

MARION ISD: A DISTRICT PLAN
FOR INNOVATION AND LOCAL CONTROL
2017-2022



APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF
TRUSTEES ON
JANUARY 25, 2017
IN ACCORDANCE WITH TEXAS HB 1842



Marion ISD District of Innovation Plan

Summary Points:

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in the spring of 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.



- ⑩ take greater local control in decision-making about the educational and instructional model for students;
- ⑩ have increased autonomy from state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- ⑩ be empowered to innovate and plan differently and creatively.

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

- ⑩ The Marion ISD Board of Trustees resolved in September 2016 to seek designation as a District of Innovation.
- ⑩ This plan supports exemplary practices and local decision-making processes to improve student learning.
- ⑩ The board appointed a District of Innovation Committee in October 2016 to represent teachers, parents, and administration.

Under this plan, what might innovation look like in Marion ISD?

- ⑩ Marion ISD will achieve the flexibility to exercise more creative local control over existing quality programs without some statutory constraints. Marion ISD will use innovative strategies to provide increased opportunities for student and staff success.

The proposed plan would:

 **Maintain reasonable class sizes in grades K-4.** Except in unique and extenuating circumstances, Marion 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.** Marion 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.** When a certified educator is not found for an offered course, the school district may allow a non-certified professional OR a certified educator to teach a subject in a related field without the traditional state credentials.

 **Adjust instructional minutes and school day length.** Marion 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 one additional probationary contract year for new teachers to our district. When a teacher is new to Marion ISD, the school district may offer a probationary contract for a second year regardless of previous years of experience allowing additional time to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness prior to offering a term contract.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Kelly Walters, Superintendent

Elizardo Hernandez, Marion High School Principal

Matthew Connor, Marion High School Assistant Principal

Jon Lindholm, Marion Middle School Principal

Paul Goetzke, Karrer Elementary Campus Principal

Julie Brown, Krueger Elementary Campus Principal

Daniel Terrazas, Director of Special Programs

Bruce Salmon, Athletic Director

Taylor Greene, Teacher

Christen Schoen, Teacher

Rachel Zimmermann, Teacher

Crystal Lehmann, Teacher

Mike Sims, Teacher

Sherri Doerr, Parent

Melanie Lleverino, Parent

Jill LeSage, Parent

Dawn Bierstedt, Parent

District of Innovation Timeline

September 21, 2016	Board of Trustees approved resolution to develop innovation plan
October 19, 2016	Board of Trustees held a public hearing in accordance with the statute
October 19, 2016	Board of Trustees appointed a committee to Develop a local innovation plan
October 24, 2016	District of Innovation committee held initial Meeting
November 2, 2016	District of Innovation committee met to review first draft of plan
November 10, 2016	District of Innovation committee met to review updated draft of plan
November 16, 2016	Draft to Board of Trustees for review
December 7, 2016	District of Innovation committee met to finalize draft of plan
December 12, 2016	Post proposed plan on the district's website for 30 days for staff, parent, and community review
December 16, 2016	Notify Texas Commissioner of Education of intention to vote on adoption of proposed plan
January 25, 2017	District of Innovation committee presents plan in a public hearing
January 25, 2017	Board of Trustees to formally approve the innovation plan
January 26, 2017	Formal notification to Texas Commissioner of Education that plan is adopted

As a result of this plan, Marion ISD will apply the following innovative guidelines to the instructional needs of its students and staff.

1. MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES IN GRADES K-4

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

Current Limitations:

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. They are valid for one school year. A waiver cannot be obtained for the same grade level for two consecutive school years.

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.

Marion 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 productive 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 Marion ISD the local control to determine class size.

Innovation Strategies:

A. In accordance with TEC §25.112, Marion 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 the Board of Trustees.

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, Marion ISD will consider student/teacher ratios appropriate to carry out the curriculum and ensure student and staff safety.
- D. Additionally, consistent with TEC §25.112, Marion 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 Marion ISD Board of Trustees will be notified.

2. DETERMINE A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL START DATE

(TEC §25.0811a) (EB LEGAL)

Current Limitations:

The Texas Education Code states a school district may not begin student instruction before the fourth Monday of August. 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.

Innovation Strategies:

- A. Marion 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. Consideration will be given to factors such as equalizing instructional days per semester for single semester courses and providing additional instructional days prior to state standardized testing dates.
- C. The annual calendar will be submitted by the District Calendar Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees.

3. ALLOW ALTERNATIVES TO EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

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

Current Limitations:

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 complicated 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.

Innovation Strategies:

- A. In exceptional circumstances, when a certified educator is not found for an offered class, the campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request for local certification that may 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. Should the school district be required to provide a bilingual education program, this same exemption will apply if there is a scarcity of certified bilingual educators or applicants.
- E. In the event an uncertified yet highly qualified educator or professional is assigned to a course, the superintendent will inform the board of trustees.
- F. 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)

Current Limitations:

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 engage 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, etc. Marion ISD believes flexibility in use of minutes as well as the length of the school day will support teachers and staff who participate in 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.

Innovation Strategies:

- A. Marion 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.
- B. The flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction will better meet individual student needs.
- C. This exemption will also allow Marion ISD to alter the length of a school day or a school year. These could include additional professional development and collaboration opportunities for

educators, social-emotional benefits for students, accommodations during parent-teacher conferences, and adjustments in cases of inclement weather.

5. ALLOW ONE ADDITIONAL PROBATIONARY CONTRACT YEAR FOR NEW TEACHERS TO OUR DISTRICT

(TEC§21.102) (DCA LEGAL)

Current Limitations:

Texas Education Code states that experienced teachers new to the district have a probationary period that 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 time period is not always sufficient to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

Innovation Strategies:

A. Experienced teachers new to Marion ISD that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years may be issued a probationary contract for up to two years from the date of district employment. This will allow the district more time to evaluate a staff member's effectiveness.

B. The principal must specify in writing the recommendation for either a second probationary contract or a term contract for each new employee in the spring of the employee's first year of employment.