Woodson Independent School District of

Innovation Plan

2022-2027



“Be the Best You Can Be”

Background

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allows public school districts to declare exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code by becoming a designated District of Innovation. Woodson ISD's previous District of Innovation plan has been in place from 2017-2022.

Local Innovation Committee

Amber Boland, Parent Ashley Gray, Parent Carol Anne Priddy, Parent Roni Mills, Parent Margaret Mathiews, Teacher Melissa Vickers, Staff Robert Carruthers, Teacher	Sheilah Owens, Staff Denny Berend, Teacher Kristi Bellah, Teacher Nicole Ellis, Teacher Brent Mills, Principal Casey Adams, Superintendent

Woodson ISD Board of Trustees

Gary Brockman, President Brady Miller, Vice-President Jim Tom Boland, Secretary Janet Sullivan, Member	Brigette Carruthers, Member John Michaels, Member Heather Webb, Member

Texas Education Code Exemptions

District staff in conjunction with the Local Innovation Committee reviewed the subchapters of the Texas Education Code to determine which permissible exemptions currently inhibit the district from maximizing the educational opportunities of the students who attend Woodson ISD.

I. Uniform Start Date and End Date (TEC §25.0811, 25.0812)

State law currently prohibits school districts from starting class before the fourth Monday in August, unless they are year-round districts. A school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year after May 15.

Rationale for Exemption

The flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students, the school, and the community. In addition, this flexibility allows the district to better align its starting date to accommodate the start date of colleges in which the district uses for dual credit courses. Another benefit of exempting this restriction is it allows the school to look at starting classes as a short week which can ease the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high school. Lastly, the ability to change the school start date and end date can also help better balance the amount of days in each semester.

II. Length of School Day (TEC §25.081, 25.083)

House Bill (HB) 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amended the Texas Education Code TEC §25.081 by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring the district to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess) each school year. Lastly, TEC §25.083(a) limits a district's ability and authority to make nonemergency announcements to once per day.

Rationale for Exemption

Exemption from this requirement would allow Woodson 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 4,200-minute maximum number for the school year.

Additionally, this exemption gives the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling (above and beyond the 4,200-minute 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. This would allow the district the flexibility to schedule non-instructional days into the schedule to allow for teachers to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development.

Woodson ISD does not have any intentions to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days would be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar, which is approved by the Board of Trustees and published and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year and continuously published using school media.

Lastly, exempting the District from the restrictions under TEC § 25.083 will allow each campus the ability to make non-emergency announcements throughout the day on an as needed basis. While the District is committed to keeping announcements at a minimum, there are certain situations where non-emergency announcements are essential to communicate pertinent procedural and regulatory information.

III. Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.053, 21.055 and §21.057)

State law states that 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.

Rationale for Exemption

The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District’s ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high demand, dual credit, as well as career and technical courses. Woodson ISD is located in a rural area which limits course offerings and utilizes creative instructional methods district wide. In order to enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of such course offerings, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training professionals and experts to teach such courses, in lieu of the requirements set forth in law.

By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, the district will have the flexibility to hire community college instructors, university professors, or internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area for full and/or part time course loads. This will enrich applicant pools in specific content areas and afford more students the opportunity to take dual credit courses if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses. In addition, this exemption will afford the district the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades or vocations to teach the crafts of those trades or vocations (such as welding, fine arts, health sciences, law, etc.) if certified teachers are not available to teach those courses, or their quality of expertise would benefit the students in that area. This exemption does not apply to special education and bilingual/ESL teachers, who will continue to be certified in accordance with the law.

Further, allowing local control and discretion as to when parental notification is required and

appropriate will permit the district to operate fully in compliance with its District of Innovation Plan while also providing necessary notice as needed. Notice will be provided to parents if a teacher will teach in the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year and the teacher is not qualified to instruct in the classroom under the District of Innovation Plan.

This innovation will be implemented by the District as follows:

- Campus Principal may request that the Superintendent allow a certified teacher to teach subject or subjects out of their certified field without seeking approval from TEA. The Principal must specify the reason for the request and document the credentials the certified teacher possesses which would qualify them to teach outside their acquired field.
- In addition, this exemption will enrich applicant pools by allowing the District to hire candidates who possess, at minimum, a bachelor's degree to teach a content area course if a certified teacher is not available to teach the course.
- An individual with Career and or Technology experience may be considered for a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The Principal must specify the reason for the request and document the credential the individual possesses which would qualify them to teach within the District. The Superintendent will provide the Board of Trustees with this information and seek Board approval of the hiring. Local certificates will be for one year only and the employee will be hired as an at-will employee.

IV. 90 Percent Attendance Rule (TEC §25.092)

State law mandates a student 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. In addition, a student who is in attendance greater than 75 percent and less than 90 percent may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the campus administrator and meets the instructional requirements for the class.

Rationale for Exemption

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage. Districts should have the option to set their own requirements. Local districts need the flexibility to set attendance requirements which reflect their specific situations and expectations.

Abstaining from the requirement means the district will not have to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. The flexibility can allow for local boards to set higher expectations for attendance while promoting student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in extracurricular activities. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the district by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates. Woodson ISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate content mastery, given this exemption. This exemption supports the districts overarching goals and provides the flexibility needed to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers.

It must be noted, relief from Section §25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Opting out of Section §25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in

accordance with Texas Education Code Section §28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section §28.0216.

V. Contract Service Days (TEC §21.401)

State law currently requires educators employed on a 10-month contract to provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Rationale for Exemption

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

This exemption will allow Woodson ISD the flexibility to alter teacher contract days with no effect on teacher salaries. This stems from an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days.

- If contract days are reduced, this will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers.
- This exemption should enhance teacher recruitment, putting the district on a more level playing field with larger districts.
- This exemption should significantly improve teacher morale.
- This exemption will provide teachers more opportunities during the year to seek out beneficial staff development that relates to their field.

VI. Appraisal System for Teachers and Administrators (TEC §21.352, §21.354, and §21.3541)

The Texas Education Code §§21.352, 21.354, and 21.3541 establish the basic standards for teacher and administrator appraisal. In 2016-2017, the Texas Teacher Evaluation System (T-TESS) and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS) were implemented by the state of Texas to be used in public schools. The domains within these systems are developed by the State to meet the needs of the entire State of Texas.

Rationale for Exemption

Woodson ISD believes it is essential to maintain flexibility in using a variety of measurements, including goal setting, observations, student growth progress toward learning objectives, and other formative assessments in determining the performance of educators. By claiming exemption from the above referenced sections, the district can determine locally the most appropriate appraisal instrument to evaluate its educators. Regardless of whether any adjustments or changes are made to the state-mandated appraisal system and laws, Woodson ISD believes this issue should be a local decision as opposed to a state mandate.

VII. Probationary Contracts (TEC §21.102)

State law currently limits the probationary contract period to one year for an employee new to the district but who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the new district.

Rationale for Exemption

This period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom

since the teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the availability of end of year classroom and student data. Woodson ISD will have the option to extend the probationary period for two or three additional years to allow more time for training/support for struggling teachers before considering termination of the probationary contract or offering a term contract.

VIII. Transfer Students (TEC §25.036)

State law allows a student to transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in the state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history, academic performance, and attendance records are also evaluated. Under TEC §25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

Rationale for Exemption

The administration will review disciplinary records, academic performance, attendance records, and other data of transfer students on an ongoing basis to determine if the transfer agreement is being upheld. Students and their parents/guardian will be expected to comply with district standards and expectations, including but not limited to all Woodson ISD policies, procedures, and regulations governing appropriate behavior for a school setting. Woodson ISD is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment to transfer students when the student or their parent/guardian violates district expectations of attendance, discipline, academic achievement, acts inappropriately for a school setting towards Woodson ISD staff, students, or other community members, and/or falsifies documentation. This flexibility would allow the district to have the option of immediate revocation of a student's transfer status by the Superintendent or designee at any time during the school year.

IX. Counselor Work Time (DP(LOCAL); TEC § 33.006)

Texas Education Code Section 33.006 states that a school counselor must "spend at least 80 percent of the school counselor's total work time on duties that components of a counseling program developed under Section 33.005." Further, "time spent in administering assessment instruments or providing other assistance in connection with assessment instruments, except time spent in interpreting data from assessment instruments, is not considered time spent on counseling."

Rationale for Exemption

Due to staffing limitations, this plan exempts the District from the statutory provision above that requires school counselors to spend at least 80 percent of the counselor's total work time on duties that are components of a counseling program. This exemption directly supports the District's commitment to high academic achievement. This innovation will be implemented by the District as follows:

- The District is committed to ensuring that the academic and emotional needs of all students are met. In order to accomplish this goal with limited staffing, the District must balance the roles of academic guidance, emotional support, and other administrative tasks in each counselor's workload.
- In addition to the role of providing student support through individual and crisis counseling, this exemption will allow the District to enhance the work of school personnel and parents through the counselor's role of guiding student goal setting and planning by promoting understanding of

standardized test results and other assessment data.

- Additionally, through annual auditing, the counselor will support the District to inform accountability, action plans, time management, and systemic change. In doing so, the counselor will be useful in providing parent and guardian consultation to foster each student's educational, career, personal, and social development.

X. Removal of Unwanted Visitors (GKA(LEGAL, GKA(LOCAL), TEC § 37.105)

Texas Education Code Section 37.105 limits a school districts discretion as to how and when a person can be refused entry or ejected from a school district's property or school-related event. Under the law, an individual must first refuse to leave peaceably upon request and either (1) pose a substantial risk of harm to any person or (2) behave in a manner inappropriate for a school setting and be given, at a minimum, a verbal warning before they are ejected or refused entry, and the person persists in the inappropriate behavior. Upon ejection or refusal of entry, an individual must also be given notice of how they may appeal the ejection.

Rationale for Exemption

Due to an increase in the prevalence of unruly visitors acting inappropriately for a school setting, this plan exempts the District from the statutory provision above that requires a verbal warning prior to ejection or refusal of entry. This exemption is in the best interests of the District and protects the District's commitment to providing a safe, stable educational environment and allows the District to avoid interruptions or interference with its daily operations. This innovation will be implemented by the District as follows:

- The District will allow designated staff members the authority to remove parents or visitors whose behavior is deemed inappropriate for a school setting without any prior warning or written notice.
- Following a parent or other visitor's ejection or refusal of entry from District property, administration will send written notice to the individual regarding the consequences and their right to appeal.

XI. Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator (FO(LEGAL); FO(LOCAL); TEC § 37.0012)

Section 37.0012 of the Texas Education Code requires that a person be designated to serve as the Campus Behavior Coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37.

Rationale for Exemption

The District is committed to ensuring a collaborative approach to discipline compliant with Chapter 37. This plan will allow a campus administrator to serve in the capacity of the Campus Behavior Coordinator as part of their job description.

XII. School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) Meetings (BDF(LEGAL); DCB(LOCAL); TEC § 28.004)

Texas Education Code Section 28.004 requires the school board of each school district to establish a local school health advisory council to assist the district in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the district's health education instruction. Further, the law requires the health advisory council to meet at least four times each year.

Rationale for Exemption

Because of the size of the District, this plan exempts the District from the statutory provision above that requires the advisory council to meet at least four times each year. This innovation will be implemented by the District as follows:

- The SHAC will meet twice per year–once in the Fall and once in the Spring.
- Additionally, the Board will be kept informed following both meetings.
- This exemption directly supports the District's commitment to health education and instruction.

XIII. Planning and Preparation Time (DL(LEGAL); TEC § 21.404)

Under Section 21.404 of the Texas Education Code, each classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and planning. A planning and preparation period may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day, and during a planning and preparation period, a classroom teacher may not be required to participate in any other activity.

Rationale for Exemption

The District is committed to providing each teacher with ongoing and consistent training and planning time to support student achievement. Flexible scheduling for planning and preparation time will allow the District to accommodate staffing shortages and times where all staff are required to perform duties outside of their routine day-to-day activities, including but not limited to mandatory testing days. The District will be able to combine the 45-minute requirement into one or multiple days resulting in longer planning and preparation periods for teachers and/or split the 45-minute requirement into smaller increments throughout an instructional day.

XIV. Student/Teacher Ratios and Class Size (EBB(LEGAL); TEC § 25.111, 25.112, 25.113)

Under Section 25.111 of the Texas Education Code, a school must employ a sufficient number of teachers to maintain an average ratio of not less than 1 teacher to 20 students. Texas Education Code section 25.112 states a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with TEA annually. Texas Education Code section 25.113 states a campus or district granted a class size waiver to exceed the 22:1 ratio shall provide written notice to parents of each student that a waiver has been submitted.

Rationale for Exemption

This exemption will allow the district flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation Designation and would not be required to seek waivers annually or notify parents. Woodson ISD will attempt to keep all the core K-4 classrooms to a 22:1 ratio. However, class sizes must, at times, be balanced with the logistics of adding staff and staff shortages within the district's community. The Board of Trustees will be notified of K-4 classrooms that exceed 22:1.

XV. Minimum Minutes of Instruction (EC(LEGAL); EB(LEGAL); TEC § 25.081, 25.083)

Texas Education Code Section 25.081 requires each school district to operate for at least 75,600 minutes each year, including time allocated for instruction, intermissions, and recesses for students. Lastly, TEC §25.083(a) limits a district's ability and authority to make nonemergency announcements to once per day.

Rationale for Exemption

This plan will allow the District to have local control over scheduling and the flexibility to alter the length of the school day when deemed to be necessary based on certain circumstances. Specifically, this plan will (1) reduce the number of days following Spring STAAR/EOC assessments, (2) aid in balancing semesters for a more uniform grading period each six-weeks, and (3) provide flexibility in scheduling extracurricular events.

Additionally, exempting the District from the restrictions under TEC § 25.083 will allow each campus the ability to make non-emergency announcements throughout the day on an as needed basis. While the District is committed to keeping announcements at a minimum, there are certain situations where non-emergency announcements are essential to communicate pertinent procedural and regulatory information.

Term and Implementation

The term for this plan is for five years unless terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas law. In the event Woodson ISD feels other exemptions would benefit the district, the Board of Trustees will nominate a new committee and follow all procedures for amending this plan.

The appropriate campuses and principals will develop this innovation plan and specific implementation procedures. Adjustments to Woodson ISD Board Policy and other district policies will be researched, reviewed, and adopted by the Board of Trustees in accordance with applicable law.