

**Joaquin Independent School District
District of Innovation Plan
2017-2022**

A DISTRICT PLAN FOR INNOVATION AND LOCAL CONTROL

2017-2022

“Innovation is creativity in action.”

- The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in Spring 2015, providing public school districts the opportunity to become Districts of Innovation. To qualify, an eligible school district must adopt a five-year innovation plan according to the Texas Education Code.

Districts of Innovation may be exempt from state statutes to:

- take greater local control in decision-making about the educational and instructional model for students;
- have increased autonomy from state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- be empowered to innovate and plan differently – to create and implement transformative processes.

Why is Joaquin ISD seeking the state’s official designation as a District of Innovation?

- The Joaquin ISD Site Base Committee resolved in March 2017 to seek designation as a District of Innovation.
- This plan supports exemplary practices and local decision-making processes to improve student learning.
- The board appointed a District of Innovation Committee, represented by a majority of classroom teachers.

Under this plan, what might innovation look like at Joaquin ISD?

- In this case, innovation does not necessarily mean ambitious new initiatives beyond the school district’s current plan. Instead, it would signify Joaquin ISD has achieved the privilege and flexibility to exercise more creative local control over existing quality programs without some statutory constraints.

The proposed plan would:

- Maintain reasonable class sizes in grades K-4. Except in unique and extenuating circumstances and only with the Board of Trustees’ consent, Joaquin ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to preserve an important student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 per K-4 homeroom class.
- Determine a flexible school start date. Joaquin ISD will determine on an annual basis its own local starting date for the first semester, not to precede the second Monday in August of any given year, instead of the Texas statute that requires districts to begin a new school year on the fourth Monday of August.
- Allow alternatives to educator certification for distinctive subjects. When a certified educator is not found for a unique circumstance or innovative class, the school district may allow a non-certified professional to teach OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field without the traditional state credentials.
- Adjust instructional minutes and school day length. Joaquin ISD will make every effort to meet the goal of 75,600 instructional minutes per year, but may want to approach this total more creatively without being confined to either 420 minutes or seven hours of instruction every day.
- Allow the board to make adjustments to teacher contract days in an effort to make salaries more competitive.

JOAQUIN ISD PLAN FOR INNOVATION & LOCAL CONTROL

INTRODUCTION

Joaquin ISD is committed to providing high quality instruction in an environment conducive to learning.

Joaquin ISD continues to intentionally and strategically design a school system that: engages the digital generation; assesses student progress and growth using multiple, appropriate measures of assessment; embraces accountability to our community; transforms our school into a learning organization; and advocates local control to be restored to community schools.

House Bill 1842 passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in Spring 2015 provides Texas public school districts the opportunity to be designated as *Districts of Innovation*. To qualify and access allowable exemptions, an eligible school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Texas Education Code, Chapter 12A.

Districts of Innovation may be released from several statutes to have:

- greater local control in making decisions about the educational and instructional model for students;
- increased autonomy and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- empowerment to innovate and think differently.

**Districts are not exempt from statutes that address curriculum, assessment and graduation requirements as well as academic and financial accountability.*

THE PROCESS

On March 8, 2017, the Joaquin Independent School District Site Base Committee passed a resolution to initiate the process of designation as a District of Innovation. Following the resolution adoption, the district held a public hearing to provide an overview of the process, concepts, and benefits of such a designation on March 27, 2017.

The board appointed a District of Innovation Committee on March 27, 2017 with a charge to begin the process of drafting a local innovation plan. The committee consisted of a majority (60%) of classroom teachers with the remaining members being campus, district administrators, parents and community members. The committee began working on plan on March 31, 2017, to draft a plan of innovation. The proposed District of Innovation plan was posted to the district website for public comment and review on April 4th, 2017. The document will remain on the district website for the 30-day requirement. On April 4th, 2017, the district notified the Commissioner of Education that the proposed plan had been published on the District's website.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Joaquin Elementary:

Shelli Vaughn-Teacher
Rondalyn Neal-Teacher
Deborah Derbonne-Teacher
Tracy Bryant-Teacher
Shonda Prnka-Elementary Secretary
Sherry Scruggs-Principal

Joaquin Jr. High:

Amanda Freeman-Teacher
Tammy Hamilton-Teacher
Ann McDaniel-Teacher
Terri Gray-Principal

Joaquin High School:

Lynn Silvey-Teacher
Lisa Barton -Teacher
Sharon Shanz-Teacher
Amanda Russell-Teacher
Jimmy Jackson-Principal

District/Parents/Community:

Joel Bumback-Director of Finance
Jennifer McCann-Admin. Services Coordinator
Shelly McDaniel - Parent
Kay Balkcom - Community

***60% Classroom Teachers/ 40% Non-Teacher**

Proposed Actions of the Plan of Innovation

As a result of this plan, Joaquin ISD will apply the following innovative governance guidelines to the unique, local and instructional needs of its students and community.

1. MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES IN GRADES K-4

(TEC 25.112a-g) (TEC 25.113a-b) (EEB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Code requires districts to maintain 22 students or less in kindergarten through 4th-grade classes. A school district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for each class that exceeds this limit. These waivers are rarely rejected by TEA, making the process primarily for awareness purposes and to preserve a more personal instructional environment.

State law also requires districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. Sometimes during the course of a school year, due to shifting enrollments, a class may return to a smaller student-to-teacher ratio before or after the waiver is formally granted, thus negating the notice or causing parents and staff unnecessary concern.

Joaquin ISD certainly recognizes reasonable class size plays a positive role in the classroom, and acknowledges the intent of the state requirements. However, class size must be balanced with the logistics and timing of adding staff, available campus resources or space, and the optimal teacher-to-student ratio given the total number, age and needs of students. Often, it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which create a more personal instructional environment. Most importantly, research shows the teacher in the classroom has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. This exemption does not disregard the intent of class size ratio requirements, but rather, allows Joaquin ISD the local control to determine class size.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. In accordance with TEC §25.112, Joaquin ISD will make every effort to begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student-to-teacher ratio of 22:1 per K-4 homeroom class. Also consistent with TEC §25.113, if, after consideration of the factors outlined below, any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will inform and obtain consent from the Board of Trustees and will notify parents of affected students.
- B. If, during the school year, a K-4 homeroom exceeds 22:1, the administration will have 30 school days to consider:
 1. The subject/age to be taught, the teaching methodology to be used and any need for individual instruction in the class;
 2. Available space and resources;
 3. Whether another teacher should be hired (thus creating a new classroom);
 4. Whether a teaching assistant could be added to the homeroom class; or
 5. Whether keeping the class intact is more advantageous than separating students, in which case the class size may slightly exceed 22:1.
- C. Consistent with TEC §25.112, TEC §25.114 and TEA guidance, the 22:1 ratio does not apply to physical education or fine arts classes. In such subjects, Joaquin ISD will consider student/teacher ratios appropriate to implement the curriculum and ensure student and staff safety.

- D. Additionally, consistent with TEC §25.112, Joaquin ISD will not be required to seek consent from the Board of Trustees for a homeroom classroom that may exceed 22:1 during the last 12 weeks of the school year.
- E. A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio, although the Joaquin ISD Board of Trustees must still consent and parents must still be notified.
- F. The district will not allow the average class size per grade level (K-4) to exceed 23:1.

2. DETERMINE A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL START DATE

(TEC §25.0811a) (EB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Code states a school district may not begin student instruction before the fourth Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to begin earlier, even as early as the second Monday in August.

The start-date waiver was eventually removed when the legislature determined school districts should begin the first semester no earlier than the fourth Monday of August, with no exceptions. The current process allows no flexibility in the design and balancing of instructional semesters to meet the needs of students or the wishes of the local board of trustees, who represent community interests in this matter.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Joaquin ISD will determine on an annual basis the local starting date of the first semester, not to precede the second Monday in August of any given year.
- B. The annual calendar will be submitted by the District Calendar Committee and approved by the board of trustees.

3. ALLOW ALTERNATIVES TO EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION FOR DISTINCTIVE SUBJECTS

(TEC §21.003a) (TEC §21.057a-e) (DK LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Codes state a person may not be employed as an educator by a school district unless the individual holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. In the event a school district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position, or a teacher is teaching a subject outside her or his certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or the State Board of Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district, especially for innovative classes where certification may not exist or educators with those credentials may not be readily available.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. In exceptional circumstances, when a certified educator is not found for a unique or innovative class, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that will allow a non-certified yet highly qualified professional to teach OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field for which she or he is not credentialed by the state.

- B. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what qualifications the individual possesses to teach the proposed subject. Emergency or financial situations creating the need for this assignment should also be noted.
- C. Whenever possible, lesson plans or curriculum guides to support the uncertified yet highly qualified educator will be developed or provided in partnership with certified teachers in the same field.
- D. In the event an uncertified yet highly qualified educator or professional is assigned to a course, the superintendent will inform and obtain consent from the board of trustees and will notify parents of students who benefit from this decision.
- E. A teacher certification waiver, state permit applications or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency.

4. ADJUST INSTRUCTIONAL MINUTES AND SCHOOL DAY LENGTH

(TEC §25.081) (TEC §25.082) (EB LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

The Texas Education Codes define the length of the instructional day as “420 minutes of instruction” or “seven hours each day including intermissions and recesses.” The intent of this code is to standardize across all districts the amount of time students are engaged in classroom learning. The school code also allows school districts and charter schools to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disaster, flood, extreme weather conditions, fuel curtailment or another calamity.

Joaquin ISD believes flexibility in use of minutes as well as the length of the school day will support teachers and staff who participate in relevant professional development, perfecting their craft, deepening their content knowledge and analyzing student data. In addition – particularly at the elementary level – flexibility in both instructional minutes and the length of the school day will protect all-important parent-teacher conferences especially in the event of inclement weather days, which may impact cumulative instructional minutes allocated over the course of a school year.

Local Innovation Strategies:

- A. Joaquin ISD will make an effort to maintain the total of 75,600 minutes of instruction per year, but seeks an exemption from these statutes as necessary so it may approach the 75,600-minute goal in a more creative manner without being confined to either 420 minutes or seven hours of instruction every day. This will offer campuses greater flexibility in creating daily/weekly instructional schedules that better meet the needs of the students we serve.
- B. This exemption will allow for local control regarding the early dismissal of students for various purposes. Early release days may be used for additional professional development, unique instructional arrangements, teacher collaboration, teacher/parent conferences, releasing prior to a holiday and other special occasions, or other school related activities.

5. ADJUSTMENT OF TEACHER CONTRACT DAYS

(TEC §21.401) (DC LEGAL)

Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan:

Texas Education Code states that a contract between the district and an educator must be for a minimum of ten months of service. An educator employed under a ten-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. The Commissioner may reduce the number of days of service, but such a reduction does not reduce an educator's salary.

Local Innovation Strategies:

This plan reduces teacher contract days from 187 to 182 with no effect on teacher salaries.

This reduction in contract days at the current salary schedule would make our salaries more competitive.

- A. This plan will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers.
- B. This plan should enhance teacher recruitment.
- C. This plan will provide teachers more flexibility during the summer months to seek out beneficial staff development that relates to their field.
- D. In each year of the plan, it will be part of the calendar planning process to maintain the reduced number of teacher contract days.
- E. The superintendent will inform and obtain consent from the board of trustee