

# Mineral Wells ISD

## Innovative Plan



## **Mission**

Mineral Wells Independent School District is committed to building a community of life-long learners in a student-centered climate emphasizing character and responsibility.

## **Vision**

Mineral Wells Independent School District will design challenging, relevant learning experiences to prepare students for our ever-changing global community.

## **Goals**

Mineral Wells Independent School District will strive for:

- Academic Competitiveness
- Competitive Workforce
- Community/School Partnerships
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Safe and Secure Schools

## **Core Values**

Honesty

Integrity

Teamwork

Excellence

Accountability

Belief in Students

Continuous Improvement

Partnerships with Parents, Businesses, and our Community.

# Mineral Wells ISD as a District of Innovation

## House Bill 1842

This District of Innovation plan relates only to the specific exemptions outlined below. The term of the Plan is for 5 years, beginning January 9, 2017 and ending January 9, 2022 unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with applicable law. The district will adhere strictly to the Texas Education Code in all other areas. If it becomes apparent that changes to this plan are necessary, the district will convene the DEIC to discuss and potentially enact those changes.

House Bill (HB) 1842 was passed in the 84th Texas Legislative Session. This law gives Texas public school districts an opportunity to modify state requirements to meet the needs of their students. As a District of Innovation, Mineral Wells ISD will have the increased flexibility necessary to customize student learning experiences. Every student is unique. If implemented properly, the unprecedented innovation enabled by HB 1842 can create a different schooling experience for every child. As a school district that puts the needs of students first, Mineral Wells ISD cherishes the ability to make important educational decisions locally.

MWISD seeks, via this process, to fully bring to life the district's vision for the future. Community and business partners have been involved throughout the process of developing our innovation plan, providing feedback regarding what they want their children's educational experience. As we begin to transform their dreams for their children into reality, local educators and district officials must be positioned to leverage allowed flexibility and reduce or avoid barriers that could otherwise prevent us from doing our best work on their behalf.

This plan requires us to evolve, to think drastically differently about critical systems in place in our school district. HB 1842 allows us to re-examine, free of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, how we teach, how we recruit and retain talent, how we organize ourselves, how we involve our families, how we grow as a learning organization, and what kinds of educational experiences we provide.

HB 1842 allows districts to exempt themselves from a limited subset of requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code (TEC) "that inhibit the goals of the plan and from which the district should be exempted on adoption of the plan. . ." The purpose of HB 1842 is to spur innovation in school districts, and it the desire of Mineral Wells ISD to become a more innovative district as a result of pursuing District of Innovation status. Because MWISD seeks to make best use of local control of educational decisions for the benefit of students, we seek exemption from the following permissible provisions of the TEC as allowed in the statute:

## **Uniform School Start Date**

(EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.0811)

### **Currently**

The District may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the 4th Monday of August.

### **Proposed**

The flexibility provided by permitting an earlier start date will allow Mineral Wells ISD to annually determine, at the local level, what start date best meets the needs of the students and community. This enables us to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, balance the amount of instructional time per semester, and provide more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff. In addition, this change will help enable students to enroll in college courses that start in early June, avoiding a hurdle that otherwise might hinder students' college and career readiness. Removing the uniform start date would also allow MWISD to start classes on a Wednesday or Thursday, as a short week, easing the transition to schooling for students entering pre-k/kindergarten, as well as transitioning through the elementary schools, middle school, and high school.

Students will start school no earlier than the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in August.

## **Minimum Minutes of Instruction and Length of School Day**

(EC LEGAL & EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.081) (Ed. Code 25.082)

### **Currently**

House Bill (HB) 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amended 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. Additionally, TEC §25.082(a) currently requires that a school day be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

### **Proposed**

Exemption from the 7-hour school day requirement would allow MWISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is an existing waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum per school year.

Exempting MWISD from the 75,600-minute annual requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with the 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.

MWISD does not intend to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days will 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.

## **Class Size in Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> Grade**

(EEB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.112) (Ed. Code 25.113)

### **Currently**

Texas Education Code § 25.112 requires enrollment in Kindergarten through 4th Grade classes to be limited at 22 students. If maintaining this limit creates an undue hardship, the District may request a waiver from the Texas Education Agency. Texas Education Code § 25.113 requires written notice to be sent home to parents each time a waiver is granted. Many times, soon after the waiver is submitted, situations change and we are below the 22:1 ratio.

### **Proposed**

As a district that is constantly changing, it has become a common need to Mineral Wells ISD to apply for a class size waiver. While we believe that a small class size may play a positive role for students, this must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff, and mindfulness must be given to the best teacher to student ratio that can be achieved given the total number of students. Many times, it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom that most influence the learning environment. Research shows that the teacher in the classroom has the greatest impact on student learning, as opposed to absolute class size. Under our district of innovation plan, in the event the class size exceeds the 22-student limit for kindergarten through 4th grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary. This plan emphasizes the importance of flexible environments and student learning based upon student needs. It grants flexibility in class size at all times for regrouping for success, small groups, large groups, etc. It also works to minimize paperwork requirements in order to free up time to place additional focus on student success. An exemption from the class size ratio requirements of Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112, will allow the ability to group students based upon academic, social, and emotional needs without adding ongoing filings of waivers when the need arises.

When exceeding a 22:1 student-teacher ratio in a K-4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom\*, district policy will be to constantly evaluate the possible need to add additional staff. We will follow this guide throughout this process:

23:1 – Inform the Superintendent

24:1 – Inform the Superintendent and Board of Trustees

25:1 – Inform the Superintendent, Board of Trustees, and notify parents

\* For classrooms participating in Opportunity Culture, these class size ratios do not apply. Opportunity Culture (OC-TX) is a state-supported model that extends the reach of excellent teachers to more students, for more pay, within existing budgets.

## **90 Percent Attendance Rule**

(FEC LOCAL) (Ed. Code 25.092)

### **Currently**

Texas Education Code 25.092 requires students to attend class for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered in order to earn class credit or be given a final grade for the class.

### **Proposed**

The 90 Percent Rule is an arbitrary standard, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Abstaining from the requirement means the district will no longer be required to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This exemption will allow the district to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities. It will also allow MWISD administrators to award credit to students because they can show they understand the concepts, rather than because they have attended a certain number of school days. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum. 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. MWISD 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.

Exempting the District from the 90 Percent Rule does not, in any way, impact or alters existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, 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 a District grading policy adopted pursuant to Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

## **Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator**

(FO LEGAL & LOCAL) (Ed. Code 37.0012)

### **Currently**

Senate Bill 107 amended the Texas Education Code by adding Section 37.0012, which requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

### **Proposed**

The proposal is for the district to abstain from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. MWISD's approach to discipline is becoming more collaborative, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration in regard to student discipline, as outlined in the MWISD Student Code of Conduct.



## **Teacher Contract Days**

(DCB Legal, DCB Local) (Ed. Code 21.401)

### **Currently**

Texas Education Code § 21.401 currently requires a contract between the District and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

### **Proposed**

This proposal reduces teacher contract days from 187 to 182 with no effect on teacher salaries. This stems from an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days.

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

## **Teacher Certification**

(DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT) (Ed. Code 21.003)

### **Currently**

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 submit a request to the Texas Education Agency and provide notification to parents of each student assigned to a classroom taught by the non-certified teacher. There is a lot of bureaucracy and unnecessary paperwork involved in the process.

### **Proposed**

MWISD is committed to placing a life changer in every classroom. In order to best serve MWISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the district's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high demand, dual credit, and career and technical/STEAM (applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts & Mathematics) courses, as well as, but not limited to, our bilingual education classes. These requirements also inhibit the district's ability to hire teachers moving in with out-of-state credentials. 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 of 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 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.

## **Probationary Contracts**

(DCA Legal) (Ed. Code 21.102(b))

### **Currently**

Under current guidelines, probationary periods for newly hired teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one year.

### **Proposed**

This limited time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Relief from Texas Education Code 21.102 will permit the district the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two years for experienced teachers, counselors or nurses newly hired in MWISD.

## **Planning and Preparation Time**

(DL Legal) (Ed. Code 21.404)

### **Currently**

Teachers are entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for preparing to teach, conducting parent conferences, and evaluating students' work.

### **Proposed**

In an effort to implement PLCs and Opportunity Culture within MWISD, flexible scheduling is a requirement. Having flexibility in planning and preparation time helps in creating schedules where select teachers can reach more students and have more planning time on teacher teams. All teachers will have appropriate planning and preparation time, but flexibility is requested.

## **Summary**

This District of Innovation Plan will reduce restrictions and help MWISD to better support our students, employees, and families in more innovative ways. Nudging our district toward the locally-customized environment our students deserve will enable us to better prepare them according to their individualized needs and their unique talents and traits. Through HB 1842, MWISD will be able to utilize innovative approaches to making the best decisions for our children because we will be able to make them locally.

In many cases, the implementation of exemptions from the TEC will require the revision of MWISD policies. MWISD will utilize a local policy development process that includes stakeholder input. This District of Innovation Plan will be implemented upon Board approval and will be in effect for 5 years from the date of implementation. Where necessary, the superintendent of schools or designee will promulgate regulations, policies, and procedures to govern the areas for which local flexibility has been sought.

We are grateful to the legislators who campaigned for Districts of Innovation through HB 1842 and to Commissioner Morath and his team for furthering our ability to create innovative strategies. We are committed to the children of our community and pledge to implement this plan with their best interests at heart.