

# Van Alstyne ISD District of Innovation Plan



## **Plan Approved**

District of Innovation Committee 10/12/2016

District Improvement Committee 10/20/2016

Board of Trustees 12/12/2016

**Reviewed by the District Improvement Team on 9/26/2018**

**Reviewed by the District Improvement Team on 9/25/2019**

## **I. Introduction**

The 84th legislature passed House Bill 1842 which allowed traditional independent school districts the ability to access flexibilities which had previously been reserved for Texas' open enrollment charter schools. In order for an independent school district to obtain these flexibilities, districts must seek designation as a "District of Innovation." On Monday, September 19, 2016, the Van Alstyne ISD Board of Trustees initiated the process by adopting a resolution to pursue a "District of Innovation" designation.

## **II. Mission**

Van Alstyne ISD will be a premier school district providing a well-rounded, safe school experience that prepares our graduates to discover and attain their life goals.

## **III. PREMIER**

For Van Alstyne to be PREMIER....Our Students and Staff will demonstrate the following qualities: Prepared Relevant Engaged Motivated Innovative Encouraging Relationships

## **IV. 2016 – 2017 Board Goals**

**GOAL 1** Van Alstyne ISD will achieve the highest accountability rating by TEA.

**GOAL 2** All students will experience highly engaging and rigorous lessons to help them attain their academic potential.

**GOAL 3** Parent and community members will be partners with the Van Alstyne ISD staff in meeting the needs of our students.

**GOAL 4** School facilities will be safe, well maintained, and disciplined environments conducive to student learning.

**GOAL 5** An appropriate overall financial condition of the district will be maintained through effective planning and efficient management of the budget.

## V. Process

On September 19, 2016, the Board appointed a District of Innovation Committee which was composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community representatives, and a board member. The committee met on September 26, 2016, and October 5, 2016, to discuss and draft a Local Innovation Plan (LIP). The committee was arranged into 5 teams with the objective of investigating Texas education codes in which the district could benefit from modifying in order to make the education process more effective/efficient for Van Alstyne ISD. Each group presented their findings to the committee for discussion and vote. In order to facilitate transparency, a site was designed and updated routinely on the District web page in order to inform all constituents throughout the process.

In order to promote and garnish more involvement in the process, Van Alstyne ISD and the District of Innovation Committee determined that the plan would be presented at each campus during a staff meeting in order to gather input from all campus based personnel. These meetings occurred on October 13, October 18, and October 19, 2016. The District Improvement Committee approved the plan October 20, 2016. The plan was posted on the District web page for public input on October 21, 2016 for 53 days before the Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the plan on December 12, 2016.

## VI. Committee Members

1. John Spies, Ed. D.	Superintendent
2. David Brown, Ed. D.	Assistant Superintendent
3. Wendi Russell	Curriculum Director
4. Jeremiah Johnson	Van Alstyne High School Principal
5. Ryan Coleman	Van Alstyne Middle School Principal
6. Elizabeth Smith	Van Alstyne Elementary Principal
7. Dennis Smith	Van Alstyne ISD Board Member
8. Rajonia Carnley	Elementary Teacher
9. Brandy Crow	Elementary Teacher
10. Myca Phillips	Middle School Teacher
11. Cindy Hensley	Middle School Teacher
12. Steve Campbell	High School Teacher
13. Amina Chaghani	High School Teacher
14. Tara Sprague	Elementary Parent
15. Amy Whitsell	Elementary Parent
16. Melinda Hunter	Elementary Parent
17. Kristi Densmore	Middle School Parent
18. Debbie Reece	Middle School Parent
19. Kary Cataldie	Middle School Parent
20. Lara Montgomery	High School Parent
21. Sherry Swift	High School Parent
22. Tina Watkins	High School Parent
23. Sharron Evans	Community Representative
24. Jeff Burge	Community Representative

## **VII. Timeline of Events**

### **Thursday, August 25, 2016**

Initial meeting with administrative staff to discuss preliminary thoughts and discuss possible members of the District of Innovation Team

### **Monday, September 19, 2016**

#### **6:00 pm, Special Board Meeting**

- Board of Trustees approve resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of using HB 1842 to become a District of Innovation

#### **7:00 pm, Public Hearing**

- Public hearing to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation

#### **7:00 pm, Regular Meeting**

- Approve a motion to pursue local “District of Innovation” plan - Board of Trustees approve the members of the District of Innovation Committee

### **Monday, September 26, 2016 – 4 pm High School Multipurpose Room**

Initial meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

### **Wednesday, October 5, 2016 – 4 pm High School Multipurpose Room**

2nd meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

### **Thursday, October 13, 2016 – 7:45 am High School Multipurpose Room**

High School Faculty Meeting

### **Tuesday, October 18, 2016 – 3:45 pm Middle School Library**

Middle School Faculty Meeting

### **Wednesday, October 19, 2016 – 3:30 pm Elementary Library**

Elementary Faculty Meeting

### **Thursday, October 20, 2016**

District Improvement Committee Public Hearing

District Improvement Committee Votes on Local Innovation Plan

### **Friday, October 21, 2016**

Notify Commissioner of Education of the Board’s intention to vote on adoption of proposed plan

Post the District of Innovation Plan on the district website for 30 days

### **Monday, December 12, 2016, Regular Board Meeting**

Approve the District of Innovation plan

### **Tuesday, December 13, 2016**

Update all policy changes with TASB

Notify Commissioner of Education of Approval of Local Innovation Plan

## VIII. Term of Plan

The term of the District of Innovation plan, as constituted by the Texas Education Agency, will be five years. Therefore, this plan will begin with the 2017-2018 school year and conclude at the end of the 2021-2022 school year unless terminated by the Board of Trustees. The District Improvement Committee will annually monitor the Local Innovation Plan and provide feedback to the Board on the effectiveness of the plan.

## IX. Innovations

### **Calendar (EB Legal, Local) (TEC §25.0811)**

Under current Texas state law, “a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August” (TEC 25.0811).

*Innovation Strategy* School start dates is an area in which the district should be able to determine locally and on an annual basis to determine what is best for our community. Having the ability to modify the start date of school allows us the flexibility to balance semester days, align classes to college courses, and ease transitions by beginning school on a shortened week.

**We did utilize this strategy this school year. We started school on Thursday, August 15th with a shortened two-day week to ease the transition back to school. By law, we would not have been able to start school until August 26th. College classes for our dual credit students would have already begun before this time. Starting early also allows us to finish before the end of May.**

### **Class Size Waiver (EEB Legal) (TEC §§25.111, 25.112, §25.113)**

State law requires that a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class. If classes are going to exceed this cap, a waiver is required from the Texas Education Agency. If approved, the district must then notify parents by “specifying the class for which an exception from the limit imposed by Section 25.112(a) was granted; (2) state the number of children in the class for which the exception was granted. (§25.113, 1-2).

*Innovation Strategy* Van Alstyne ISD is a growing district with one elementary campus that has reached capacity. As we look to build a new facility, the number of students per class is anticipated to exceed the 22:1 ratio dictated by law. In the event the cap of 22:1 is exceeded, the superintendent will report these findings to the board. If class sizes reach a 25:1 ratio, the superintendent will report to board and the district will notify parents. Van Alstyne ISD is committed to keeping class sizes at or below the current

22:1 ratio. Therefore, we will continue to look at avenues to reduce class sizes, but need to have the flexibility to exceed this cap during the expansion process.

**We were able to stay under the 22:1 student limit at both elementary campuses, and will continue to try to do so as we grow.**

### **Teacher Certification (DK Legal, Local, Exhibit) (TEC §21.003, §21.044, §21.053)**

As a small school district it is sometimes difficult to find qualified applicants for certain fields. When an applicant is unavailable it occasionally becomes necessary for a teacher to teach outside their certified teaching field. In order for a teacher to teach outside their teaching field, the district is required to submit a request to TEA. TEA then approves or denies this request.

Another area in which flexibility would benefit Van Alstyne ISD would be the ability to hire full time employees, with industry experience, for innovative, dual credit, or new classes in which we are unable to find certified teachers for a position.

***Innovative Strategy*** It would benefit the district and students to have the ability to allow a teacher to teach one class period out of their certified teaching field. It would also benefit the students and the district to have the flexibility to hire individuals with college teaching or industry experience on a part or full time local certification. The district's first option would be to hire a qualified applicant with a TEA certification. In order to meet the criteria above, the following procedures would be implemented:

- a) The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach one class period out of their certified field.
- b) An individual with college teaching or industry experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certificate. The campus principal would make a request to the superintendent and make all credentials available. The superintendent would have the capability to hire this person on a local certification and the employee would obtain an at-will contract.

**While we always strive to find highly qualified applicants for every position, we have utilized this strategy in several areas. An example of this was one of last year's Spanish teachers. She had years of experience teaching Spanish at the college level. The other position that was on a local certification was last year's athletic trainer, who taught one class for us. We have hired a full-time trainer for this upcoming school year, who is signed up to take the certification test to be fully certified.**

### **Teacher Contract Days (DCB Legal, Local) (TEC §21.401)**

Current education law in Chapter 21 requires a teacher who is on a 10 month contract to work an equivalent of 187 days.

*Innovation Strategy* In an attempt to align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students, the district would have the option to reduce the amount of contract days with no effect on teacher salaries.

**We have not utilized this strategy.**

### **Teacher and Principal Evaluation (DNA Legal, Local) (TEC §21.203, §21.351, §21.352, §21.354, §21.3541)**

The state of Texas has issued a new teacher appraisal system called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) as well as a new principal evaluation system called the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). Under current law, “the employment policies adopted by a board of trustees must require a written evaluation of each teacher at annual or more frequent intervals” (TEC §21.203).

*Innovation Strategy* A committee initiated by the district would have the option to develop a local instrument and/or process to evaluate teachers and principals which meets the needs and goals of Van Alstyne ISD. This committee would also have the authority to determine the frequency of both teacher and principal evaluations. After development of the local instrument, the Board of Trustees would approve the use of the local instrument in lieu of the instrument directed by the Texas Education Agency.

**We have not utilized this strategy. We are currently using the State’s T-TESS and T-PESS system.**

### **Probationary Contracts (DCA Legal) (TEC §21.002, §21.102)**

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. A one year probationary period is not a sufficient amount of time to evaluate the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Currently, contracts for Van Alstyne ISD employees occur in March which demands that employment decisions must be made with very little time for evaluating teacher effectiveness and prior to state assessment results.

*Innovation Strategy* For experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to the district that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years from the first day of employment with Van

Alstyne ISD.

**We do utilize this strategy and it has given principals an extra year to make more well-informed decisions about whether or not to place an employee on a term contract. Prior to this strategy, principals would sometimes have to make a contract decision before they were certain about whether they wanted to keep an employee or not.**

### **Planning and Preparation (DL Legal)(TEC §21.404)**

Texas Education Code dictates that each classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating student work, and planning. A planning and preparation period under this section may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day.

*Innovation Strategy* As a district we need to have the flexibility in developing teacher schedules and planning time. In order to meet the needs of our students, some teachers may have the need to have multiple preparation periods which adds up to a minimum of 45 minutes per day and 450 minutes per two-weeks. This flexibility is especially convenient for our staff who commute to multiple campuses.

**We have used this at times (mainly with teachers who are split between campuses), but try to use it sparingly. We try to give our employees 45 continuous minutes of time rather than breaking it up into smaller time segments.**

### **X. Summary**

The direction provided by this Local Innovation Plan is a culmination of collaboration between community members, parents, teachers, administrators and board members. This committee investigated the needs of our faculty and students and formulated a plan which allows our district to provide a premier education for all students. This plan provides an opportunity for the Van Alstyne community to make local decisions on the best way to educate our children. We are thankful for the support of the Van Alstyne Board of Trustees, local and state legislatures, and the Texas Education Agency for making this process possible.

**Having this plan in place has given us more flexibility to make decisions we feel are in the best interest of our district and students. It has also increased participation in some courses that we otherwise would not have been able to provide.**