

Rochelle Independent School District District of Innovation Plan

Introduction

The 84th Legislature passed House Bill 1482, which allows traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to the state's open enrollment charter schools. HB 1842 provides Rochelle ISD an opportunity to modify state requirements, which will allow RISD to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of our students. RISD meets all requirements set by the Texas Education Agency to become a District of Innovation. Our district must have an academic performance rating of at least Academically Acceptable and adopt an innovation plan. RISD's District of Innovation Plan is comprehensive and touches numerous areas in the TEC, and because RISD seeks to maximize local control of educational decisions for students, RISD seeks exemption from the permissible provisions of the TEC included and explained in the local Innovation Plan. RISD's District of Innovation Plan will begin April of 2018 school year and conclude at the end of the 2021-2022 school year unless the plan is terminated or amended by the RISD Board of Trustees in accordance with HB 1842. Any future amendments will adhere to the same term of the original plan.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

Flexibility: Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates including the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.

- School start date
- 90% attendance rule
- Class-size ratios
- Site-based decision-making processes
- Certain student discipline provisions
- Use of planning and preparation periods
- Teacher appraisal requirements

Local Control: Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.

Autonomy: Districts can create an innovation plan for a level of school (e.g., only high schools), grade level, or a single campus. Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On December 13, 2017, the RISD Board of Trustees (School Board) passed a Resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of the plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community.

District of Innovation Team

Les Brook, Board Trustee

Matthew Fields, Principal

Miranda Johnson, Teacher

Jeff Rochat, Teacher

Stephanie Arnold, Librarian

Jamie Fields, Community Member

Telisa DeRamus, Parent

Cody Holubec, Teacher

Dixie Pitcox, Teacher

Dave Lewis, Superintendent

Cindy Willmann, Teacher

Diana McKenna, Teacher

Michael Johnson, Teacher

Tammy Parrish, Counselor

Jane Penn, Community Member

Amanda Howell, Parent

Karen McWilliams, Teacher/Parent

Timeline

December 13, 2017-Adopt Resolution

December 13, 2017-Appoint Educational Advisory Committee/Public Comment

January 18, 2018 –Initial meeting of DOI Committee

January 25, 2018-Planning meeting, writing plan

February 1-February 9, 2018-Cont. Develop District of Innovation Plan if needed

March 9 2018- March 17, 2018-Post Plan for 30-day Public Feedback

April 11, 2018- Final public hearing and Board approval of DOI plan

District of Innovation Plan:

Connection to District Goals:

Goal 1: Create a collaborative culture of contagious ambition.

Goal 2: Expect all staff to embrace growth opportunities.

Goal 3: Empower students to seize opportunities to achieve at high levels.

The Rochelle Independent School District recognizes that we are a district experiencing rapid student fluctuation. We also recognize that the methods which previously met student needs may no longer support all students achieving at their highest levels. Changes in student demographics and shifting pedagogical frameworks that best support future-ready students require a paradigm shift for all school districts across Texas and across our country. As an organization, we must all confront areas in which we can grow so that we may better serve our students. As a small rural

school, we must also model collaboration with our school community and demonstrate actions for what it means to be ambitious. The district of innovation designation serves as a rallying call for our community that clearly and proudly demonstrates our belief that our community can be a better decision-making body for students when it has the freedom to exercise local control over the decision-making process and policies that govern us.

Teacher Probationary Contracts

Exempt from TEC § 21.102

Current Law: TEC 21.102 a probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district.

Innovation Strategies

The Rochelle ISD believes that a one year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. For contracted employees new to the district who have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight year preceding employment by the district, administration will have the autonomy to decide the length of a probationary contract, not to exceed three years.

ROCHELLE ISD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

1. The Superintendent has sole authority to make recommendations to the Board regarding the selection of contractual personnel. The Board retains final authority for employment of contractual personnel.
2. When relevant to the decision, written evaluations of a professional employee's performance, as documented to date, and any other information the administration determines to be appropriate shall be considered in decisions affecting contract status. Written evaluations and other evaluative information need not be considered prior to a decision to terminate a probationary contract at the end of the contract term.
3. A probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the District.
4. A probationary contract period may be extended beyond the third consecutive year of employment if, during the third year of the probationary period, the Board determines

that it is doubtful whether a continuing contract or a term contract should be given. If the Board makes such a determination, the District may make a probationary contract for a term ending with the fourth consecutive school year.

Contract Service Days

Exemption from TEC § 21.401

Current Law: TEC 21.401 states that a contract between the district and an educator must be for a minimum of ten months of service. An educator employed under a ten-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. The Commissioner may reduce the number of days of service, but such a reduction does not reduce an educator's salary. District calendars are designed to maintain the minimum total of 75,600 minutes of instruction per year. Although flexibility has been allowed for required student attendance, there was no flexibility for the number of required teacher contract days.

Innovation Strategies

TEC §25.081 changed the required number of days of instruction to required number of minutes of instruction. The law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees. The determination of how many days are needed to fulfill an employee's contract should be a local decision.

ROCHELLE ISD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

1. In an attempt to align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students, the district would have the option to reduce the amount of contract days with no effect on teacher salaries.
2. The District Plan is having the start date of school moved back in August which would have teachers possibly starting in the end of July to meet contract days.
3. RISD would evaluate the number of in-service days needed to meet the needs of the administration and the staff. If the administration will set days based on needs and not contract days.

Educator Certificate

Exemption from: TEC § 21.003; TEC § 21.053; TEC § 21.057

Relevant Board Policies: DBA Legal/Local; DK Legal/Local, DK Exhibit

TEC 21.003(a) states a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B.

TEC § 21.053 requires a person who desires to teach in a public school to present the person's certificate to the employing district before the person's contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding. Additionally, the District may not pay an individual for teaching or work done if the individual does not hold a valid certificate.

TEC § 21.057 requires a school district that assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year to provide written notice of the assignment to a parent or guardian of each student in that classroom.

Current statutes require that all teachers be fully certified by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC), regardless of previous work experience and/or demonstrated knowledge and skills in their area of specialty. While emergency certification and local permits are available, such certification is dependent on TEA approving the request. This process is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district. Current statutes require the teachers to present his or her certificate to the district before their employment contract is binding and prohibits the district from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time. Further, current statutes require that the district provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation Strategies

This exemption will allow RISD the authority to hire applicants that do not have traditional state certifications. The District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in areas that are difficult to hire. Administration may submit detailed request to the superintendent for a local certification. Local teaching certifications may require employee agreements in lieu of term contracts. This would include the local authority to hire and grow paraprofessionals for teaching assignments within the district.

ROCHELLE ISD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

1. Recruit and Retain Qualified Staff- RISD will promote an environment that ensures support and development that will lead to the retention of highly qualified staff.
2. RISD will provide higher education opportunities to all staff interested in furthering their educational career or obtaining certification in areas of interest to promote student growth in areas outside of a teacher's certification.

3. The Superintendent or designee shall ensure that contract personnel possess valid credentials before issuing contracts. Credential will be based on local policy created by the Board.
4. A district may issue a school district teaching permit and employ as a teacher a person who does not hold a teaching certificate issued by SBEC.
5. The principal of a campus shall approve all teacher and staff appointments for the campus from a pool of applicants selected by a district or of applicants who meet the hiring requirements established by a district, based on criteria developed by the principal after informal consultation with the faculty. Qualifications must include demonstrated subject matter expertise such as professional work experience, formal training and education, holding an active professional relevant industry license, certification, or registration, or any combination of work experience, training and education, or industry license, certification, or registration, in the subject matter to be taught.
6. If a district assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year, it shall provide written notice of the assignment to the parents or guardians of each student in that classroom.
7. A school district teaching permit remains valid unless the district issuing the permit revokes it for cause. A person authorized to teach under a school district teaching permit issued by a particular district may not teach in another school district unless that other district complies with the permit-issuing provisions.

First Day of School

Exemption from TEC § 25.0811, TEC § 25.0812

Current Law: TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC 25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15th.

Innovation Strategies

By exempting itself from Sections 25.0811 and 25.0812, the Rochelle ISD will have the authority to set the first day of school for the district instructional calendar based on the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent the community in this manner. This empowers us to personalize and customize learning for all District learners, including teachers and staff through professional learning, and allows us to more efficiently balance the amount of instructional time per semester. In addition, by having the flexibility in the start and end of the school year, students will be able to enroll in college courses that start in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness.

Removing the constraints of the current uniform start date will allow Rochelle ISD to implement a possible short first week, easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school, ultimately allowing for more flexible professional development opportunities and preparation time for our staff.

ROCHELLE ISD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

1. Each school year, a district shall operate for at least 75,600 minutes, including time allocated for instruction, intermissions, and recesses for students.
2. Start date will be based on instructional days for the first semester. This will ensure that there are enough instructional days to get material covered before the end of the first semester. Calendar Committee will help in the design of the start date.

Class Size

Exemption from TEC §§ 25.112, 25.113

Current Law: TEC 25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or fewer to one to one teacher for Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. TEC 25.113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits.

Innovation Strategies

The Rochelle ISD has the authority to locally control class sizes and teacher ratio. Administrators evaluate the needs of teachers and students; therefore, RISD should have authority to assess the effectiveness of our teachers and their ability to teach more than 22 students. The Rochelle ISD has the authority to properly position personnel to soundly maintain the local, state and national standards for a classroom with more than 22 students without a state waiver.

ROCHELLE ISD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND PROCESSES

1. By seeking an exception from TEC 25.112, the District would have flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation Designation and would not be required to seek waivers annually.
2. District intends to remain within the guidelines of the current education code as much as possible; the District seeks flexibility to provide the best learning environment for our

K-4 students, including more flexibility when teaching, creative ways of delivering instruction, and ability to manage increases in class sizes.

3. Small class sizes may have a positive effect in the classroom, but must also be balanced with the timing of adding staff, the qualifications of staff available, the makeup and chemistry of the classroom and other classroom influences.

4. In the event a classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio in grades K – 4, the class sizes will be reviewed by appropriate district and campus administration. The Board of Trustees will be informed of K- 4 classes that exceed 22:1. TEA waivers for class sizes exceeding 22 will not be required.