Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator
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Exemption from: TEC §37.0012

TEC§37.0012 requires a person be designated to serve as the Campus Behavior Coordinator (CBC) who is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementation of Chapter 37 and allows duties imposed on a campus principal or other campus administrator to be performed by the campus behavior coordinator.

Innovation:

Abernathy ISD has always taken a collaborative approach to student discipline in the campuses. With exemption from the requirement and duties of the Campus Behavior Coordinator, principals will be able to create the system where the duties of the CBC are shared among the administrative staff. This allows a more personal and effective approach to student discipline and better communication with parents.

Minimum Attendance for Class Credit (90% Attendance Rule)

Exemption from: TEC §25.092

TEC §25.092 *declares* A student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90

percent of the days the class is offered.

Innovation:

Abernathy ISD believes 90% is an arbitrary percentage emphasizing “seat time” over content mastery. By claiming exemption from Sec. 25.092, the district can abstain from penalizing students who miss class time due to extra- and co-curricular activities, academic activities, and/or other extenuating circumstances enabling the district to accommodate students with legitimate scheduling conflicts while reducing dropouts and increasing the number of qualifying graduates. Note that relief from Sec. 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. Furthermore, in no way does this exemption limit a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Sec. 28.214 nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Sec. 28.216. Regardless of whether any adjustments or changes are made to the minimum attendance for class credit or final grade laws, Abernathy ISD believes this issue to be a local decision as opposed to a state mandate.