

Gustine ISD
District of Innovation Plan
Effective through March 21, 2022

The Gustine Independent School District (GISD) is exercising authority created by passage of House Bill 1842 of the 84th Legislative Session, as set forth in Texas Education Code, Chapter 12A. HB 1842 allows a traditional public school to exercise greater local control, and utilize the exemptions in Education Law that charter schools currently are entitled to. We feel this is a great opportunity for our local district to create a plan based on the needs of our students and community.

Beginning March 21, 2017, GISD will exercise this authority to exempt itself from the following state requirements for a five-year period running through March 21, 2022, including: Uniform school start date, required length of school day, teacher certification and contract service days.

Uniform Start Date (§TEC 25.0811)

State law currently prohibits school districts from starting class before the fourth Monday of August, unless they are a year-around district.

Proposal for Exemption:

The Gustine Independent School District strategic plan proposes that we be permitted a flexible start date. This would allow for a calendar which best fits the needs of our students, community and school. It would provide a start date aligned with dual credit college courses and a more balanced semester structure; in turn, giving additional needed instruction time prior to standardized testing.

Length of School Day (TEC 25.081)

State law currently requires that all school days be 420 minutes in length in order to count for ADA calculations and funding purposes, and to accumulate instructional minutes toward the 75,600 minutes required annually.

Proposal for Exemption:

Exemption from the 420-minute day requirement would allow Gustine ISD the flexibility needed to alter the length of school day on selected days as deemed necessary and beneficial to the district and its stakeholders by local administration and board of trustees. The waiver process in place allows for a 6-day maximum number of days per school year. Given that Gustine ISD is a rural and remote district, it could possibly benefit by having greater flexibility and local control over this requirement.

Full exemption from the 420-minute daily requirement would allow the district significant local control over scheduling and creation of yearly calendars. This would eliminate the possibility of diminished state funding or loss of credit for instructional time that could possibly cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements. Greater local control would allow for the scheduling of non-instructional days as needed to allow teachers time to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development.

Gustine ISD has no intention of shortening school days on a regular basis or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, early release days would be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar, which is approved by the Gustine ISD Board of Trustees and published to all stakeholders in advance of the beginning of the school year.

Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.057)

(Amended by District on October 22, 2018)

State law states that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a district unless the person holds an appropriate certification or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. 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 request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or the State Board of Education. The request may or may not be approved.

Proposal for Exemption:

As a small rural district, it is difficult to find qualified applicants for all courses. In order to best serve the students of Gustine ISD, the decision on certification will be handled locally.

- a) The Campus Principal may submit to the Superintendent, a written request to allow a certified teacher to teach a subject outside of their certification field. The Principal must provide reasoning for the request and document credentials that the certified teacher possesses, which qualifies this individual to teach a particular subject.
- b) As a last resort, if a certified teacher cannot be secured to fill a position, the Principal and the Superintendent may pursue employing a non-certified, but degreed individual to fill the position. The candidate would be required to demonstrate content competency through locally developed measures. If a non-certified person is employed, the Superintendent and Principal will investigate ways the individual can obtain their certification during their employment. The individual will be highly encouraged to obtain their certification.
- c) In the event that a degreed individual cannot demonstrate content competency, an individual with experience in a needed area could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or subject through a local teaching certificate. The Principal and/or Superintendent will evaluate the candidate's credentials. The Superintendent will report to the school board prior to the individual beginning employed. The local certificates will require an employee agreement rather than a contract.
- d) This process will allow more flexibility in our scheduling and more options for our students.

Contract Service Days (TEC§ 21.401)

State law currently requires educators employed on a 10-month contract to provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Proposal for Exemption:

The changes concerning the required days of instruction to minutes implemented by the passage of § 25.081 did not address contract days for employees with a 10-month contract. The determination of how many days are required to fulfill an employee's contract should become a local decision. This innovation strategy would allow the district the option to reduce the amount of contract days without affecting teachers' salaries. This endeavor seeks to align the teacher contract with the 75,600 required student minutes.

Currently, Gustine ISD has 468 minute days. There are no plans to change the start and ending times of the school day. This length of school day allows the district to meet the 75,600 minute requirement in approximately 161.5 days. Teachers potentially work 25 days without students. Gustine ISD would also examine the possibility of altering the length of 11 and 12 month contracts. Altering the length of contracts could be a recruiting tool used to recruit and retain staff. Gustine's pay scales are significantly low and this hinders in recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff.