



Innovative Practices

- Enhance community engagement through the district of innovation process
- Improve access to enriched curriculum through flexibility for certification requirements
- Improve personalized learning through a locally-created staff appraisal system

2015-2016 ENROLLMENT: **5,619**
PERCENT LOW INCOME: **11%**

Overview

Located 25 miles outside of Austin, Dripping Springs ISD is a medium-sized school district growing in enrollment by six to seven percent per year. The district recently completed its five-year strategic plan and feels the opportunity to use the District of Innovation (DOI) statute represents an opportunity that was “meant to be.” Diane Flaim, Assistant Superintendent for Learning and Innovation, noted that the district is currently focused on getting “the right people in the right place doing the right work” and on personalized learning for both staff and students. One advantage of the DOI process noted by Ms. Flaim is that increased local autonomy allows district staff to refocus efforts away from compliance and toward the district mission as embedded in the strategic plan. Below is a summary of the innovations in Dripping Springs ISD supported by the DOI legislation.

Using the DOI Process to Build Community Engagement

A foundational aspect of the DSISD strategic plan is building community partnerships. To support this goal, the district included community members, both with and without children enrolled in the district, in the DOI process. DSISD believes it should be the hub of the community and wants to ensure that citizens of the district feel both valued by and connected to the district. Staff believe that engaging community members as decision-makers through the DOI process is a key way to fulfill this objective, and they are looking forward to revisiting the plan with the committee as they gain experience with implementation.

Expand Student Access to Teaching Staff with Specific Expertise Flexibility Needed: Certification Requirements

DSISD is using increased local flexibility in the area of teacher certification to hire teachers in hard-to-fill positions, largely focused on career and technology courses. This year, the district was able to hire staff with expertise in health sciences and automotive technology. While the district will hire fully certified teachers whenever they are available, this change allows them to give students access to courses they would not otherwise have had. To make sure the new teachers are successful, instructional facilitators on each campus will provide additional assistance focused on effective instructional practice. The district is also tracking the teachers hired through this process so it can measure the impact of this change and adjust as necessary.

Improve Individual and Personalized Learning for District Staff

Flexibility Needed: Appraisal System

DSISD is focused on individual and personalized learning for both students and staff. To further this objective, the district created its own staff appraisal system that is anchored in local district goals and objectives. The district created an appraisal system with four versions: one for teachers; one for administrators; one for non-certified instructional staff like instructional aides; and one for non-certified non-instructional staff like bus drivers and food service workers. This way, all staff members are engaged in professional growth. To make sure all staff understand their roll in district effectiveness, the DSISD appraisal system includes sections that correspond to the district strategic plan. It also includes a section related to personalized professional goals for each staff member.

Ongoing Implementation and Revision

The district also accessed flexibility in the area of elementary school class size restrictions, the requirement that students be in class for 90 percent of instructional days to receive course credit, and the uniform school start date. While some changes have already been implemented, others are still in process as staff, including principals and teachers, continue to evaluate the impact of specific practices on students and community members. The DSISD innovation plan provides for ongoing evaluation, assessment and adjustment, and staff plan to survey stakeholders for feedback on the impact of DOI changes. The district is also maintaining a list of additional areas of flexibility it may wish to access during the next iteration of DOI planning.

For more information about Districts of Innovation, visit RaiseYourHandTexas.org/DOI