



# SULPHUR SPRINGS

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## INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

### **Sulphur Springs ISD District of Innovation Plan Effective 2025-2030**

#### **I. Introduction**

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session, permits traditional Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation, permitting an exemption from some parts of the Texas Education Code (TEC), offering the same flexibility afforded to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools. The term of the designation as a District of Innovation may not exceed 5 years and may include:

- Innovative curriculum, instructional methods, and provisions regarding community participation, campus governance, and parental involvement;
- Modifications to the school day or year;
- Provisions regarding the district budget and sustainable program funding;
- Accountability and assessment measures that exceed the requirements of state and federal law; and
- Any other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees.

#### **II. Timeline**

The current DOI plan for Sulphur Springs ISD was for five years, beginning July 13, 2020, and concluding July 13, 2025.

The term of the renewed DOI Plan will begin on June 9, 2025, and end on June 8, 2030, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The following timeline was followed by Sulphur Springs ISD as required by HB 1842.

<b>Historical DOI Timeline</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Summary</b>
January 30, 2017	Resolution – School Board Meeting	Initiates the process to consider designating SSISD as a District of Innovation.
February 13, 2017	Public Hearing – School Board Meeting	A public hearing to consider whether the district should develop a local innovation plan to be designated a District of Innovation.
February 15, 2017	Local Innovation Plan	The appointed planning committee develops

	Development	the district's innovation plan.
February 21, 2017	Post Final Innovation Plan on District's Website	Final innovation plan is posted on the District's website for 30 days before final board action.
March 22, 2017	DAC Approval of Final Local Innovation Plan – DAC Meeting	The DAC holds a public meeting to consider the approval of the final local innovation plan.
March 23, 2017	Commissioner Notification	The Board of Trustees notifies the commissioner of the Board's intention to vote on adoption of the final plan.
April 10, 2017	Final Board Adoption – School Board Meeting	Board's adoption of final local plan of innovation.
April 11, 2017	Commissioner Notification	Approved/Final District of Innovation Plan submitted to the Commissioner of Education.
May 27, 2020	Local Plan Development	The appointed planning committee develops the district's innovation plan.
May 28, 2020	Post Innovation Plan on District's Website	Final innovation plan is posted to District's website for 30 days.
June 29, 2020	DAC Approval of Local Innovation Plan – DAC Meeting	The DAC holds a public meeting to consider the approval of the local innovation plan.
June 30 2020	Commissioner Notification	The Board of Trustees notifies the commissioner of the Board's intention to vote on adoption of the final plan (renewal).
July 13, 2020	Board Adoption – School Board Meeting	Board's adoption of local innovation plan.
July 21, 2020	Commissioner Notification	Approved District of Innovation Plan (renewal) submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Summary: In April 2017, SSISD adopted its original District of Innovation Plan. In the spring of 2020, SSISD sought to amend and renew the plan for five years simultaneously. The renewed/amended plan was sent for Commissioner notification on July 14, 2020.

<b>DOI Renewal Timeline</b>		
January 13, 2025	Local Plan Development	The appointed planning committee develops the district's innovation plan.
January 24, 2025	Post Innovation Plan on District's Website	Final innovation plan is posted to District's website or 30 days.
March 5, 2025	DAC Approval of Local Innovation Plan – DAC Meeting	The DAC holds a public meeting to consider the approval of the local innovation plan.

March 17, 2025	Board Adoption – School Board Meeting	Board’s adoption of renewed/amended local innovation plan.
March 18, 2025	Commissioner Notification	Approved District of Innovation Plan (renewal) submitted to the Commissioner of Education.
March 18, 2025	Post Adopted Innovation Plan on District’s Website	Board Approved District of Innovation Plan is posted to District’s website.
March 18, 2025	Copy of District of Innovation Plan provided to TEA	Copy of Board adopted District of Innovation Plan provided to TEA for posting on agency website.

### **III. Sulphur Springs ISD Goals**

Six board goals steer Sulphur Springs ISD. These goals are the basis for all district decisions regarding teaching and learning and for this innovation plan.

Our district’s goals are:

1. SSISD will provide meaningful, relevant, and innovative learning experiences for all students.
2. SSISD will ensure a physically and emotionally safe environment for our students.
3. We will attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified professional staff by providing a culture of ongoing learning and continuous growth.
4. SSISD will enhance the learner experience through community partnerships and interactive communication with all stakeholders.
5. We will ensure fiscal accountability through transparency with our stakeholders.
6. The district will monitor, project, and plan for district facility needs.

We have developed a five-year District of Innovation Plan to best serve our students and align our service with our district’s goals. The plan, which exercises provisions of HB 1842, allows our SSISD Board of Trustees to utilize more local control to better meet the needs and challenges of our diverse student population. Allowing our Board to exercise local control over these decisions will have lasting positive effects on our students, parents, and community.

### **IV. Sulphur Springs ISD District of Innovation Plan Exemptions**

The plan provides for a comprehensive educational program for the district and includes the following exemptions:

#### **A. First Day of Instruction – District Goal 1**

Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 25.0811 (Policy EB). The relevant provision states:

“A district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August unless the district operates a year-round system. A district may not receive a waiver of this requirement.”

#### Inhibition of Goals:

The rule as currently written restricts the flexibility in the design of our annual school calendar. The flexibility to begin instruction earlier in August will enable the district to develop a calendar that best meets the needs of SSISD students.

#### Innovation:

SSISD is seeking local control of establishing the instructional calendar by allowing the first day of instruction to begin before the fourth Monday in August based on the needs and input of the SSISD stakeholders.

#### Benefits to SSISD students:

1. Allows for better balance between first and second semester instructional days.
2. Allows for flexibility in dealing with yearly variances in calendar dynamics.
3. Allows additional days of instruction before state assessment.
4. Allows school to end before June; ending earlier supports student remediation efforts.
5. Allows the district to seek innovative instructional arrangements that promote learning.

### **B. Teacher Certification Requirements – District Goal 3**

#### Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 21.003(a), TEC 21.053, and TEC 21.057 (Policies DK and DBA). The relevant provisions state:

“A person may not be employed as a teacher....by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit...” TEC 21.003(a)

“A person who desires to teach in a public school shall present the person’s certificate for filing with the employing district before the person’s contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding.” TEC 21.053

“A school district that assigns an inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher to the same classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days during the same school year shall provide written notice of the assignment to a parent or guardian of each student in that classroom...” TEC 21.057

### Inhibition of Goals:

In the event that the district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of his/her certification area, the district must request emergency certification from TEA and/or the State Board of Educator Certification. These requests may be denied.

This process is time-consuming and burdensome, and it may not allow the district to meet its instructional needs in a timely fashion. With the growing teacher shortage in Texas, this process may prevent the district from being able to hire the best teacher available.

### Innovation:

Decisions regarding employee certification will be made locally. The district will maintain its current expectations for traditional employee certification and the district will make a reasonable attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position. However, when this is not reasonably achievable, the district will have the flexibility to hire staff who are knowledgeable in their teaching area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position.

SSISD seeks to certify teachers locally, if necessary, in areas of high demand. These areas include, but are not limited to, CTE, foreign languages, Math, Science, ELAR, Social Studies, etc. Special education and bilingual teachers will continue to be required to hold a state teaching certificate.

The principal or supervisor may submit to the superintendent a request to locally certify a teacher. The request must specify the reason for the request (need) and document the applicant's credentials/expertise that qualify the applicant for the position. The superintendent will approve or deny requests for local certification and report to the Board of Trustees.

### Benefits to SSISD students:

1. Allows the district to have more flexibility in hiring the best candidate for each position.
2. Allows for more flexibility in campus scheduling.
3. Provides more class offering options.
4. Increases opportunities for students to earn recognized industry certifications.
5. Enhances the District's ability to compete for qualified individuals not yet certified.

### **C. Group Health Benefits for School Employees – District Goal 3**

#### Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 22.004(i) (Policy CRD). The relevant provision states: “Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, a district participating in the uniform group coverage program established under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code, may not make group health coverage available to its employees under this section after the date on which the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code, is implemented.”

#### Inhibition of Goals:

TEC 22.004(i) states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees under TEC 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverage provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all Sulphur Springs ISD employees. This provision also inhibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverage for its employees at a lower cost.

#### Innovation:

This innovation allows the district to procure group health insurance benefits that may better benefit District employees.

#### Benefits to SSISD Students:

1. Increases the District’s competitiveness in hiring.
2. Enables the District to hire and retain exceptional staff.
3. Increases insurance options for SSISD staff.

### **D. School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) Meetings – District Goal 1 and 4**

#### Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 28.004 (d-1) (Policy BDF). The relevant provision states:

“The local school health advisory council shall meet at least four times each year.”

#### Inhibition of Goals:

TEC 28.004 requires the school board of each school district to establish a local school health advisory council to assist the district in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the district’s health education instruction. Further, the law requires the health advisory council to meet at least four times each year. The provision interferes with the district’s efforts to secure council members due to overburdening of designated council members.

### Innovation:

The District's School Health Advisory Council will meet twice per year, once in the fall and once in the spring. This exemption directly supports the District's commitment to health education and instruction without overburdening designated council members.

### Benefits to SSISD Students:

1. Enables the district to enhance the student learning experience through community partnerships.
2. Enables the district an opportunity to increase interactive communication with a larger number of stakeholders.

### **E. Retire/Rehire Minimum Salary – District Goal 1, 3, and 5**

#### Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 21.002 and 21.402. The relevant provisions state:

“Each board of trustees shall establish a policy designating specific positions of employment, or categories of positions based on considerations such as length of service, to which continuing contracts or term contracts apply.” TEC 21.002

“A school district must pay each classroom teacher, full-time librarian, full-time counselor certified under Subchapter B, or full-time nurse not less than the minimum monthly salary, based on the employee's level of experience in addition to other factors, as determined by commissioner rule,...” TEC 21.402

#### Inhibition of Goals:

When hiring a retired educator, all districts must pay them their salary based upon the TEA minimum salary pay scale, in addition to the TRS surcharges. Employers are prohibited from directly or indirectly passing the cost of the employer surcharge on to the retiree. Due to the significant cost of this provision, the District is inhibited from securing the most qualified teacher available, thus negatively affecting the student learning experience.

### Innovation:

With the ongoing budget restraints, SSISD is seeking the opportunity to hire an eligible retired educator and pay them below the TEA minimum pay scale while also paying the required TRS surcharge. The District will reap the benefits of an experienced, veteran educator who is still involved in and passionate about the education process. Additionally, the District will be able to employ an experienced educator at a significantly lower cost than if we had paid them based on the TEA minimum pay scale plus the TRS surcharge.

Local control allows the District to negotiate salaries for retired hires, adding value to our campuses and ensuring sound fiscal decisions for our District stakeholders.

Benefits to SSISD Students:

1. SSISD students will benefit from the experience and knowledge of retired educators.
2. SSISD can hire retired professional staff without an increase to the budget. The funds to pay the surcharge would be available through the negotiated decrease in salary.
3. Adds value to our schools, while making sound fiscal decisions for our District stakeholders.

**F. Ejection from Facilities – District Goal 2**

Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD is seeking exemption from TEC 37.105 (Policies GKA and GF). The relevant provision states:

“A school administrator, school resource officer, or school district peace officer of a school district may refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from property under the district’s control if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request.....At the time a person is refused entry to or ejected from a school district’s property under this section, the district shall provide to the person written information explaining the appeal process....” (TEC 37.105)

Inhibition of Goals:

The TEC allows a school administrator, school resource officer, or school district peace officer to refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from district property if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request and either the person poses a substantial risk of harm to any person or the person behaves in a manner that is inappropriate for a school setting and persists in the behavior despite being given a verbal warning. Under the current law, the administrator, resource officer, or peace officer must maintain a record of each verbal warning and potential removal from a school facility, including the name of the person to whom the warning was issued and the date of issuance. At the time a person is refused entry to or ejected from a school district’s property, the district shall provide to the person with written information explaining the appeal process. And, under the commissioner’s rules adopted under the authority granted in the TEC, the person refused entry or ejected from the facility must be allowed to appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees within 90 calendar days.

These additional, administratively burdensome requirements, are impractical and potentially impossible to fulfill when an individual is dealing with an unruly individual. It is reasonable to believe that requesting such information could also escalate a situation that is already proving to be disruptive. Further, it is impractical to provide written notice of an

appeal process at many events, like athletic events or public meetings, when the removal is only the immediate event and there is not ready access to forms or a computer or printer. Furthermore, the District already has a process for taking grievances to the Board of Trustees and there is not a justified need for a unique process or timeline.

#### Innovation:

SSISD administrators, school resource officers, or school police officers are seeking the opportunity to retain their authority to refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from district property if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request and either (1) the person poses a substantial risk of harm to any person or (2) the person behaves in a manner that is inappropriate for a school setting and persists in the behavior despite being given a verbal warning. However, the following requirements will no longer be applicable: maintaining a written log of verbal warnings, providing written notice of the appeal process at the time of ejection, internet posting of the requirements and appeal process, and the ability to appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees within 90 calendar days.

Exemption from these requirements will allow the District to exercise appropriate authority and processes related to unruly individuals on campuses and at other facilities effectively and efficiently but do so without conducting the unnecessary and administratively burdensome requirements and avoiding potential escalation of already difficult situations. If an individual is banned from returning to Sulphur Springs ISD property for an extended time, the individual will receive written notification.

#### Benefits to SSISD Students:

1. SSISD students will benefit from a physically and emotionally safe environment.