

KEENE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Ricky Stephens

Superintendent

Sandy Denning

Asst. Superintendent

Keene ISD District of Innovation Plan (HB 1842) 2026- 2031

FIRST ADOPTED JULY 11, 2016
AMENDED MAY 22, 2017
AMENDED JULY 19, 2021
RENEWED AUG 16, 2021
RENEWED OCT. 20, 2025
AMENDED FEB 9, 2026

Keene ISD is utilizing HB 1842, of the 84th Legislative Session, in order to have more local control in certain areas. HB 1842 allows a traditional public school to have some of the same local flexibility that public charter schools have always been allowed. We feel this is a great opportunity for our local district to tailor plans based on the needs of our students and community.

This plan will be in effect for the 2026-2027 school year through the 2029-2030 school year. This plan may be amended at any time by the committee with approval of the Board of Trustees

District Innovation Team 2025-2026

Dr. Ricky Stephens	Superintendent
Sandra Denning	Assistant Superintendent Curriculum
Elizabeth Menchaca	CFO
Blake Rice	HS Principal
Ethan Stepp	HS Assistant Principal
Julie McKintosh	JH Principal
Ted Shurtleff	JH Assistant Principal
Kelly Turnage	Elementary Principal
Natasha Curubo	Summit Principal/Parent
Johnathon Seitz	Keene City Manager
Elvis Wells	Keene ISD Police Chief
Taryn Alvarado	High School Teacher
Rebekahh Stephenson	High School Teacher
Ann Bowling	JH Teacher
Amanda Cisco	Elementary Teacher
Tracy Hensley	Elementary Teacher
Anthony Book	IT Director
Maribel Vasquez	PEIMS

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Timeline:

- February 8, 2016
 - Board Approval of resolution to pursue District of Innovation
- March 21, 2016
 - Public Hearing to consider whether to develop a District of Innovation Plan
 - Board Approval to develop a District of Innovation Plan
- April 18, 2016
 - Board approved DIC committee
- May 17, 2016
 - DIC meeting at Southwestern Adventist University Library
- July 11, 2016
 - Public hearing to discuss District of innovation Plan
 - Board approves District of Innovation Plan

Amended

- May 19, 2017
 - DIC met and approved amending DOI to include teacher certification and bank depository
- May 22, 2017
 - Board approved DOI amendment

Amended

- July 19, 2021
 - DIC met and approved amending DOI to include providing an alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program
- July 19, 2021
 - Board approved DOI amendment

RENEWED

- July 19, 2021
 - DIC met and approved renewal of DOI

- Aug 16, 2021
 - School Board approved DOI renewal

RENEWED

- Sept. 10, 2025
 - DIC met and approved renewal of DOI

- Nov. 17, 2025
 - School Board approved DOI renewal

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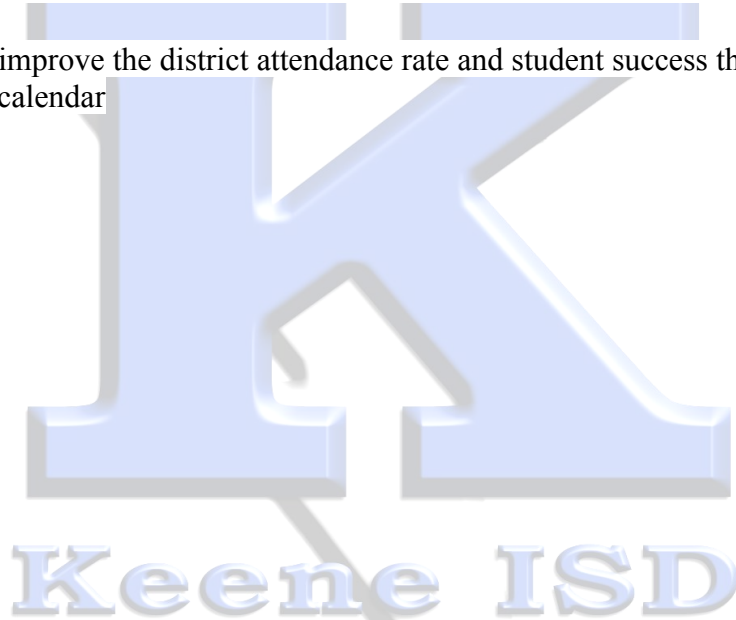
Keene ISD District of Innovation Plan

School start date (EB LEGAL) (Ed. Code 25.0811)

Currently Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August.

Proposed: KISD committee felt the need for dynamic professional development to occur during the school year. In order to provide the days for teacher training during the year that can directly impact student learning and to provide a calendar that better meets the local needs of our students, KISD proposes to start school before the 4th Monday in August.

- a. Students will begin no earlier than the 3rd Monday of August. **(Aug. 18th for year 2016-2017)**
- b. Teachers will begin no earlier than the 2nd Monday of August. **(Aug. 11th for year 2016-2017)**
- c. This will allow the first and second semesters to be closer in the number of days of instruction.
- d. The goal is to improve the district attendance rate and student success through the flexibility in the calendar



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AMENDED MAY 22, 2017

Teacher Certification (TEC 21.003, 21.053, and 21.3662057) DK (LEGAL)

State law states that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency or business or industry group. In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of their certification, the district must request emergency certification from Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator

Certification.

Rationale of Exemptions

Current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high-demand, dual credit, as well as career and technical courses. Keene ISD is located in a rural area which limits course offerings. The District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements and its own requirements for training professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of the requirements set forth in law. This flexibility will allow the district to offer a wider variety of courses and provide more innovation in instruction and coursework for Keene ISD students.

Benefits of Exemptions

- Ability to hire credentialed postsecondary instructors to teach dual-credit courses to students in grade 9 through 12;
- Ability to hire instructors with industry experience that align to career and technical pathways offered to District students in grades 9 through 12; and
- Opportunity to increase the number of career and technical and dual-credit course offerings to students in grades 9 through 12.

Implementation Guidance

When developing parameters for hiring instructors in career and technical education and dual credit coursework who do not have the requisite certificate or permit, the District shall ensure the following:

- The District must first consider high quality, certified teachers.
- The District must establish criteria for selection of high quality, non-certified candidates.
- The District must implement a rigorous on-boarding and training program for newly hired, non-certified instructors. The program must emphasize support in classroom management and effective instructional practice.

Special Education and ESL/ELL certifications cannot be waived.

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BANK DEPOSITORY CONTRACT TERM

((Ed. Code 45.206 and Ed. Code 45.205) BDAE (LEGAL), BDAE (LOCAL)

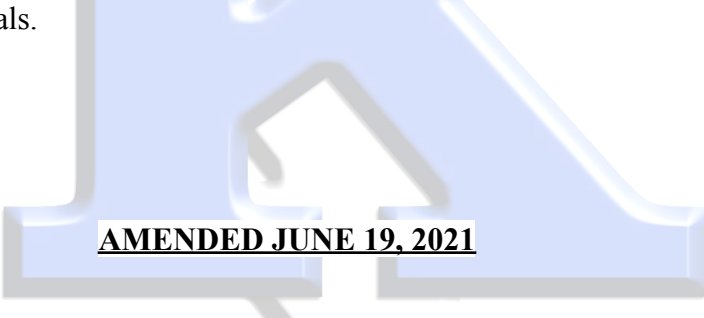
The depository for the District shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified. A district and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for two additional two-year terms. The contract term and any extension must coincide with the district's fiscal year. An extension is not subject to the requirements of Education Code 45.206, Education Code 45.205 and Education Code 45.204.

Rationale for Exemption

In a small district and a small town, the District's choices for its depository bank are limited. KISD uses services provided by the bank on a daily basis. KISD will continue to use the local depository for the District without rebidding as follows:

At the end of each two year term, the District and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for multiple two additional year periods. The District must review the contract to ensure

the best value and support for the District and obtain Board approval for each of the two year periods. Nothing in this process would hinder the District's ability to undertake bidding the District Depository Bank at the end of any of the two year periods. Further, this entire Innovation Plan must be reviewed and renewed at the end of five years, including this provision. The time saved by the superintendent and the board of trustees by not having to deal with this ministerial duty every two years will allow the superintendent and the board more time for studying and planning for student progress, instructional strategies, and innovative options for the district educational goals.



AMENDED JUNE 19, 2021

Preclusion from providing alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program

Ed. Code §22.004(i) CRD(LEGAL) CRD(LOCAL)

Texas Education Code: §22.004(i) Preclusion from providing alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program once the program of coverages under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code is implemented.

Rationale for Exemption

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 KEENE ISD employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. This provision is in direct contradiction to the wishes of the KEENE ISD Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter. This exemption will increase local control of the group health benefits plan to allow the District to be responsive to employee and community needs

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Transfer Students

TEC §25.036. FDA (Local)

Rationale for Exemption

Texas Education Code states that a district may choose to accept, as transfer, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC §25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.

Keene ISD has a local transfer policy FDA (LOCAL) requiring non-resident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the superintendent or designee considers:

1. The current enrollment at the particular grade level or class, as well as any special program requirements of the student seeking admission. Consideration shall include the effect of additional students in that grade or program, and on facilities, staffing needs, and the educational opportunities of resident students.
2. The disciplinary record of the student seeking admission.
3. The attendance record of the student seeking admission.
4. The academic record of the student seeking admission, including the student's performance on applicable state-mandated assessments, the student's record of promotion to the next grade level, and the student's extracurricular record.
5. The parent's compliance with District and campus policies and regulations.

The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in acceptance of transfer applications for the following reasons:

1. Student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion.

60851584. Student attendance falls below the TEA truancy standard.

60862208. Student refuses to attend required interventions (if needed) to retain approved transfer status.

This exemption will allow KISD to provide the best learning environment possible while providing for the safety and well being of our students

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AMENDED JUNE 20, 2022

Teacher Contract Days

(DCB Legal, DCB Local)(Ed. Code 21.401, 21.415)

Current education law located in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract equivalent to 187 days.

Rationale for Exemption

This proposal reduces teacher contract days from 187 to 182 with no effect on teacher salaries. This somewhat makes an attempt to align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students.

- a. This proposal will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers
- b. This proposal should enhance teacher recruitment, therefore putting the district on a more level playing field with larger districts.
- c. This proposal will significantly improve teacher morale.
- d. This proposal will provide teachers more opportunities during the summer months to seek out beneficial staff development that relates to their field.

Discussed and approved:

Superintendent Advisory Committee May 24, 2022

KISD Leadership June 13, 2022

KISD School Board June 20, 2022

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AMENDED October 20, 2025

Probationary Contracts for Experienced Teachers

Ed. Code 21.102(b)

A probationary contract may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment with the district.

Rationale for Exemption

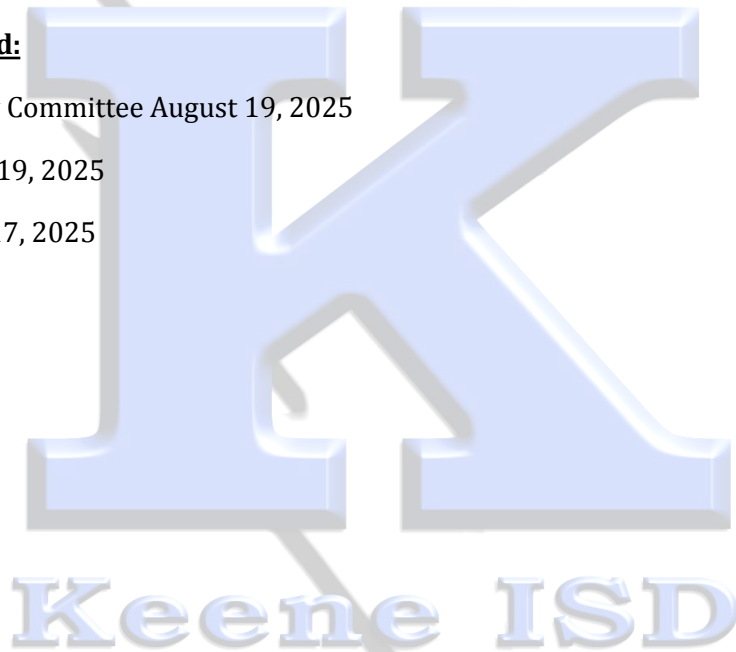
This period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to the availability of end-of-year classroom and student data. This exemption from Texas Education Code Section 21.102(b) allows KISD to offer an additional probationary contract to teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses that are new to KISD who have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years to benefit the individual, schools, and students served.

Discussed and approved:

Superintendent Advisory Committee August 19, 2025

KISD Leadership August 19, 2025

KISD School Board Nov. 17, 2025



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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

- Keene 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. Keene 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. Keene 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.

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Instructional Plan

(TEC § 26.0062)

Keene ISD is committed to supporting all efforts of each campus to involve parents and community members as active participants in the education of Keene 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. Keene 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, Keene ISD will ensure that course overviews are available at the request of parents or guardians.



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Local School Library Advisory Council **(TEC § 33.025)**

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

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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

Keene 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 Keene 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 Keene 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.

Discussed and approved:

Superintendent Advisory Committee November 18, 2025

KISD Leadership November 18, 2025

KISD School Board February 9, 2026

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