

Venus Independent School District  
Local Innovation Plan

I. Introduction

During the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, HB 1842 was passed in order to provide more local control to school districts. HB 1842 provides an opportunity for our district to create a plan based on the needs our students, staff, and community. If adopted, the plan will remain in effect for the next five years. All or part of the plan may be utilized each year. The determination of which elements of the plan to utilize will be proposed by the District Advisory Committee and considered for approval by the VISD Board of Trustees annually.

II. Our Process

On April 17, 2017, the Venus ISD Board of Trustees held a special meeting to discuss the opportunity of becoming a District of Innovation. During the meeting the Board adopted a resolution to Initiate the Designation as a District of Innovation. A public hearing was held to provide the community and staff an opportunity to comment on the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation. During the regular meeting, the Board approved a District of Innovation Committee including staff members and parents from each campus. The invited members are listed below:

Steven Nazworth

Tammy Witten

Kim Buck

Randall Buck

Melissa Sulak

Jeff Whitehall

Jennifer Watson

Leslie Evans

Amber Messmer

Rosanna Medrano

Leighanne Ortiz

Joellen May

Andy Habeck

Tassy Grimes

Lacy Brown

David Yates

Benjamin Vollmer

Robin Vance

Trea Ward

Dee Hargrove

Gladys Olmos

Cassie Handlin

## District of Innovation

### Timeline

#### Options:

- School Start Date
- Teacher and Principal Evaluation
- Teacher Certification
- Teacher Contracts
- Class Size

#### Timeline:

April 17

6:30 pm Special Board Meeting

6:40 pm Public Hearing

7:00 pm Regular Board Meeting

April 19

Initial Meeting with District of Innovation Committee

April 26

Second Meeting with District of Innovation Committee

April 27

District Advisory Committee

April 28

Post the District of Innovation Plan on VISD website for 30 days

June 19

Present District of Innovation Plan for consideration

June 20

Update all policy changes with TASB

## **First Day of Instruction**

### **TEC Code Requiring Exemption:**

TEC 25.0811: Requires that school districts may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August

### **Proposed:**

VISD seeks the flexibility to have the school start date no earlier than the second Monday of August. The VISD Calendar Committee will receive annual input from parents, staff, and community members prior to the approval of the instructional calendar.

### **Benefits of Exemption for Venus ISD:**

Balancing semesters to increase instructional time for state assessments

Allow for balance of the two semesters with a natural winter break and exams prior to the break

Increase college and career readiness by aligning with college schedules

Increase summer school opportunities, flexibility, and meaningful staff development during the summer hours

## **Teacher/Administrator Evaluations**

### **TEC Code Requiring Exemption:**

TEC 21.352: appraise teachers/administrators annually using the T-TESS/T-PESS in accordance with law and administrative regulations

### **Proposed:**

VISD seeks for a committee of administrators and teachers to have the option to develop a teacher evaluation system that would be a combination of PDAS, T-TESS, and other best practices to develop a local instrument and/or process to best meet the needs and goals of Venus ISD. The committee would utilize a combination of T-PESS and best practices to develop a local instrument to evaluate administrators that would best meet the needs and goals of Venus ISD.

### **Benefits of Exemption for Venus ISD:**

Improved morale for teachers

More opportunities for administrators to be in the classroom, teacher coaching, and lesson preparation which encourages greater student success

Customized timelines

Less paperwork for all

### **Teacher Certification**

#### **TEC Code Requiring Exemption:**

TEC 21.003: requires 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

#### **Proposed:**

The District will establish local criteria, such as years of experience, qualifications, and industry certifications, to qualify for a local (district) teaching certificate. Principals, along with the CTE department or Department Heads will submit candidates to the Superintendent with credentials. The Superintendent will determine whether it is in the best interest of the district to certify the individual. The Superintendent will notify the Board prior to beginning employment. The District will have the ability to evaluate and appraise those non-certified teachers in specialized programs or dual credit classes using a locally developed evaluation tool. All evaluation tools must be adopted by the Venus ISD School Board. All locally certified employees will be considered at-will and employed for one year.

#### **Benefits of Exemptions to Venus ISD:**

Recruit teachers from the field, including individuals from certain trades and/or vocations with industry knowledge and real world experience, as well as college accredited professors

Offer dual credit opportunities in CTE courses

Hire university or community college instructors as VISD staff members

Provide more flexibility in scheduling and more options in the best interest of our students

## **Probationary Contracts**

### **TEC Code Requiring Exemption:**

TEC 21.102: Current guidelines state contracted employees new to education (less than 5 of 8 years) will be on probation for 3 years. Experienced contracted employees (reached 5 of 8 years) new to the district will have 1 year probation.

### **Proposed:**

In reference to contracted employees the proposed guideline will allow the district the option to issue probationary contracts not in excess of 2 years for experienced teachers ( 5 of 8 years of experience) new to the district. All other teachers hired will remain on probation for 3 years with an option for a 4<sup>th</sup> year. This same rule applies to any employee returning to Venus ISD.

### **Benefit to Venus ISD:**

Allow more time for the district to fairly and thoroughly assess an employee's performance

## **Teacher Contract Days**

### **TEC Code Requiring Exemption:**

TEC 21.401: Current education law defines a teacher contract as a ten-month contract equivalent to 187 days.

### **Proposed:**

Venus ISD may reduce the number of teacher contract days by no more than 5 days with no effect on teacher salaries. This is an attempt to somewhat align the teacher contract days to the required student 75,600 minutes.

### **Benefits to Venus ISD:**

Increase the daily rate the district pays teachers

Enhance teacher recruitment by offering a more competitive compensation package compared to surrounding districts

## **Student/Teacher Ratios and Submitting Waivers of Class Size**

### **TEC Code Requiring Exemption:**

TEC 25.111: requires districts to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers to maintain an average ratio of not less than 1 teacher for each 20 students in average daily attendance. State law also requires that a K-4 core classroom may not exceed a student to teacher ratio of 22:1. If classes exceed this cap, a waiver is required from the Texas Education Agency. If approved, the District must then notify parents by specifying the class for which an exception from the limit imposed by Section 25.112(a) was granted and state the number of children in the class for which the exception was granted. TEC 25.111, 25.112, 25.113

### **Proposed:**

In the event that the 22:1 class ratio is exceeded in grades K-4, the campus administrator shall notify the superintendent the same day that ratio was exceeded and the superintendent will report these findings to the Board of Trustees at the next scheduled board meeting. If there is not a regularly scheduled board meeting within two weeks, a special board meeting will be requested.

The administration, including the superintendent, shall select one of the following actions to recommend:

1. Hiring an additional teacher, creating a new classroom for the grade-level; or
2. Keeping the class in tact because this option is determined to be more advantageous than separating students, in which case the class size may slightly exceed the 22:1 student to teacher ratio.

If the classroom will continue to exceed 22:1, parent notification will be sent no later than the following day of the date the exception is presented to the Board of Trustees and will specify the class for which an exception from the limit imposed by Section 25.112(a) was granted. A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds 22:1, in accordance with the District Plan for Innovation.

### **Benefits to Venus ISD:**

A class may return to a smaller student-to-teacher ratio before or after the waiver is formally granted, thus negating the notice or the need to cause parents and staff unnecessary concern.

Students remain with the teacher and classmates they began the year with, fostering continuity and stability, which will support increased student achievement

Continue to explore avenues to reduce class sizes, but require the flexibility for staffing decisions that consider multiple variables, including time of year, enrollment projections, and the natural enrollment variations that occur during the school year