



District of Innovation Plan for Willis Independent School District (Proposed Renewal)

HB 1842, approved during the 84th Legislative Session, provides the opportunity for Texas public school districts to pursue designation as a District of Innovation.

The District of Innovation designation allows school districts to have greater local control over district operations in specified areas, as outlined in a local plan. Areas that may be included in the District plan are:

- Innovative curriculum, instructional methods;
- Provisions regarding community participation, campus governance and parental involvement;
Modifications to the school day or year;
- Provisions regarding district budget and sustainable program funding;
- Accountability and assessment measures that exceed the requirements of the state and federal law;
and Any other innovations prescribed by the board of trustees.

The DEIC reviewed an initial draft and the renewal plan was posted on the Willis ISD website February 16, 2022. At this time, Commissioner Morath was notified of the posting and of the intent to hold board vote. The plan remained posted for 30 days during which time the district received public input as well as guidance from TEA. The DEIC recommended the plan be presented to the board of trustees for consideration. The renewal plan was presented to the board of trustees for review and public comment on March 9, 2022. The board is scheduled to vote on the adopted the plan April 13, 2022 with a term of 5 years ending on April 13, 2027.

The Willis ISD District of Innovation plan is guided by and aligned with Willis ISD's mission: The mission of Willis Independent School District is to develop in each student the knowledge, skills and behaviors essential for life-long learning and for productive, responsible citizenship.

Texas Education Code §25.0811- First Day of Instruction: A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Exception:

Willis ISD will begin school earlier than the fourth Monday in August.

Rationale for exception:

- Ensures semester one and semester two are of more equal number of days;
- Ensures semester exams can be given before winter break;
- Ensures school will conclude before Memorial Day, which keeps a consistent graduation date and prevents school from going into June; and
- Aligns with college semesters which allows for more opportunities for summer school, internships and industrial certification opportunities.

Guidelines for local implementation:

- After the formal adoption of the DoI plan, the DEIC will review draft calendars and provide feedback, revisions and consider approval.
- The calendar shall provide for two distinct semesters of two nine-week periods each approximately 85-90 days in length.
- The board of trustees will then review and consider the final 2022-2023 school year calendar, no later than April, 2022.



Teacher Certification - Texas Education Code §21.003, §21.053, §21.057(A-E) DBA(LEGAL), DBA(LOCAL), DK(LEGAL), DK(LOCAL), DK(EXHIBIT):

Code and policy requires that all teachers must hold an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the state. In the absence of the certification, districts can request emergency certification from the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC). When a teacher does not have certification, the district has to provide written notification to parents within 30 days.

Exception:

Willis ISD will maintain flexibility and retain local control over certification requirements so the best interests of our students are served.

Rationale for Exception:

- Traditional certification requirements are not aligned with the realities of the current educational environment and the need to hire industry experts to teach many of the “hard to fill” course offerings such as career and technology, world languages, and others. As a result, student interest is subject to being negatively impacted by the limited availability of these courses.
- Many of the career pathways set forth by HB 5 require very specialized certification. The current laws limit the District’s ability to hire teachers for hard-to-fill, high demand career and technical courses when quality certified teachers are not available.
- Proposed TAC Rule (§231.611) states that individuals assigned to deliver content instruction in a special education setting must be certified in special education and the specific content area being taught. The proposed rule change compounds the current critical staffing shortage area of special education teachers.

Local qualifications will allow the district to:

- Recruit and hire qualified individuals that would normally not be able to fulfill specific teaching roles, as well as hard to fill positions.
- Benefit through flexible hiring or staffing in the area of Career and Technical Education (CTE), Dual credit courses, Middle School staffing for employees who only hold an elementary (kindergarten through sixth grade) or secondary (seventh through twelfth grade) certification, certified teachers teaching outside their content area, Certified Special Education teachers requirement for content certification in special education courses where instructional content is significantly modified by an ARD committee, Foreign Languages, and other hard to fill positions.



Guidelines for local implementation:

- The District will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question. In core subjects, K-12, individuals must have a Bachelor's Degree (the only exception could be in CTE Trades courses).
- The campus principal may submit to the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources a written request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.
- An individual with experience in the content of a course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or a course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing to the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trade course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.
- The Superintendent, after consultation with Human Resources, will certify candidates that meet local credential guidelines and notify the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment
- The District will develop criteria requirements for individuals seeking a local certification. Possible qualification criteria might include:
 - Professional work experience
 - Formal training/education in the content area
 - Active / relevant professional industry certification
 - A combination of work experience, training, and education
 - Demonstration of successful experience working with students
- Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's (and teacher out of content) course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, and / or other supports.
- Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The District will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.



- Those individuals with a local certification will not be guaranteed teacher contracts as outlined in TEC §21. Non-certified teachers on a Local Certificate will receive a one-year Non-Chapter 21 Contract.
- Certified teachers (hired full year) will receive a Chapter 21 Contract.
- All teachers will still be required to complete the criminal background check in compliance with State Board of education rules



TEC §21.102 (Subchapter C) - Probationary Contract: Requires that for experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years.

Section 21.101 Definition: In this subchapter "teacher" means a principal, supervisor, classroom teacher, school counselor, or other full-time professional employee who is required to hold a certificate issued under Subchapter B; or a nurse.

Exception:

Willis ISD will, when deemed necessary, extend probationary contracts to two years instead of one.

Rational for exception:

- In many cases, the one year probationary time period is not sufficient to evaluate teacher, (as defined above) effectiveness. This is because the probationary contract must convert to either a term contract or a termination notice BEFORE the results of state assessments are available.

Guidelines for local implementation:

- The District will continue to utilize one-year probationary contracts, moving employees to a term contract or to a non-renewal, within the given time frame, whenever possible;
- The District will only use this exception as it applies to experienced teachers new to Willis ISD who have been employed as a teacher at least five of the previous eight years;
- The District will only extend a probationary contract to a maximum of two years; and
- New teachers will remain on a 3-year probationary contract.

