

CONNALLY ISD DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS

(TEC 21.102 (b) (DCA LEGAL)

Currently

Under current guidelines, 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. This time frame limits a district's ability to adequately evaluate a teacher's performance and effectiveness in the classroom.

Proposed

Due to the opportunity to grow and develop an effective teacher and educator for CISD, we propose to have the ability to renew the probationary period one additional year for a maximum of two school years, for all teachers, counselors and nurses who are new to the district and have been employed as a highly qualified teacher for at least five of the eight previous years. This extension will provide the district more opportunity to evaluate a teacher, counselor or nurse's effectiveness.

HIGHER EDUCATION VISITS

(19 TEC 25.087 b-2 (1) (2) TAC 129.21(j)(3) (FEA LOCAL)

Currently

Policy allows for two higher education visits during a student's junior year and two visits their senior year, with verification.

Proposed

Connally ISD will establish the number of days that a student may receive an excused absence while visiting an institution of higher education. The current limit of two days does not allow for a student to travel to an out-of-state or some in-state institutions. Connally ISD high school principals, counselors, and central staff will propose a policy change to the Board for their consideration for approval

CLASS SIZE RATIO

(EEB LEGAL) (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.

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Proposed

While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff, and the best teacher to student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. We do not believe it has a negative effect when a district adds only 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. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. In the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio for Kindergarten – 4th grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, but the superintendent will report to the Board of Trustees for approval. This exemption only allows Connally ISD the local control over class size ratios, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements.

This plan also emphasizes the importance of flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passions and needs. This grants flexibility in class size at all times-regrouping for success, small groups, large groups, etc. It also works to minimize paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place additional focus on student success. An exemption in meeting Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112, will allow the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waivers when the need arises.

MINIMUM MINUTES OF INSTRUCTION

(EC LEGAL & EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.081)

Currently

State law currently requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day (including intermissions and recess) to count for ADA (average daily attendance) calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes towards the 75,600 minutes required annually.

Districts must submit any request for a waiver for an early-release day at least 31 days in advance of the target date for the early release. The request for a waiver must go through the online TEAL secure environment and if the waiver is approved, the early release day must be at least 4 hours.

Proposed

Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Connally ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days whenever it was locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum number for the school year. Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling (above and beyond the 6-day maximum as needed) 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. Connally ISD will continue to meet the 75,600 minute requirement.

Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control to:

- Schedule non-instructional days into the calendar to allow teachers to engage in targeted, relevant professional development.
- Build in the time for teachers to collaborate in PLCs (professional learning communities) to develop lessons, review student data, and collaborate with peers to implement instructional

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strategies.

- Build in the time for student-parent conferences, campus meetings, and other campus needs.
- Design creative student schedules where Connally ISD can offer alternative programming with fewer minutes that focuses on quality programs and cost savings, designed to fit the needs of students without having to apply for an annual waiver.

SCHOOL YEAR START AND END DATE

(EB Legal) (TEC §25.0811, TEC §25.0812)

Currently

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August.

TEC §25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15.

Proposed

On an annual basis, the district will determine the best day to start and end the school year to allow flexibility in meeting the needs of students and the local community. An earlier start date will allow the district to balance the amount of instructional time per semester, creating more instructional time before STAAR/EOC/AP and college dual credit exams. Flexibility in the start date may also provide to start the school year with a short week easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, junior high, and high school for the first time. An earlier end date will allow more time for remediation and will address the difference between the calendar of the school district and colleges and universities, allowing more students to enroll in college courses that begin in June or attend orientations without missing instructional time, increasing college and career readiness.

TEACHER CERTIFICATION

(TEC Code 21.003) (TAC 231)

Currently

With the addition of House Bill 5, there is a need to expand college and career opportunities for students. However, the increased need does not meet the challenges faced by school districts seeking individuals with education or work-related experience to properly educate students in specialized areas. The statutory requirements, inhibit the district's ability to hire professionals with industry experience to teach Career and Technical Education.

Proposed

Exemption from TEC Code 21.003 and 19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 231 would allow our district to issue a school district teaching permit to individuals who do not hold a teaching certificate, but who the district deems qualified to teach based on a determined set of criteria.

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The district will establish local criteria, such as relevant years of experience, qualifications, relevant industry certifications, formal training, and education.

All candidates will be carefully considered to ensure the individual has sufficient education and experience to provide the instruction necessary to meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for the course. Principals will submit the candidates to the superintendent along with the credentials of the candidate. The superintendent will determine whether it is in the best interest of the district to certify the individual. The individual will be required to complete a criminal background check in compliance with the State Board of Education rules. The superintendent will notify the Board prior to beginning employment.

Any Connally ISD school permit issued would only be valid in Connally ISD.

TEACHER ASSIGNMENT

(TEC Code 21.003, and TAC Title 19 Part 7 Chapter 231)

Currently

The district must submit requests to the Texas Education Agency to hire a teacher who may be assigned to a subject or grade level outside of their teaching certification area. Due to limitations for districts with TEC Code 21.003, 21.044, and TAC Title 19 Part 7 Chapter 231 (Requirement for Public School Personnel Assignments), Subchapter A, B, C, D, E, and F.

Proposed

Exemption from TEC Code 21.003 and TAC Title 19 Part 7 Chapter 231 (Requirement for Public School Personnel Assignments), Subchapter A (Criteria for Assignments of Public School Personnel), B (Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 6 Assignments), C (Grade 6 – 8 Assignments), D (Electives, disciplinary Courses, Local Credit Courses and Innovative Courses), E (Grade 9 – 12 Assignments), and F (Special Education Related Personnel Assignments).

Connally ISD will employ and have certified teachers in classrooms. The district will use the exemption to meet the local needs in assigning staff. Examples of this include but are not limited to the examples described. The exemption will allow an elementary certified teacher with expertise in early grades such as a first and/or second to teach kindergarten. A certified teacher who is certified through grade six to teach courses in grades seven and/or eight. Allow a teacher to teach one or two classes out of the field in an area the teacher has college coursework and/or expertise. Allow a teacher certified in middle school or high school math to teach elementary grades such as grade six and/or grade five. Principals will submit to the superintendent a written request to allow a certified teacher to teach out of their certified teacher field and/or grade level in which the certified teacher is not certified for. The superintendent will approve or deny the request, basing the decision on whether the certified teacher can be an asset for students. Upon approval, the superintendent will notify the Board.

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ATTENDANCE

(TEC code section 25.092)

Currently

Currently the state TEC code section 25.092 requires MINIMUM ATTENDANCE FOR CLASS CREDIT OR FINAL GRADE. (a) Except as provided by this section, 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. Students to attend an arbitrary percentage of 90% of the class days offered in order to obtain credit for their course. Thereby awarding credit based on “seat time” rather than the mastery of content. Exemption from this requirement will allow students educational advantages and provide opportunities for innovation in methods, location and instructional times for students. Further, abstaining from this requirement means the district won’t have to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum.

Proposed

CISD administrators will award credit to students based on their mastery of content, skills and students ability to show understanding of important and necessary coursework concepts.