



## South San Antonio Independent School District Local Innovation Plan Proposal



<b>2022-2023 District of Innovation Committee Members</b>	
Millicent Marcha	Chief Academic Officer
Joel Gaines	Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Rita Uresti	Executive Director of Human Resources
Sandra Sandoval	Principal, Hutchins Elementary School
Donna Gomez	Principal, Zamora Middle School
Erika Almendarez	Principal, South San Antonio High School
Daniela Munoz	Teacher, Benavidez Elementary School
Conrad Antoon	Teacher, Kazen Middle School
Ryan Paredes	Teacher, South San High School
Gwen Villarreal	Teacher, West Campus High School
Kandy Amaro	Community Member
Leslie Cantu	Community Member
Cynthia Guerra	Community Member
Rosalinda Tsheulin	Community Member
Ad Hoc Members	
Henry Yzaguirre	Superintendent of Schools
Tony Kingman	Chief Financial Officer

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<b>2025-2026 District Educational Improvement Committee Members</b>	
Amanda Galloway	Teacher – Madla ES
Krystal Kuykendall	Non-Teaching Professional – Madla ES
Charlie Hudson	Para – Madla ES
Esmeralda Serna	Teacher – Palo Alto ES
Nadia Santos	Teacher – Palo Alto ES
Sarai Martinez	Non-Teaching Professional – Palo Alto ES
Lauren Torrez	Para – Palo Alto ES
Ileana Lopez	Teacher – Carrillo ES
Sarah Morales	Teacher – Carrillo ES
Patricia Lopez	Non-Teaching Professional – Carrillo ES
Kimberly Goguen	Para - Carrillo ES
Adrianna Ruiz	Teacher – Price ES
Gloria Galvan	Teacher – Price ES
Cynthia Ozuna	Non-Teaching Professional – Price ES
Diana Delacruz	Para - Price
Hector Ramirez	Teacher – Five Palms ES
Celinda Martinez	Teacher – Five Palms ES
Laura Madrid	Non-Teaching Professional – Five Palms ES
Lisa Dominguez	Para – Five Palms ES
Lucy Hernandez	Teacher – Armstrong ES
Beatrice Acosta	Teacher – Armstrong ES
Sylvia Sosa	Non-Teaching Professional – Armstrong ES

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Eveilyn Vidales	Para – Armstrong ES
Evelina Espinoza	Teacher – Hutchins ES
Isela Flores	Teacher – Hutchins ES
Sherrie Jackson	Non-Teaching Professional – Hutchins ES
Gabrielle Rodriguez	Para – Hutchins ES
Victor DeLaCerde	Teacher – Benavidez ES
Amber Walker	Teacher – Benavidez ES
Mark Aguilar	Non-Teaching Professional – Benavidez ES
Nancy Cavazos	Para – Benavidez ES
Elizabeth Jaimes	Parent – Benavidez ES
Ashley Romero	Teacher – Dwight MS
Amanda Rosenberg	Teacher – Dwight MS
Sally Linares	Non-Teaching Professional – Dwight MS
Divina Bravo	Para – Dwight MS
Bridget Burns	Teacher – Shepard MS
Ruben Navarro	Teacher – Shepard MS
Linda Suttner	Non-Teaching Professional – Shepard MS
Andrea Bazaldua	Para – Shepard MS
Yvette Delgado	Teacher – Zamora MS
Armando Hernandez	Teacher – Zamora MS
Daniella Moreno	Non-Teaching Professional – Zamora MS
Cynthia Lugo	Para – Zamora MS
Andrew Baiza	Teacher – South San HS
Curtis Bannert	Teacher – South San HS

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Minnie Rodriguez	Non-Teaching Professional – South San HS
Adrienne Gamez	Para – South San HS
Dillon Sparks	Teacher - DAEP
Yvonne Perez	District Level Administrator
Ruby Rosario	District Level Auxiliary
Dr. Ramona Vedia	Elementary Principal
Donna Gomez	Secondary Principal
Silvia Bernal	Parent
Angela Moreno	Parent
Amparo Salazar	Local Business Representative
Andy Diaz	Local Community Representative
Facilitated By:	
Dr. Jennifer Gutierrez	Deputy Superintendent

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## I. Introduction

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, allows Texas public school districts to pursue the designation of District of Innovation. This designation allows local school districts to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. In turn, the district would have more flexibility and provide local control to the district's Board of Trustees. On August 22, 2022 the South San Antonio Independent School District's Board of Trustees passed a Resolution to begin the process of becoming a District of Innovation to support local innovative initiatives and to improve educational outcomes for all students and the school community as a whole. The District's Board of Trustees also held a public hearing on the decision to become a District of Innovation on September 19, 2022.

On October 12, 2022, the Board of Trustees, working with the input of the Superintendent of Schools, acted to appoint a fourteen-member District of Innovation Committee. The Committee, composed of school district leaders, teachers, and community members, represented a diverse cohort of the District's stakeholders.

The District of Innovation Committee met on October 25, November 3 and November 9 to prepare a Local Innovation Plan to address the needs and challenges of the District. On November 17, 2022, The Board of Trustees notified the Texas Commissioner of Education of the District's intent to become a District of Innovation. The plan was posted online for public viewing and feedback on November 17, 2022, and remained online for the required 30 days. On January 17, 2023 the Local Innovation Committee held a public meeting and approved the final version. The plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees on January 18, 2023.

## II. Term

The term of the Local Innovation Plan will begin January 19, 2023 and end at the end of the 2026-2027 school year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The Committee will revisit the Plan annually to ensure that the recommendations are still in line with the needs of the District. If, within the term of the Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, the Committee will meet to discuss and approve any proposed additional exemptions in the form of an amendment. Any and all amendments adopted by the Board of Trustees will adhere to the same term as the original Plan.

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### III. Continual Improvement

The South San Antonio ISD Local Innovation Plan is a testimony to the school community's commitment to the District's Call to Action, Core Beliefs, Goals/ Strategies, Learner Outcomes and Strategic Plan.

#### **VISION:**

To empower all students in SSAISD to achieve academic excellence and personal success by providing equitable access to high-quality education, resources, and opportunities.

#### **MISSION:**

Inspiring, educating, and preparing all SSAISD students for success beyond the classroom, by providing a safe, nurturing, and challenging learning environment, empowering students to reach their full potential, and engaging the community in our shared commitment to excellence.

#### **CORE VALUES:**

WE believe that:

1. All of us must be bold, student-focused advocates, making collaborative decisions to ensure a united vision that enhances educational opportunities.
2. Trust is an active process and essential to ensure the academic wellness, safety, and success of our students, staff, and community.
3. All of us deserve to be cherished, challenged and stretched to reach our highest level of contribution.
4. All of us must take responsibility for our learning journey to achieve the goals we set for ourselves.

#### **GOALS**

- SSAISD will increase academic achievement for all students and thus closing the gap between student populations in pursuit of advanced performance.
- SSAISD will recruit, develop, support, and retain effective teachers, principals, and other instructional staff.
- SSAISD will implement program initiatives and activities that reflect a commitment to preparing 100% of students for post-secondary educational or career paths.
- SSAISD will ensure all students are provided a learning environment centered on their

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well-being that impacts their learning and success.

- SSAISD will collaborate with parents and the community to ensure all students receive a gold standard education.
- SSAISD will provide supplemental support and resources to low performing campuses.

### **LEARNER OUTCOMES**

- All learners will develop learning goals, track their progress, and adjust based on feedback and reflection.
- All learners will be able to demonstrate creative and innovative thinking in a productive manner.
- All learners will demonstrate integrity and honorable citizenship.
- All learners will develop reading, writing, thinking, and speaking skills that will allow them to communicate and collaborate effectively in academic and non-academic environments.
- All learners will employ digital skills to demonstrate literacy and comprehension of multiple forms of technology.
- All learners will develop leadership skills that enable them to act independently when necessary and give them the confidence to take appropriate risks.

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### IV. Innovations

The South San Antonio ISD Board of Trustees and the District Educational Improvement Committee reflected on the current needs of the District and the desired Specific Results of the Strategic Plan and proposes flexibility in the following areas:

#### **A. SSAISD Strategic Plan - Academic Calendar**

##### TEC Code Requiring Exemption

***TEC §25.0811 First Day of Instruction and §25.0812 Last Day of Instruction***

##### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

The District desires to design a district calendar that best meets students' and the school community's needs.

The District will have the flexibility to start earlier than the state requirement. This will balance the two instructional semesters, setting exams prior to Winter Break, and allowing for more instructional time before STAAR/EOC/AP exams.

Students enrolled in the Early College High School would benefit from the balanced semesters by being able to start and end their high school courses at the same time as their college counterparts. The balanced semesters will better align with college semesters, allowing for more opportunities for summer internships, summer courses at the colleges, and industrial certification opportunities.

Mirroring the college calendar would enable SSAISD to recruit highly qualified faculty who desire to coordinate their work schedule with the local college.

##### Local Guidelines

The District Educational Improvement Council, composed of teachers, administrators, support personnel, parents, and business and community leaders, serves as the District's calendar committee. This committee will develop several instructional calendar options and recommend a preferred option to the Superintendent. The Superintendent will then make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees. In developing calendar options, the Committee will utilize the flexibility of having more local control on the school start date.

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## B. SSAISD Strategic Plan - Teacher Certification

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

***TEC §21.003 Certification §21.057 Parental Notification***

### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

The teacher certification requirements enacted in these statutes inhibit the District's ability to hire highly-skilled individuals to teach dual credit, career and technological education courses, STEM courses, as well as courses taught in languages other than English. The availability of teachers who are certified to teach these courses is limited, which causes the District to limit course offerings that support the 21st Century Learner.

SSAISD is committed to the continuation of hiring fully certified teachers for all positions. SSAISD is seeking flexibility in hiring professionals in hard to recruit and retain areas. This would include teacher recruitment in the following areas:

- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)
- English, Language Arts, and Reading
- Fine Arts and Humanities
- Career and Technology Education
- Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
- Advanced Academics

In order to best serve SSAISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. Henceforth, students will be afforded greater course options, fluidity in scheduling and exposure to specialized practitioners (i.e. college professors, public service professionals and other expert personnel).

### Local Guidelines

The campus principal may submit to the Superintendent a request to allow a teacher to teach a course in a highly specialized or hard-to-fill area. The superintendent will decide whether the applicant is qualified to teach such a course or vocational skill through a local teaching certificate. Local teaching certificates will be for one year. The employee will receive a non-Chapter 21 contract. The Superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees. Parental notification will not be required for these employees.

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### C. SSAISD Strategic Plan – Student Teacher Ratios, Class Size and Notice of Class Size

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

***TEC §25.111 Student Teacher Ratios, TEC §25.112 Class Size and TEC §25.113 Notice of Class Size***

#### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

TEC §25.111 requires each school district to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers to maintain an average ratio of not less than one teacher for every 20 students in average daily attendance, except as otherwise provided by §25.112.

South San Antonio ISD (SSAISD) seeks flexibility in this area to determine class enrollment based on class structure, instructional content, and student age, rather than a fixed statewide ratio. While the District recognizes that student-teacher ratios influence classroom dynamics and student achievement, local flexibility is essential due to high student mobility rates and challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff within required timelines. Allowing minor variations—such as one or two students beyond the state-recommended ratio—ensures continuity and stability in students' academic and emotional development.

TEC §25.112 limits class sizes in prekindergarten through grade 4 to 22 students per class, except under authorized circumstances. Flexibility from this requirement will allow SSAISD to make data-informed, local decisions about class size that consider teaching methodology, instructional delivery, and student needs—without the necessity of repeatedly seeking waivers from the Commissioner of Education. This autonomy enables the District to maintain balanced and effective classrooms while focusing on student learning outcomes.

TEC §25.113 requires written notice to parents when a district is granted an exception to class size limits. Flexibility in this area would allow SSAISD to tailor communication and notification procedures appropriately, particularly as the District explores innovative instructional models or nontraditional classroom configurations designed to enhance learning opportunities.

#### Local Guidelines

South San Antonio ISD remains committed to adhering to the intent of the Texas Education Code §25.112, maintaining the 22:1 ratio in grades K–4 whenever possible. However, the District requests flexibility to make student-centered decisions that support both the academic and emotional well-being

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of learners.

If a classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio in grades K–4, the campus and district administration, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, may request an exemption from the Superintendent of Schools. The Superintendent will then report the number of exemptions granted to the Board of Trustees, which may at any time request a formal review or approval of such exemptions.

This flexibility allows the District to:

- Determine class enrollment based on instructional needs and student demographics;
- Make timely local decisions without submitting waivers to the Commissioner of Education; and
- Maintain stable, developmentally appropriate learning environments.

The District will develop local policy parameters to guide implementation of this innovation, ensuring all decisions remain aligned with student achievement goals, staff capacity, and community expectations.

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### D. SSAISD Strategic Plan - Probationary Contracts

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

***TEC §21.002 Teacher Employment Contracts and §21.102 Probationary Contracts***

#### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

Under current state guidelines, probationary periods for newly hired employees who have been in public education for five of the previous eight years cannot exceed one (1) year. This limited period can be an insufficient amount of time to fully determine the employee's effectiveness in their role.

#### Local Guidelines

South San Antonio ISD will issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two (2) full years for experienced teachers, counselors, nurse, or administrators who are newly hired to the district. This will allow SSAISD to better evaluate the effectiveness of the employee.

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### E. SSAISD Strategic Plan – Grievance Policies

TEC Code Requiring Exemption  
***TEC §26 A Grievance Policy***

#### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

Texas Senate Bill 2171, enacted by the 89th Legislature, establishes a statewide framework for public school grievance procedures. The bill requires districts to adopt grievance processes that extend appeal timelines, allow grievant to add claims or evidence, mandate decisions on the merits even in the event of procedural errors, and require recusal if a decision-maker is the subject of the grievance. South San Antonio ISD (SSAISD) believes that a 15-district-business-day filing requirement—from the date the grievant knows or reasonably should have known of the decision or action being grieved—best ensures the timely attention, investigation, and resolution of concerns. Extending filing timelines beyond this period (e.g., 60 to 90 days) may compromise the accuracy of information, as well as access to individuals or records necessary to resolve matters effectively. Prompt reporting and review are essential to maintaining fairness, efficiency, and confidence in the grievance process.

#### Local Guidelines

South San Antonio ISD's long-standing grievance policies ensure that all complaints are reviewed thoroughly and that district responses align with state and federal regulations and all relevant local board policies. The District will continue to follow the procedures and timelines established in Board Policies DGBA (Employee Complaints), FNG (Student and Parent Complaints), and GF (Public Complaints).

These policies provide for:

- Documentation of each step in the grievance process;
- Adequate time for filing, reviewing, and hearing complaints
- Maintenance of all related records (submitted forms, communications, investigations, findings, resolutions, and corrective actions) at the district level for transparency, accountability, and compliance.

SSAISD remains committed to ensuring that all grievances are heard, reviewed, and resolved appropriately, and that corrective action is taken when warranted. The District's current grievance policies also allow for a Level Three appeal to the Board of Trustees, except in cases involving extracurricular activities.

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### F. SSAISD Strategic Plan – Planning and Preparation Time

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

***TEC §21.404 Planning and Preparation Time***

#### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

Texas Education Code §21.404 entitles each classroom teacher to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and lesson planning. The statute further stipulates that each planning period must be at least 45 minutes within the instructional day, during which teachers may not be required to engage in any other activity.

South San Antonio ISD (SSAISD) seeks flexibility from this requirement to allow for innovative scheduling that promotes collaboration and professional growth among educators. This flexibility would enable the District to design schedules that incorporate vertical, horizontal, and cross-campus collaboration, ensuring alignment of instructional practices and continuous improvement of student outcomes.

While SSAISD is committed to ensuring that all educators have sufficient and meaningful planning time each nine-week grading period, the District recognizes that rigid statutory scheduling may limit opportunities for collective planning, data-driven instruction, and professional collaboration. Allowing flexibility in how planning and preparation time is structured will enable the District to more effectively meet the instructional and professional development needs of its staff and students.

#### Local Guidelines

South San Antonio ISD will establish local procedures to ensure that educators are provided adequate and reasonable planning and preparation time while allowing for innovative scheduling models, such as:

- Cluster or team-based planning and lesson internalization sessions;
- Data review and instructional alignment meetings; and
- Collaborative professional learning opportunities across grade levels or campuses.

These locally developed procedures will ensure that educators continue to receive dedicated planning time during the school day, while providing the District the flexibility needed to implement strategic, collaborative, and student-centered instructional practices, without requiring staff to meet after school.

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### G. SSAISD Strategic Plan – Commissioner Standardized GPA Rules

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

***TEC §28.0252 (a) (b) Grade Point Average Rules***

#### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

Senate Bill 1191 amended Texas Education Code §28.0252 (a) and (b), requiring the Commissioner of Education to establish a uniform method for calculating a student's high school grade point average (GPA), which all public-school districts must adopt.

South San Antonio ISD (SSAISD) seeks flexibility from this requirement to maintain local control over GPA calculation in alignment with the District's strategic priorities outlined in the SSAISD Strategic Plan. This flexibility ensures that GPA weighting and calculation systems reflect the District's instructional focus, community needs, and pathways designed to prepare students for postsecondary success.

The implementation of a statewide standardized GPA system would limit SSAISD's ability to recognize and reward students for participation in rigorous, locally valued coursework—particularly in specialized areas such as career and technical education (CTE), advanced science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs, and dual-credit or industry-aligned courses. Maintaining local discretion in GPA calculation supports equitable recognition of students' academic efforts across diverse pathways and encourages enrollment in advanced and high-demand programs. Additionally, it is important to avoid a situation in which a student who is midway through their high school career, and has been operating under the district's current GPA system, is negatively impacted by the sudden adoption of the Commissioner's standardized method. Local control allows SSAISD to maintain consistency, fairness, and recognition of students' accomplishments.

#### Local Guidelines

South San Antonio ISD will establish local guidelines for GPA calculation and weighting that:

- Align with the District's strategic plan;
- Encourage student participation in advanced, honors, dual-credit, and CTE courses;
- Promote equity and access to rigorous academic and career pathways; and
- Provide transparent and consistent GPA calculation procedures that ensure fairness and accountability.

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