



Learners Today Leaders Tomorrow

**North Zulch ISD**  
**District of Innovation Plan**  
2018-2019 – 2022-2023

### **District of Innovation Committee**

Alan Andrus – Superintendent

Kori Batten – Counselor

Becky Wilson – Community Member

David Kirk – Parent

Kendra Gilbert – Instructional Aide

Dana Diserens – Elementary Teacher

Laura Kirschner – Elementary Teacher

Janie Pope – Elementary Principal

Tami Suits – Elementary Teacher

Joan Osth – Secondary Teacher

Lea Ann Andrus – Curriculum Director

Ashley Crocker – Instructional Aide

Holly Ashley – Secondary Teacher

Johan Osth – Secondary Principal

Kristy Rhodes - Parent

Rinza Stewart – Community/Business Member

### **District of Innovation**

The 84th Legislative Session passed House Bill 1842, allowing Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and thus permitting exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. In an effort to transform systemic improvement to better serve and accommodate the diverse needs of all 21st century stakeholders, including students, staff, parents and community members, North Zulch ISD seeks to become a District of Innovation. This distinction allows the District increased local control over District operations to improve the quality of services benefiting all stakeholders.

The District of Innovation Plan is for five years, yet may be terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees at any time in accordance with the law. The District of Innovation Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the DOI plan and provide updates and/or necessary modifications to the Board of Trustees on a regular basis.

## **District of Innovation Timeline**

### **November 12, 2018**

- NZISD Board of Trustees received information concerning District of Innovation Designation in a board meeting.
- NZISD Board of Trustees adopted resolution to pursue becoming a District of Innovation.

### **December 13, 2018**

- NZISD Public Hearing Regarding District of Innovation.
- NZISD Board of Trustees gave the go ahead for the Superintendent to establish a district committee to develop an innovation plan.

### **January 16, 2019**

- NZISD conducted a Needs Assessment to discuss possible areas of innovation.

### **January 30, 2019**

- District of Innovation Committee considered a list of statutes to consider in the local plan.
- District of Innovation Committee approved a draft of the District of Innovation Plan

### **February 1, 2019**

- District of Innovation Plan posted to the district website for the required 30 day review period.

### **March 8, 2019**

- North Zulch ISD notified the Commissioner of Education of the intent of the school district to adopt a plan to become a District of Innovation.

### **March 28, 2019**

- Public hearing for final review of the plan.

### **May Board Meeting**

- NZISD Board of Trustees will vote to ratify the plan.
- District of Innovation Plan will be filed with TEA.

## **North Zulch ISD District of Innovation Plan**

## **Areas of Innovation**

### **1. School Calendar**

(TEC 25.0811)

Currently, students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August. The proposal would look at options for allowing an earlier start date and a calendar that best fits the needs of the North Zulch ISD community.

#### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- District Calendar Committee will have the flexibility to start school earlier.
- Starting school earlier would allow the district to balance the two semesters.
- The balanced semesters will align with college semesters as well, allowing more opportunities for summer school, internships, and industrial certification opportunities.

### **2. Teacher Certification**

(TEC 21.003, TEC 21.057)

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 TEA. TEA then approves or denies this request. This proposal would look at the following options:

- allow certified educators to teach in a related field for which they were not certified by the state
- allow individuals with industry experience in a CTE field to be eligible to teach vocational courses
- relieve the district from the requirement to notify parents if an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

#### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- State certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire professionals with industry/academic experience to teach a variety of courses such as CTE, STEMS, and electives.
- Local Qualifications will allow the district to recruit teachers from the field, including individuals from certain trades and/or vocations with industry knowledge and real world experience.
- Allow certified teachers to teach above or below the grade level span of their current certification.

### **3. Teacher Contract Days**

(TEC 21.401)

Current education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract equivalent to 187 days. With the requirement for student attendance changing from days to minutes, the number of teacher days may need to be adjusted to better align with the student day (minutes). The proposal would reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. This would be an attempt to better align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students.

#### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- North Zulch ISD will determine the number of contract days that are required to fulfill the contract of our 10 month employees.
- This will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers.
- Teacher recruitment and morale will be enhanced.

### **4. Probationary Contracts**

(TEC 21.102)

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. This limited time period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

#### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- 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 NZISD. This will allow the district time to evaluate performance.

## **5. Class Size Ratio/Reporting Requirement**

(TEC 25.112, TEC 25.113)

Under TEC 25.112, districts are required to maintain a student to teacher ratio of 22:1 or less for Kindergarten – 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency.

Under TEC 25.113, districts are required to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this notice.

### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- Flexibility in this area would allow the district to determine the enrollment in classes, bearing in mind class structure, content, and the age of learners.
- NZISD will strive to keep student to teacher ratios as low as possible, but the district would have the ability to make decisions at the local level without applying to the Commissioner for an exception.
- Flexibility in this area would allow the district to determine the appropriateness of parent notification as innovative class structures are explored and potentially put into place.

## **6. School Health Advisory Council**

(TEC 28.004)

Current education law requires the local school health advisory council to meet at least four times each year. The requirement becomes burdensome and time consuming for a district our size.

### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- Relief from this requirement will allow all stakeholders to continue to be involved in the process, but in a manner that meets the needs of this district and community.
- North Zulch ISD will hold a minimum of two meetings per year.

## **7. Inter-District Transfers**

(TEC 25.036), Relevant Board Policies: FDA (LOCAL)

Currently, under TEC 25.036, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC 25.036, has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard.

### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- North Zulch ISD is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants.
- Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

## **8. Absences for College/University Visits**

(TEC 25.087/b-2 1 & 2), TAC 129.21 j)

Under the current code, a school district may excuse a student from attending school to visit an institution of higher education accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization during the student's junior and senior years of high school for the purpose of determining the student's interest in attending the institution of higher education, provided that:

- (1) the district may not excuse for this purpose more than two days during the student's junior year and two days during the student's senior year; and
- (2) the district adopts:
  - (A) a policy to determine when an absence will be excused for this purpose; and
  - (B) a procedure to verify the student's visit at the institution of higher education.

### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- In some cases, where students are visiting colleges out of state, students need more than the two days that are currently allowed to safely visit a college they are interested in attending.
- Each situation would be evaluated by the counselor or principal on a case by case basis.

## **Amendments: Approved June 7, 2021**

### **1. Expanded Insurance Options for Employees**

(TEC: 22.004(i))

The current code precludes a school district from providing an alternative uniform group coverage program once the school district implements coverage under Chapter 1579. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all NZISD employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverage for its employees at a lower cost.

#### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- Increased local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee needs.
- Allows NZISD flexibility to offer additional insurance benefits to all district employees.
- Allows NZISD to remain competitive with surrounding districts.

### **2. School Depositories Contract**

(TEC 45.205)

Under the current code, the depository bank when selected shall serve for a term of two years and can be extended for three additional two-year terms. This places a burden on the district once it has reached the limit of extensions by requiring the district to seek bids or a request for proposal.

#### **Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- Lessens the administrative burden related to preparing/reviewing a Request for Proposal when there is a limited number of banking institutions available to bid on the district's business.
- Mitigate any impact to employees that would have to change direct deposit instructions each time a new depository occurs and allows the district flexibility with respect to banking relationships.
- Allows the district the flexibility to send depository services out for bid if the district determines contract pricing has become uncompetitive or there is some operational or financial reason.
- Reduce cost of purchasing new checks and deposit slips.



**Amendments: Approved August 30, 2021**

**Disciplinary Alternative Education Program**

(TEC §37.008 and §37.006)

**1. TEC §37.008**

The current code requires students who are placed in a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) to be under the supervision of a certified teacher, and to be separate from other students who are not in the program.

**Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- Since there will be a limited number of students assigned to DAEP and all academic responsibilities and resources are provided to the student by his/her teacher of record for each course, an additional certified teacher is not required.
- District Administrators will ensure that DAEP staff have the support necessary to properly supervise the students assigned to the program and will lend assistance of teachers with specific certification as needed.
- Exemption for this requirement would allow the district to better utilize staff and facilities by allowing DAEP students to attend the same classroom as In School Suspension (ISS) students when necessary.

**2. TEC §37.006**

The current code states that an elementary student may not be placed in DAEP with any other student who is not an elementary student.

**Benefits of Exemption for NZISD**

- Exemptions from this requirement would allow the district to make common sense decisions about which students are age appropriate to be in the same room together.
- The exemption would allow the district to better utilize existing staff and facilities in the event of an elementary DAEP placement.