

# **Sulphur Springs ISD**

## **District of Innovation Plan**

### **Effective July 13, 2020 – July 13, 2025**

#### **I. Introduction**

HB 1842 was passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas legislative session. It provides Texas public school districts an opportunity to be designated as a District of Innovation. Such a designation provides districts an opportunity to be exempt from certain sections of the Texas Education Code (TEC) that inhibit the goals of the district as outlined in the locally adopted Innovation Plan. The term of the designation as a District of Innovation may not exceed 5 years.

The Innovation Plan 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.
- Any other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees.

To access some of the exemptions made available by HB 1842, Sulphur Springs ISD seeks to develop a local innovation plan and thereafter be designated as a District of Innovation. This process may be initiated by a resolution adopted by the district's board of trustees.

#### **II. Eligibility**

A school district is eligible for designation as a District of Innovation only if the district's most recent performance rating under TEC § 39.054 reflects at least acceptable performance. Sulphur Springs ISD's accountability rating of "B" satisfies this requirement.

### III. Timeline for Plan Development and Approval

Date	Activity	Summary
January 30, 2017	Resolution – School Board Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiates the process to consider designating SSISD as a District of Innovation.</li> </ul>
February 13, 2017	Public Hearing – School Board Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A public hearing to consider whether the district should develop a local innovation plan to be designated a District of Innovation.</li> <li>The Board decides whether to pursue the designation.</li> <li>If the Board pursues the designation, it appoints a planning committee to develop a local innovation plan.</li> </ul>
February 15, 2017	Local Innovation Plan Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The appointed planning committee develops the district’s final local innovation plan.</li> </ul>
February 21, 2017	Post Final Innovation Plan on District’s Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final innovation plan is posted on the District’s website for 30 days before final board action.</li> </ul>
March 22, 2017	DAC Approval of Final Local Innovation Plan – DAC Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The DAC holds a public meeting to consider the approval of the final local innovation plan.</li> </ul>
March 23, 2017	Commissioner Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board of Trustees notifies the commissioner of the Board’s intention to vote on adoption of the final plan.</li> </ul>
April 10, 2017	Final Board Adoption – School Board Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Board’s final adoption of final local plan of innovation.</li> <li>Upon affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership, the proposed plan becomes the district’s final plan.</li> </ul>
April 11, 2017	Commissioner Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approved / Final District of Innovation Plan submitted to the Commissioner of Education.</li> </ul>
May 27, 2020	Local Plan Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The appointed planning committee develops the district’s final local innovation plan.</li> </ul>
May 28, 2020	Post Final Innovation Plan on District’s Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final innovation plan is posted on the District’s website for 30 days before final board action.</li> </ul>
June 29, 2020	DAC Approval of Final Local Innovation Plan – DAC Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The DAC holds a public meeting to consider the approval of the final local innovation plan.</li> </ul>
June 30, 2020	Commissioner Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Board of Trustees notifies the commissioner of the Board’s intention to</li> </ul>

		vote on adoption of the final plan (renewal).
July 13, 2020	Final Board Adoption – School Board Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board’s final adoption of final local plan of innovation.</li> <li>• Upon affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership, the proposed plan becomes the district’s final plan.</li> </ul>
July 21, 2020	Commissioner Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approved / Final District of Innovation Plan (renewal) submitted to the Commissioner of Education.</li> </ul>

#### IV. Summary of Procedural History

In April of 2017, SSISD adopted its original District of Innovation Plan to be in effect through the close of the 2021-2022 school year. In the spring of 2020, SSISD sought to simultaneously amend and renew the plan for 5 years. The plan renewed/amended plan was sent for Commissioner notification on July 14, 2020.

#### V. SSISD District of Innovation Plan Generally

Sulphur Springs ISD is driven by four Board goals developed and pursued in conjunction with our staff, parents, and other stakeholders. These goals drive all decisions in the district regarding teaching and learning, and they form the basis for this plan of innovation.

Our district’s goals are:

1. Students will be encouraged and challenged to meet their full educational potential.
2. Students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.
3. Students will be taught by highly qualified and exceptionally trained staff.
4. Sulphur Springs ISD will encourage parent/guardian and community involvement in school activities.

In order to best serve our students and align our service to successfully pursue our district’s goals, we have developed a five-year District of Innovation Plan. The Plan, as an exercise of the provisions of HB 1842, allows our SSISD Board of Trustees to exercise more local control to better meet the needs of our diverse population of students with its unique challenges. Allowing our Board to exercise local control for these decisions will provide lasting positive effects for our students, parents, and community.

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:

In the past, districts had the option to apply for a waiver to begin school earlier in August, and districts frequently took advantage of the waiver opportunity. However, our legislature removed the waiver opportunity.

The rule as currently written restricts 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:

Allow the district to begin school before the fourth Monday in August. The calendar will be developed to meet local needs of the community. The district will determine, on an annual basis, when school will begin each year. The district will not begin instruction for students for a school year before the second Monday in August.

The calendar development, approval, and communication process will continue as it has. The district’s calendar is approved by the district site based decision making committee, and then approved by the Board. Once approved, the calendar is communicated via the district’s website and within student handbooks.

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 prior to state assessment.
4. Allows school to end prior to June; ending earlier supports student remediation efforts.

**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, 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 Board will make a reasonable attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position. However, when this is not reasonably achievable, the Board 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 locally certify, if necessary, teachers 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.

Board minutes will reflect which employees are hired pursuant to a local certification.

#### Benefits to SSISD students:

1. Allows the district to have more flexibility to hire the best candidate for each position.
2. Allows more flexibility in campus scheduling.
3. Provides more class offering options.
4. Increases opportunities for students to earn recognized industry certifications.

### **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 pursuant to TEC § 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverages 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 coverages for its employees and 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. More/better insurance options for SSISD staff.

## **VI. Initial Term and Renewed Plan**

Pursuant to TEC § 12A.006, the district seeks designation as a district of innovation for the maximum term of five years. The initial five-year term, adopted in April of 2017, applied to the following academic school years: 2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022.

Upon renewal in July of 2020, the plan applies to the following academic school years: 2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and 2024-2025.

## VII. District of Innovation Planning Committee (Spring 2020)

First Name	Last Name	Member Category
Michael	Lamb	Superintendent
Tosha	Utt	Elementary Teacher (Douglass)
Frances	Charlton	Elementary Teacher (SSES)
Lindsay	McCoy	Elementary Teacher (Bowie)
Toni	Maddox	Elementary Teacher (Lamar)
Maricela	Resendiz	Elementary Teacher (Travis)
Laura	Badgett	Elementary Teacher (Barbara Bush)
Dustin	Morgan	Secondary Teacher (SSMS)
Carrie	Bohman	Secondary Teacher (SSHS)
Marsha	Nolan	AEP Teacher (Austin)
Kevin	Jenkins	Transition Coord. (Special Services)
Miki	Eddins	Parent Representative
Kourtney	McDonald	Parent Representative
Heather	Salverino	Business Representative
Steve	Nuckolls	Business Representative
Mario	Villarino	Community Representative
Rori	Stroud	Community Representative
Jena	Williams	Principal (SSMS)
Michelle	Wallace	Principal (Travis)

