

**Grapeland ISD**  
**District of**  
**Innovation Plan**



**2022 - 2027**

## **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, August 15, 2022 the Grapeland ISD Board of Trustees initiated the process by adopting a resolution to pursue a “District of Innovation” designation.

## **Timeline of Events**

August 15, 2022	Grapeland ISD Board approved resolution seeking District of Innovation status
August 15, 2022	Public Hearing at Board Meeting
August 15, 2022	Grapeland ISD Board approved District of Innovation committee
August 16, 2022	DOI committee approved DOI Plan
August 16, 2022	DOI Plan posted on the Grapeland ISD website
August 18, 2022	DOI Committee Plan Review
September 19, 2022	Grapeland ISD Board approved District of Innovation Plan

## **Committee Members**

Don Jackson	Superintendent
Kristi Bell	Director of Instruction
Aimee Johnson	High School Principal
Channin’ Spisak	Junior High Principal
Cassie Satterwhite	Elementary Principal
Amanda Kincade	Secondary Assistant Principal
Amy Howard	Elementary Representative
Rachel Chapman	Junior High Teacher
Kelli Heath	High School Teacher
Julie Martin	Parent Representative
Deborah Smith	Parent Representative
Brandon Bridges	Community Member

## **1. Probationary Contracts (DEC LEGAL) (TEC 21.102)**

### ***Currently***

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. This time period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

### ***Proposed***

For experienced teachers, counselors, 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. For any teacher returning to Grapeland ISD that was previously employed by GISD, the same rules will apply for the length of the probationary contract. A teacher hired to return to the district would be on a probationary status for up to two school years.

## **2. School Start Date (TEC 25.0811)**

### ***Currently***

Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August. In the past, districts could apply for a waiver to start the school calendar earlier to meet the needs of the local community. This waiver opportunity was met with resistance from the Texas tourism groups who lobbied to have the practice ended, because they believed it was detrimental to the Texas tourism business. Therefore, several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

### ***Proposed***

This flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and local community. Flexibility to start earlier in August would help our district plan for balanced instructional time in the semesters that would better support semester course curriculum. In addition, flexibility in the start and end of the school year would allow students to enroll in college courses that begin in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. Removing the uniform start date could also allow Grapeland ISD to begin the first week of classes with a shortened week, easing the transition for students entering kindergarten, middle school, and high

school. This will also allow for more flexible professional development opportunities for our staff.

### **3. Class Size Ratio (TEC 25.112)**

#### ***Currently***

Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes are to remain at or below a 22 student to 1 teacher ratio according to state law. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose. Along with the waiver, it is required that a letter be sent home to each parent in the class that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted. There are times when the classes are below the 22:1 ratio after the waiver process has been completed due to students moving out of the district.

#### ***Proposed***

Grapeland ISD has not had to file for a waiver in the last few years, however, because of recent growth in our lower elementary classes, the surpassing of the 22:1 ratio is a distinct possibility. While we certainly believe that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, keeping the 22:1 ratio must be balanced with the necessity of adding staff and other concerns. While our goal will be to maintain the 22:1 ratio, in the event the class size exceeds the 22:1 ratio for Kindergarten – 4th grade classes, a TEA waiver will not be necessary, however the superintendent will report the situation to the Board of Trustees. The board will be provided an update of class size numbers during the first six weeks and during the fourth six weeks. This exemption only allows Grapeland ISD the local control over class size ratios, not a disregard for the intent of the ratio requirements. This plan also emphasizes the importance of flexible learning environments and student learning based upon student driven passions and needs. This exemption grants flexibility in class size at all times-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 in meeting 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.

#### **4. Teacher Certification (DK LEGAL) (DK LOCAL) (DK EXHIBIT) (TEC 21.003) (TEC 21.053) (TEC 21.057)**

##### ***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. TEA then approves or denies this request. There is a lot of bureaucracy and unnecessary paperwork involved in the process.

##### ***Proposed***

Grapeland ISD is committed to placing a certified instructor in every classroom. In order to best serve GISD 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. 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. This exemption directly supports the move from "highly qualified" requirements in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). By obtaining exemption from existing teacher certification requirements, the District will have the flexibility to hire internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area. 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.

#### **5. Ninety Percent Attendance Rule (TEC 25.092)**

##### ***Currently***

State law currently requires students attend class 90 percent of the school days in order to earn credit. The law currently requires the District to award class credit to students based on "seat time" rather than based on content mastery.

### ***Proposed***

The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary percentage, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. 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. 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 Grapeland ISD 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. GISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate mastery, given this exemption. This exemption supports overarching goals in the strategic plan to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers. Relief from Section 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter 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 Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

## **6. Minimum Minutes of Instruction (TEC 25.081)**

### ***Currently***

House Bill (HB) 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amends the Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.081, by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring districts and charter schools to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess). The bill 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.

### ***Proposed***

The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction will assist with personalizing learning to better meet individual student needs. Communication about student progress is essential for the innovative work taking place through our Blueprint for Learning. The Grapeland ISD community values the opportunity to meet face to face with teachers to discuss student progress. Early release time would allow parent-teacher conferences to occur both in the fall and spring semesters. A later start or additional early release time would accommodate professional development/collaboration opportunities for teachers.

## **7. High School Diploma and Certificate/Course Sequence (TEC 28.025)**

### ***Currently***

Action by the 83rd Session of the Texas Legislature and the rule-making authority of the Texas State Board of Education imposed pre-requisite requirements for high school students in certain subjects and endorsements. This is an unnecessary and problematic requirement that may adversely impact students seeking to recover credit and graduate in a timely manner or those students seeking to accelerate their high school program to graduate early.

### ***Proposed***

Grapeland ISD students will be able to enroll in courses that meet their needs, selected graduation plans and endorsements. Students and their parents will annually review their course selections and determine which courses and which course sequences best meet the needs of each student. Annual guidance will be provided to students and their parents regarding course selections and timing of courses based on graduation plans and endorsements, without the limitations of unnecessary prerequisite course requirements.

## **8. Teacher Contract Days (TEC 21.401)**

### ***Currently***

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

### ***Proposed***

Grapeland ISD may reduce the number of days of service from a minimum of 187 to a number determined by the school board for educators employed under a 10-month contract. The reduction in days will have no effect on salaries, which will increase the teacher's daily rate, enhance educator recruitment, and improve morale. This plan will also provide more opportunities for teachers to seek beneficial staff development related to their fields.

## **9. Inter- District Transfers (FDA LEGAL) (FDA LOCAL) (TEC 25.036)**

### ***Currently***

Texas Education Code 25.001, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

### ***Proposed***

This would follow FDA Local policy requiring nonresident students to file a transfer application each school year. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one – year commitment in accepting transfer applications.

a. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services, the student's disciplinary history records and attendance records will be evaluated.

b. Transfer students are required to follow the attendance requirements, rules, and regulations of the district.

c. In rare cases, transfer status may be revoked by the superintendent or his or her designee at any time during the school year if the student is assigned disciplinary consequences such as suspension (in school or out of school), placement at the DAEP, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance stand may also be subject to immediate revocation of the student's transfer status.

## **10. School Health Advisory Council (FFA LEGAL) (FFA LOCAL) (TEC 28.004)**

### ***Currently***

Current law requires that the SHAC committee must meet four times per year to assist the district in ensuring the local community values are reflected in the district's health education instruction.

### ***Proposed***

The SHAC shall meet one time per year and may be in conjunction with the District Educational Improvement Committee as needed.

a. As a small district, committee members are intimately aware of the needs of the District's students, as well as the values that are to be promoted within the community.

b. With the limited number of stakeholders and likelihood that community members that are actively involved serve the school in many ways and often serve on more than one committee or group, it is recommended that the committees may meet at the same time, location or date to complete duties and business of the committee.