



# 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 began on June 9, 2025 and will end on June 8, 2030. The Board of Trustees amended the current plan on October 13, 2025. The following timeline was followed by Sulphur Springs ISD as required by HB 1842.

Historical DOI Timeline		
Date	Activity	Summary
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 Development	The appointed planning committee develops 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.
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.
October 8, 2025	DAC Approval of Amendment to current DOI	The DAC holds a public meeting to consider amending the current DOI plan.
October 13, 2025	Board Adoption of Amended DOI Plan	Board's adoption of amended local innovation plan.
October 14, 2025	Commissioner Notification	Approved DOI Plan amendment submitted to the Commissioner of Education.
October 15, 2025	Copy of Amended DOI Plan posted on District's Website	The Amended District of Innovation Plan is posted to the District's 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.

##### **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.

**C. 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.

#### **D. Grievance Procedures and Timelines – District Goal 3 and 4**

##### Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 26A.001, 26A.002, and 26A.003 (Policies DGBA, FNG, GF (Legal); DGBA, FNG, GF (Local)). The relevant provisions state:

Current law created timelines of up to 90 days for grievances and allowed for adding new information in as the grievance moved through the process. It also removed many requirements on timeline filing and proper filing procedures.

##### Inhibition of Goals:

The Texas Education Code 26A.001, 26A.002, and 26A.003 changed timelines, filing requirements and procedures around grievances, that make the process less efficient, more cumbersome to investigate and resolve, and allow grievants to bring months'old complaints which would often be moot by the time they are brought.

##### Innovation:

Through this DOI exemption the District will continue to use its current, well-functioning policy and procedures to handle all grievances. This includes:

- 15 Days of becoming aware of the decision or action to file Level 1 grievance.
- 10 Days for administrators to schedule a conference to hear grievances.
- 10 Days to provide a written response.
- 10 Day time period after written response to file a grievance at the next level.
- Valid and grantable relief is required as is timely filing.
- Forms will be available at all administrative offices.

The District will continue to follow the timeline and requirements outlined in Board policy for all grievances.

#### **E. Transfer Students – District Goal 1, 2, and 3**

##### Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 25.036. The relevant provision states:

Any child, other than a high school graduate, who is younger than 21 years of age and eligible for enrollment on September 1 of any school year may transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in the state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian or person having lawful control of the child jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer. A transfer agreement under this section shall be filed and preserved as a receiving district record for audit purposes of the agency.

Inhibition of Goals:

The current law, as written, requires a one year commitment in accepting a transfer student. This negatively affects the learning environment if the student violates district expectations.

Innovation:

The District is seeking exemption from the one year commitment in accepting a transfer student, allowing the district to rescind a transfer at any time during the school year if the student violates district expectations of attendance, discipline, academic achievement, and/or falsifying documentation. This flexibility would allow the district to have the option of immediate revocation of a student's transfer status by the Superintendent or designee at any time during the school year.

**F. Requirement to Post Full Course Syllabus - District Goal 3 and 4**

Legal Requirements Necessitating Exemption:

SSISD seeks exemption from TEC 26.0062. The relevant provision states:

(a) Each school district shall adopt a policy to make available on the district's Internet website at the beginning of each semester an instructional plan or course syllabus for each class offered in the district that semester. (b) The policy adopted under Subsection (a) must: (1) require each teacher to provide before the beginning of each semester a copy of the teacher's instructional plan or course syllabus for each class for which the teacher provides instruction to: (A) district administration; and (B) the parent of each child enrolled in the class; and (2) provide for additional copies of an instructional or course syllabus to be made available to a parent of a student enrolled in the class on the parent's request.

Inhibition of Goals:

The additional, administratively burdensome requirements are impractical for staff. This requirement also hinders the teachers' ability to use timely and student-centered materials.

Innovation:

The District is opting out of this provision in order to reduce administrative burdens and preserve instructional flexibility. The District already ensures transparency through readily available curriculum resources, open parent communication, and established procedures for reviewing instructional and library materials. Requiring additional compliance would divert time from instruction and limit teachers' ability to use timely, creative, and student-centered materials. The District will continue to foster innovation while maintaining strong parent partnerships and academic accountability.