

Rice CISD District of Innovation Plan

Rice Consolidated Independent school District (RCISD) is exercising authority created by passage of House Bill 1842 of the 84th legislative session, as set forth in Texas Education Code, Chapter 12A. House Bill 1842 allows a traditional public school to declare itself a District of Innovation in order to exercise greater local control over its district. RCISD believes that becoming a District of Innovation will provide greater opportunity for our district to create a plan based on the needs of our individual students and community.

Beginning with the start of the 2018-2019 school year, RCISD will exercise the authority created by House Bill 1842 to exempt itself from allowable state requirements for a five year period running through the conclusion of the 2022-2023 school year. If, within the term of this plan, other areas are brought forward to be considered under HB 1842, the RCISD school board will reconvene the District of Innovation committee to consider and propose additional exemptions or changes to the original plan.

SCHOOL START DATE (TEC 25.0811)

CURRENTLY:

Texas law states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday in August unless it is a year-round district.

PROPOSED:

RCISD may choose a school start date that best meets the students'/district's needs. The school start date may be prior to the 4th Monday of August in order to develop a calendar that allows for adequate professional staff development before the start of instruction as well as allowing for interim work days for teacher planning.

TEACHER CONTRACT DAYS (TEC 21.401)

CURRENTLY:

A contract between a school district and a teacher must be for a minimum of 10 months' of service. An educator employed under a 10 month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

PROPOSED:

The contract between RCISD and a teacher will be a 10 month contract with the number of days of service dependent on each school year's individual calendar of instruction. The number of days of service will not exceed 187 days of service. This will allow the district to set a calendar each year that is aligned with the number of instructional days.

PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS (TEC 21.102)

CURRENTLY:

Texas Education Code provides a 1 year probationary period for teachers who have been in public education for at least 5 of the previous 8 years.

PROPOSED:

Because this limited time period is insufficient to fully assess the effectiveness of the professional, RCISD will issue a probationary contract for a period of 2 years for experienced teachers, counselors, and nurses newly hired in the district.

MINIMUM ATTENDANCE FOR CLASS CREDIT OR FINAL GRADE (TEC 25.092)

CURRENTLY:

Texas Education Code mandates that credit not be issued if students have not been in attendance for an arbitrary percentage of the time that a class is offered. Law currently requires the district to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than mastery of course objectives.

PRPOSED:

Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students who have legitimate scheduling conflicts, will reduce dropouts and increase the number of graduates.

TEACHER CERTIFICATIONS (TEC 21.003, 21.044, 21.053, 21.057)

CURRENTLY:

A person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aid, 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. Districts are required to provide written notice to parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days. Furthermore, Code requires that teachers present their certificate to the district before their employment contract will be binding and prohibits the district from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time. In addition, teachers in CTE programs are required to be certified in that specific area in order to receive CTE funding. All of these requirements make hiring in hard-to-fill areas difficult.

PROPOSED:

RCISD will maintain its current expectations for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, when 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.

1. The campus principal may submit to the superintendent in writing a request to have a certified teacher teach subject(s) or grade level(s) outside of their certification field. The principal must provide reasoning for the request and document the credentials which make the assigned teacher qualified to teach the subject(s) or grade level(s). The teacher will be expected to pursue passing the appropriate certification test. Teachers in positions that have been designated as high needs will receive half of the high needs stipend until passing the appropriate state certification test.
2. In order to provide more flexibility in scheduling and course offerings, as well as eliminate teacher shortages, RCISD may issue a local teaching certificate to a non-certified but highly qualified person to teach a CTE or elective course. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the person possesses that would qualify them to teach the course.
3. If RCISD allows a teacher to teach a subject or grade level outside of their certification area, the district will not be required to provide written notice of the assignment to parents/guardians.

OUT OF DISTRICT TRANSFERS (TEC 25.036)

CURRENTLY:

Code 25.036 is interpreted to mean that an out of district transfer is for a period of 1 year.

PROPOSED:

RCISD is seeking to eliminate the 1 year commitment of a transfer student if the student's behavior (in or out of school) warrants suspicion, the student is placed in a disciplinary alternative program, is expelled, attendance falls below TEA truancy standards or academic performance is deemed unacceptable.

STUDENT TO TEACHER RATIO, K – 4TH (TEC 25.111-25.113)

CURRENTLY:

Texas Education Code requires that districts maintain class sizes of 22 students or less in kindergarten – 4th grade. A waiver must be completed by the superintendent if a class exceeds the cap and parents must be notified. TEA does not reject the waivers. While RCISD accepts that small class size is optimal in lower elementary classrooms, it is not feasible, particularly in the smaller campuses where enrollment can vary occasionally in one class.

PROPOSED:

RCISD will attempt to keep class size at 22 or below in K – 4th but a waiver will not be necessary if enrollment exceeds 22 in order to free the administration from unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy.