



Tolar ISD

District of Innovation Plan

Proposed New Exemptions 2025

HB 1842: The 84th Legislative Session passed House Bill 1842 allowing school districts to have greater local control while becoming a District of Innovation. This opportunity will allow for flexibility regarding certain state level rules and regulations in order to transform and make improvements to better serve students of the Tolar Independent School District.

When considering any plan for implementation, we will be mindful of the district's mission, vision, and goals to ensure that the needs of the Tolar ISD are met.

Tolar ISD Mission Statement: The mission of the Tolar Independent School District, in partnership with the community, is to provide knowledge and skills for our students so they will be positive thinkers, hard workers, and problem-solvers who contribute constructively to society.

Tolar ISD Vision Statements: Building tomorrow's leaders through education with pride in country, school, and self.

Tolar ISD Goals:

1. Create and maintain a culture of high expectations.
2. Recruit, retain, and support highly efficient educators.
3. Develop a culture of continuous professional learning and district improvement.
4. Develop continuity and communication throughout the district.
5. Plan, upgrade, and maintain facilities and learning environments with the future in mind.

District Advisory Committee Members:

- Candice Hull – Parent
- Anna Ballew – Parent
- Rhonda Knight – School Board Member
- Cameron Michels – Elementary Teacher
- Shawnee Endsley – Junior High Teacher
- Jennifer Eidsvoog – High School Teacher
- Kristen Carey – Assistant Superintendent
- Travis Stilwell – Superintendent

Timeline:

- October 9, 2025 – The District of Innovation Committee met to review the current District of Innovation Plan and determined proposed revisions.
- October 20, 2025 - The Tolar ISD School Board approved the Amended District of Innovation Plan. It was approved by a vote of 6-0.
- October 21, 2025 – The Amended Draft District of Innovation Plan was posted to the Tolar ISD website and submission of notification of new exemptions were sent to the commissioner.

Tolar ISD Innovation Plan

Term:

This five-year District of Innovation Plan will become effective upon board approval in March 2023 and end in March 2028. This plan provides flexibility to incorporate innovation ideas to help us meet the goals set forth for the Tolar ISD. This plan allows for certain decisions to be made at the district level so Tolar ISD can best serve its students, teachers, and community.

Previously Adopted Exemptions:

- I. First Day of Instruction
- II. Teacher Contract Days
- III. Probationary Contracts
- IV. Certification Requirements for certain CTE courses
- V. Transfer Students

I. First Day of Instruction (EB Legal) (Ed. Code 25.0811)

Current Statute:

Students may not begin school before the fourth Monday of August. In the past, districts could apply for a waiver to start the school calendar earlier to meet the needs of the local community. This opportunity was met with resistance from the Texas tourism groups that lobbied to have the practice ended, because they believed it was detrimental to the Texas tourism business. Therefore, several years ago, the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin school until the fourth Monday, with no exceptions.

Proposed exemption and flexibility:

Relief from Ed. Code 25.0811 will allow us flexibility for the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students, teachers, and local community. Flexibility to start school earlier in August would help our district plan for more balanced semesters, increase teacher planning/staff development time throughout the school year, and localized decision making regarding holiday scheduling.

II. Teacher Contract Days (Ed. Code 21.401)

Current Statute:

A contract between a school district and an educator must be for a minimum of 10 months service. An educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Proposed Flexibility:

The district will have the flexibility to decrease contract days from 187 to 185 days, and will maintain the flexibility to increase contract days back to 187 days prior to each school year dependent upon the school calendar and district needs. Any decrease in teacher contract days is not intended to have any effect on teacher annual compensation, though may result in an increase to a teacher's daily rate of pay.

III. Probationary Contracts (DCA Legal) (Ed. Code 21.102)

Current Statute:

Under current guidelines, probationary periods for newly hired teachers who have been in public education for at least five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one year. This limited period is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

Proposed Flexibility:

Relief from Ed. Code 21.102 will permit the district to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two years for certified educators. This will allow the Tolar ISD to better evaluate a teacher's effectiveness.

IV. Certification Requirements for Certain CTE Courses (Ed. Code 21.003, Ed. Code 21.053)

Current Statute:

TEC 21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless a person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. In the event that a district can't locate a certified person, the district must request emergency certification from the TEA and the State Board of Educator Certification. TEC

21.053 requires a teacher to present their certificate to the District before their

employment contract will be binding and prohibits the District from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at that time.

Proposed Flexibility:

The Tolar ISD will continue to try and find certified individuals for all of its courses. However, in the event that a quality certified individual is not available for CTE courses, the Tolar ISD will have the flexibility to enter into at-will agreements with non-certified individuals that have field experience in a CTE field or a vocational skill that would provide more options for students and flexibility in scheduling.

**V. Transfer Students
(FDA(LOCAL) and TEC 25.036)**

Current statute:

Currently under TEC 25.036, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year. Tolar ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA(LOCAL) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer into the District shall file an application for transfer each school year with the Superintendent or designee. In approving transfers, the Superintendent or designee shall consider availability of space and instructional staff, the student's disciplinary history, and the student's academic achievement and attendance records.

Proposed Flexibility:

The Tolar ISD is seeking exemption from the one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants and to all the district to rescind a transfer at any time during the school year.

Procedure:

Campus principals will refer requests to rescind transfer students to the superintendent who will make the final decision to retain or rescind a transfer student.

New Exemptions Requested:

VI. Grievance Policy (TEC § 26.011; TEC Chapter 26A)

The Texas Education Code and the Texas Constitution requires school boards to establish procedures for parents to file complaints if they believe their student's rights have been denied.

Current Law

Current law in TEC Chapter 26A requires each school district to adopt a standardized complaint policy with several burdensome requirements, including extended timelines for filing and compressed timelines for holding conferences at each level. The law requires a policy allowing 60 calendar days for a parent to file a grievance from the date on which the parent or person knew or had reason to know of the facts giving rise to the grievance, unless the parent engaged in informal attempts to resolve the grievance, in which case the parent could have up to 90 calendar days to file a grievance. The law further requires that such complaints be heard within ten calendar days of the complaint being filed. Moreover, in contradiction of existing law in the Texas Government Code, the recently adopted provisions in the Education Code would allow the person bringing the complaint to decide if it is heard in open or closed, rather than the person against whom the complaint is brought. Finally, parents and other grievants would be allowed to add issues and claims at any point during the grievance process, making it difficult to resolve concerns at the lowest possible level.

Proposed Exemption

Tolar ISD has always and will continue to adhere to an established grievance policy with procedures and timelines outlined in local Board policy. Such policies ensure thorough documentation of each step in the grievance process and provide adequate time for complaints to be filed and for complaints to be heard. All records related to grievances—including submitted forms, communications, investigations, findings, resolutions, and any corrective actions—are systematically maintained at the district level to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with legal and policy standards. The District is committed to monitoring the legality and appropriateness of every decision and action taken. The District is further committed to hearing, reviewing, and attempting to resolve all parent complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible, as well as to taking corrective action, where appropriate. It is imperative that grievances and complaints are filed in a timely manner to ensure the best prompt response.

Tolar ISD's long-standing grievance policy will ensure that all such complaints are carefully reviewed and that district responses are in alignment with state and federal regulations, as well as all other local board policies. Tolar ISD seeks to be exempt from a statewide grievance policy and will continue to follow established grievance procedures as outlined in district policy. This will allow the District to hear and consider parent and employee complaints in an orderly and responsive manner and to resolve

those concerns as quickly as possible.

VII. Instructional Plan (TEC § 26.0062)

Tolar ISD is committed to supporting all efforts of each campus to involve parents and community members as active participants in the education of Tolar ISD students. The District strives to support the actions of our teachers and other instructional staff as they develop curriculum and effective instructional strategies.

Current Law

Under current law, each school district must post on the district's website at the beginning of each semester an instructional plan or course syllabus for each class offered in the district for that semester. The policy would require each teacher to provide to district administration and to the parent of each student enrolled in the class such an instructional plan or syllabus before the beginning of each semester for each class for which the teacher provides instruction.

Proposed Exemption

Because teachers use data-driven instruction aligned with student mastery of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), instructional plans are regularly adjusted to support student learning. Teacher autonomy to modify instruction based on real-time data and effective strategies does not align with publishing a fixed, comprehensive semester-long plan. Tolar ISD will not adopt a policy or create a requirement for its teachers to post at the beginning of each semester an instructional plan or course syllabus for each class offered in the District. However, Tolar ISD will ensure that course overviews are available at the request of parents or guardians.

VIII. Local School Library Advisory Council (TEC § 33.025)

Tolar ISD encourages and supports all campus efforts to involve District parents and community members as active participants in the education of Tolar students.

Current Law

Current law requires the school district to establish a School Library Advisory Council at any campus where either 10% of parents or 50 parents (whichever is fewer) submit a written request for such a council. The council would then be tasked with reviewing library materials, providing input on the selection and removal of resources, making recommendations to ensure materials are age-appropriate and aligned with community values, reviewing all books and other material objected to by any District parent, and advising on such objections.

Proposed Exemption

While these councils are not required to be formed until such a petition is received, once the petition is received, the Board will be statutorily required to create these councils. At that time, the council(s) will not be optional for the District. Tolar ISD seeks to be exempt from Texas Education Code §33.025,

which mandates the creation of a School Library Advisory Council upon petition by 10% of parents or 50 parents. The District believes this requirement is redundant and unnecessary, as Tolar ISD already has board-approved procedures in place for selecting, reviewing, and reconsidering library materials – led by certified educators and aligned with state-mandated requirements and guidance from the Texas Education Agency. Creating such advisory councils risks undermining the professional judgment of educators, introduces the judgment of non-certified individuals, introduces potential for politicization of instructional resources, and could very easily lead to inconsistency across campuses. Furthermore, the statute presents an administrative burden, requiring staff time and resources that would be better directed toward student learning and support. Tolar ISD's existing processes already allow for meaningful parental review and involvement, including access to their child's library checkout records, formal challenge procedures, and transparency in material selection. In addition, concerned individuals may also speak with teachers, administration, and/or the school board through District complaint processes and/or during the open forum of any regularly scheduled board meeting. The District remains committed to ensuring age-appropriate and educationally sound resources while maintaining an efficient and effective oversight structure that includes educator expertise and parent input, without the disruption and/or duplication caused by the statutory requirements in §33.025.

IX. Acquisition of Library Materials (TEC § 33.026)

Current Law

Current law outlines specific procedures school districts must follow before acquiring library materials. The law requires that materials be reviewed and approved in advance by a certified school librarian and be verified for compliance with age-appropriateness, educational suitability, and community standards. Additionally, it mandates a multi-step vetting process, documentation of acquisition decisions, and the public posting of selected materials for 30 days before they are made available to students. Finally, current law requires the Board of Trustees to approve every library book or other resource material acquired by or donated to the District.

Proposed Exemption

Tolar ISD will be exempt from this statutory provision because the District already has board-approved policies in place that govern the acquisition of library materials in a manner that ensures transparency, appropriateness, and educational value. These policies and procedures are implemented by certified educators and are fully compliant with the standards required by Texas law and guidance from the Texas Education Agency. The statutory process under §33.026 introduces redundant and restrictive requirements that may delay access to timely instructional and enrichment resources. It also places bureaucratic barriers in front of trained professionals who are certified to select age-appropriate, curriculum-aligned materials that are consistent with standards set by Texas law. Furthermore, the mandated documentation process creates an administrative burden that consumes time and resources better allocated to instructional support. While Tolar ISD fully supports transparency and parental engagement in the school library

process, the rigid requirements of TEC §33.026 are unnecessary and duplicative of local safeguards already in place. This exemption allows Tolar ISD to preserve instructional flexibility, uphold educator professionalism, and provide students with timely access to enriching and appropriate materials—without compromising accountability or community trust.