



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a District of Innovation? The district of Innovation concept was passed into law by the 84th Legislature Session in House bill 1942, which created Texas Education Code Chapter 12A. The law allows traditional independent school districts to access most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open enrollment charter schools by becoming designated as a District of Innovation. In order to be eligible, a school district must have an accountability rating of met standard.

How do you become a District of Innovation? The process is initiated by adoption of a board resolution or a signed petition from a majority of the District Improvement Committee. Then the Board must promptly conduct a public hearing to consider developing an innovation plan. At the conclusion of the public hearing the Board can decline to pursue the designation or appoint a committee to develop a Local Innovation Plan.

What are the benefits of becoming a District of Innovation? Primarily local control, flexibility and autonomy from some laws that prevent a District from meeting the needs of its community. Among the allowable exemptions are from laws related to:

- Site-based decision making processes
- First and last day of school
- Minimum minutes of instruction
- Class size
- Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinators
- Certain purchasing and contract requirements
- Educator certification
- Teacher contracts, use of planning and preparation periods, duty free lunch and appraisal system
- 90 percent attendance rule (compulsory attendance still applies)

Please note our district is only asking for two very specific areas of exemption: First Day of School and Educator Certification for Career and Technology Teachers only if necessary.

What are some of the laws from which Districts cannot be exempt? Those related to:

- Elected boards of trustees/governance
- Powers and duties of school boards, superintendents and principals
- State curriculum and graduation requirement
- Academic and financial accountability, including assessments and PEIMS reporting
- Bilingual, special education and prekindergarten programs
- Criminal background checks and educator misconduct reporting
- Open meetings and public information
- Conflicts of interest and nepotism
- Other federal requirements and state laws outside of the Texas Education Code.

What are the next steps in the process? The Board appointed a Committee, which is also our District Improvement Committee, and it has met and drafted a proposed plan. Prior to the Board voting on the Local Innovation plan:

- The final version of the plan must be available on the district/s website for at least 30 days for further public input and review.
- The Board must have notified the commissioner of education of the Board's intention to vote on the adoption of the proposed plan.
- The District Improvement Committee must have held a public meeting to consider the final version of the proposed plan and have approved the plan by a majority of the committee members.
- Upon adopting the local innovation plan by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of the Board, and notification to TEA, the District is designated as a District of Innovation for no longer than five years from the date specified in the local plan.

Are other districts taking advantage of this process? Currently there are 90 school districts designated as districts of innovation. Several north Texas districts and other districts across the state are in the process of working toward designation in the next few months.

Once approved, can the Local Innovation Plan be changed? The local plan can be amended, rescinded or renewed by a majority of the District Improvement Committee, along with a two-thirds majority vote of the Board. The District shall notify the Commissioner of any actions taken to amend, rescind or renew along with the associated TEC exemption and local approval dates.

Can the designation be revoked? The Commissioner may terminate the innovation plan or require the district to amend its plan if the innovation district receives unacceptable academic and/or financial performance ratings two years in a row. It must terminate after three consecutive years of these ratings. Upon termination, the district goes back to complying with all areas of the TEC on a date determined by the Commissioner and this cannot be appealed.