

FARWELL ISD
District of Innovation Plan

School years 2017-2018 through 2021-2022

Farwell ISD

District of Innovation Plan

During the 84th Legislative Session, House Bill 1842 was passed in order to permit Texas public school districts to become a District of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

On February 14, 2017, the Farwell ISD Board of Trustees (Board) received a petition signed by a majority of the District Site Based Committee indicating the Committee's support of the initiative that the Farwell ISD (District) become a District of Innovation. On February 14, 2017 the Board held a public hearing regarding the possibility that the District become a District of Innovation. The Board also passed a resolution to stipulate that the District develop a local innovation plan for the purpose of being designated a District of Innovation and appointed members of the District Site Based Committee to fulfill the role as the District Innovation Plan Committee and that the Interim Superintendent and Principals of the district be included as members of the District Innovation Plan Committee. The Board notified the Commissioner of Education on February 15, 2017 that a resolution had been adopted indicating that a District of Innovation Plan was to be developed.

The District Innovation Plan Committee met on February 15, 2017 to draft the Proposed District of Innovation Plan. The Proposed District of Innovation Plan was posted to the district's website beginning February 16, 2017. The final Plan will be posted and will remain posted during the duration of the Plan. The District Site Based Committee held a public hearing regarding the Plan on March 20, 2017 and voted to approve the Plan as written and to forward its recommendation for approval to the school board. The Board approved the final District of Innovation Plan on March 23, 2017 and notified the Commissioner of Education of that fact.

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning with the 2017-18 school year and ending with the 2021- 2022 school year. The Plan may be amended by the Board at any time during the term.

Goals of the Innovation Plan

1. To secure and retain highly qualified and dedicated staff members.
2. To provide an exceptional learning environment for all students.

Requirements Imposed by the Texas Education Code that Inhibit the Goals of the Innovation Plan and the Innovations to be Implemented to Ensure Attainment of the Goals

Requirement - Minimum Service Required of Teachers. Current law provides TEC Sec. 21.401. MINIMUM SERVICE REQUIRED. (a) A contract between a school district and an educator must be for a minimum of 10 months' service. (b) An educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Innovation – This plan addresses the number of teacher days under a 10-month contract. The number of days could be reduced from the 187 required days to as low as 182 days. The number of days would be determined yearly and would be dependent on staff development needs. This reduction will have no effect on teacher salaries for the 10 month period. The teacher's daily rate would be based on 187 days no matter if the total number of days of service is less than 187. In that funds are limited, it is often problematic for the District to attract and retain teachers. The District is unable to match the teacher salary schedules of more adequately funded districts. By reducing the number of contract days, teachers would experience an increase in their daily rate pay. This should enhance teacher recruitment and provide for improved teacher morale which in turn would provide improved student attitudes about school and their school work.

Requirement - Teacher Certification. Current law provides TEC Sec. 21.003 . CERTIFICATION REQUIRED. (a) 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.

Innovation – In order to best serve District students, decisions regarding certification will be handled locally. Current law places very real hardships on small, rural school districts who often find it difficult to find fully certified teachers or teachers certified for more than one subject area. This plan will allow principals to submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach subjects out of their certified area. The principal must provide the reason for the request and document what credentials/experience the certified teacher possesses which makes them suitable for the assignment. With this innovation, more class offerings may be offered District students and current courses/classes may be maintained.

This innovation would also be utilized for an individual who is not certified but does possess experience and expertise to teach Career and Technology courses. The principal will submit a request

to the superintendent to allow such a person to teach a CTE course indicating the individual's experience and expertise in the needed area. This would allow a greater number of CTE course offerings from which students may choose. It would provide realistic requirements for professionals transitioning from industry to teaching and provide the ability for the District to employ part-time professionals. A teacher employed under this provision would not be contracted but considered an at-will employee.

A teacher certification waiver, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency.

Requirement - School Start Date/Last Day of School. Current law provides TEC Sec. 25.0811. FIRST DAY OF INSTRUCTION. (a) Except as provided by this section, a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August, and TEC Sec. 25.0812. LAST DAY OF SCHOOL. (a) a school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15.

Innovation – This plan provides flexibility of a start/end date for school. This allows the District to determine locally what best meets the needs of the students and community. Local control of the instructional calendar will allow the District to eliminate imbalanced six weeks and semesters. School may start earlier than the fourth Monday in August and may end prior to May 15. Additional days of instruction prior to state assessments and fewer days after the May assessments would be a benefit for students and teachers.

Requirement - Class Size Ratio. Current law provides TEC Sec. 25.112. CLASS SIZE. (a) Except as otherwise authorized by this section, a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class.

Innovation – While small class size is an important factor in providing for successful classrooms, attempting to adhere to the 22:1 student to teacher ratio is often problematic for small school districts. This requirement places a real hardship on districts such as Farwell ISD, when one or two students enroll over the 22 students per class limit. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must employ an additional teacher or file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency.

The District will attempt to maintain the Kindergarten – fourth grade 22:1 ratio when possible. However, we do not believe that by adding one or two students to a class that a negative effect is realized. Many factors other than class size influence the learning environment. The superintendent will notify the Board in the event that the class size exceeds the ratio. A TEA waiver

will not be filed when a K - 4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio. At no time will a K – 4 class have an enrollment of more than 25 students without Board approval.

Requirement - Teacher and Principal Evaluation. Current law provides TEC Sec. 21.352. LOCAL ROLE. (a) In appraising teachers, each school district shall use: (1) the appraisal process and performance criteria developed by the commissioner; or (2) an appraisal process and performance criteria: (A) developed by the district- and campus-level committees established under Section 11.251; (B) containing the items described by Sections 21.351(a)(1) and (2); and (C) adopted by the board of trustees. Also TEC Sec. 21.3541. APPRAISAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FOR PRINCIPALS. (a) The commissioner by rule shall establish and shall administer a comprehensive appraisal and professional development system for principals.

Innovation – The District would have the option to develop and use teacher and principal evaluation systems that would incorporate the best practices of the state’s evaluation systems and other resources to develop local instruments and procedures.

Requirement – Probationary Contracts. Current law provides TEC Sec. 21.102. PROBATIONARY CONTRACT. (b) 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 – The District would have the option to offer to teachers new to the District that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years a probationary contract for up to two years. This will allow the district more time to evaluate a staff member’s effectiveness.