

Gustine ISD

District of Innovation Plan

Approved by Gustine ISD Board of Trustees on February 16, 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 February 16, 2022, GISD will exercise this authority to exempt itself from the following state requirements for a five-year period running through February 16, 2027, 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.

Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.057)

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.

Revocation of Transfers (TEC§ 25.036)

Currently Gustine ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (local) requiring non resident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer request, the availability of space and instruction staff, availability of programs and service, and the student’s disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules and regulations of the District. TEC 24.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one year commitment by the District.

Proposal for Exemption:

Gustine ISD seeks to eliminate the provision of a one academic year commitment to accepting transfer applicants. Gustine ISD believes that by eliminating this provision we can provide a better education to both our resident students as well as potential non resident students. Gustine ISD has a history of being successful with transfer students. However, because of the current provision that a transferring student must be retained for the entire school year, Gustine ISD has been hesitant to accept transfer students that have “questionable” records at other schools. If Gustine ISD could accept transfer students and not be held to keeping them for a complete academic year, this would allow Gustine ISD to be more willing to accept transfers and give more students a fresh start and opportunity for success.

TEACHER PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS (TEC 21.102(b))

PROBATIONARY CONTRACT. (b) A probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district.

Proposal for Exemption:

Current legal policy allows experienced teachers new to the district to 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. This time period is not sufficient to evaluate a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Relief from this law would allow time to sufficiently determine a staff member’s effectiveness. Exemption from this requirement will allow ample time for campus administrators to determine the effectiveness of employees who have been a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years thus providing a more stable and effective learning environment for students. Gustine ISD would like to have the ability to renew the probationary contract for one additional year period, for a maximum of two school years, for all teachers that are new to the district who have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the District.

SCHOOL HEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (SHAC) (TEC 28.004 6(d))

Under the current statute, the SHAC is to meet 4 times a year. Statute states that the SHAC is to be made up mainly of parents that are not employees of the district and community members. Below are the two areas of concern Gustine ISD has regarding SHAC:

1. Even though our School Nurse works hard every year to get non-employee parents to volunteer to be on this committee, Gustine ISD has struggled to solicit enough members to meet the membership standards outlined in statute .
2. Even after enough members have been convinced to serve on the Council, many times the School Nurse and School Administrators are the only people in attendance for meetings. Gustine ISD has made the meetings available via Zoom during the 2020-2021 school year in hopes this would improve attendance. Unfortunately that has not helped with attendance.

Proposal for Exemption:

1. Employees of the district that are parents of currently enrolled Gustine ISD students may be included as parent members of the SHAC. By allowing district employees to be SHAC parent participants, we would be significantly increasing the amount of parent participation and input in the Gustine ISD wellness program.
2. The SHAC is only required to meet 2 times during the school year - once in the 1st semester and once in the 2nd semester. The district's size ensures that committee members are aware of the needs of the district's students and are often able to review, advise, and revise plans in fewer than four meetings. The Gustine ISD Board of Trustees and the members of the SHAC committee should feel that the work of the SHAC can be carried out with fewer than 4 meetings. The Gustine ISD Board of Trustees and SHAC feel that formal once a semester meetings will allow them ample time to tend to the district's needs.