

SIDNEY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

I. Background

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

On April 25, 2017, the Sidney Independent School District's Board of Trustees passed a resolution to adopt a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. In addition to passing a resolution the SISD Board held a hearing to allow the public to learn more about the plan, the designated innovations, and to provide feedback. At this time, the board members appointed a District of Innovation Advisory Committee to discuss, review, and develop the plan.

The committee gave feedback on April 13, 2022, to discuss and draft the District of Innovation Plan. On April 14, 2022 the plan was posted online for public viewing and feedback and remained online until May 14, 2022 . The final version was referred to the District of Innovation Advisory Committee for a final vote to approve the plan. The SISD board of trustees reviewed to approve the plan with a unanimous vote on May 16, 2022 .

II. District of Innovation Advisory Committee

James Rucker -Superintendent

Deanna Drummond-Principal

President of school board of trustees

Rachel Miller-Board member

Karla Colcleasure-Secondary

Shirley Diaz-Elementary

Deanna Drummond-CTE teacher

Ashley Kinnard-PEIMS coordinator

Becky Caffey-parent

Amanda Redden-parent

Lacy Carriger-parent

III. Process

Timeline – District of Innovation	
April 24, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Inform Board of Trustees of the interest to become a District of Innovation.● District of Innovation Resolution presented and adopted by the Board of Trustees● Public Hearing regarding District of Innovation● Board of Trustees approved committee to develop District of Innovation Plan
May 8, 2017	Meeting with District of Innovation Advisory Committee to develop plan
	Proposed plan posted to the District website for 30 days
	Board of Trustees sends letter to Commissioner informing of intent to become a District of Innovation
	SISD District of Innovation Advisory Committee hosts a public meeting to review/approve the final version of SISD District of Innovation Plan by majority vote.
	At the SISD school board meeting, the board members votes to approve the final District of Innovation Plan.
May 16, 2022	Board reviewed and approved DOI for another 5 years
Jan 8, 2026	Grievance Policy (Ed. Code 26A.001, 26.011, and 26A.002)

IV. Term and Implementation

The term of the plan is for five years, beginning at the start of the 2017-2018 school year and concluding at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. District policies will be amended as necessary to be consistent with the statutory exemptions and the District Innovation Plan. The District of Innovation Advisory Committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the plan and recommend to the Board any suggested modifications to the plan.

V. Innovations

Sidney ISD seeks flexibility and exemptions from the following statutory requirements:

Uniform Start Date

Texas Education Code 25.0811

State law currently states a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Rationale for Exemption

The flexibility of the start date allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students, the school, and the community. Benefits to this exemption include but are not limited to:

- Aligning school start date to accommodate college start dates for dual credit students
- Starting school mid-week in order to aid in the transition to school for students.
- This provides a natural break after establishing routines, procedures, and expectations before introducing rigorous academic based lessons for students transitioning to their respective campus.
- Providing a better opportunity to balance the number of days in each semester. Providing more instructional and accelerated instruction days prior to State mandated tests.

Innovation Strategy

Sidney ISD does not have any intention to start school prior to the second Monday in August.

Teacher Certification

Texas Education Code 21.003

State law currently states a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B.

Rationale for exemption

Generally, and in certain circumstances, this system is unnecessarily restrictive and does not take into account the unique logistical, financial and/or instructional needs of the district. The 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. Sidney ISD is located in a rural area and the current certification rules limit the district's options to hire professionals with work related experience. Benefits of this exemption would include but not be limited to:

- Allowing the District to have the flexibility to utilize existing staff members to teach certain classes that other than not being certified, would be well suited to teach. This will help the District to be more efficient and offer more electives for our students.
- Utilizing local professionals, for the vast array of STEM and CTE related courses, to provide invaluable working knowledge of industry skills and standards. This could help to prepare our student for the jobs that are available in our community and beyond.

Innovation Strategy

Sidney ISD will continue to recruit and retain highly skilled certified educators, but when it is advantageous to the district to pursue a local certification the principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials the applicant possesses. This must be presented to the superintendent for approval. Special Education and Bilingual teachers will continue to be certified according to law and will not be included in this exemption. Sidney ISD will continue to comply with parent notifications as required by law.

Qualifications that may be considered include but are not limited to:

- Professional work experience
- Formal training and education
- Active professional relevant industry certification or registration
- Combination of work experience, training, and education
- Demonstration of successful experience working with students

- Out of state teaching certification

The superintendent will make a determination on the principal recommendation and if approved, will submit the recommendation to the board of trustees for final approval. Determinations shall be made on a case-by-case basis.

Length of School Day

Texas Education Code 25.081 and 25.082a

State law currently states for each school year each school district must operate so that the district provides for at least 75,600 minutes of instruction, including intermissions and recesses, for students. A school day shall be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

Rationale for exemption

Exemption from the 420-minute (7 hours) day requirement would allow Sidney ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days, whenever locally determined necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum number for the school year. Exempting completely from the 420-minute requirement would give the district a significant amount of local control over scheduling (above and beyond the 6-day maximum as needed) without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time that might cause the district to fall out of compliance with annual minute requirements. This would allow the district the flexibility to schedule non-instructional days into the schedule to allow for our teachers to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development. Benefits of this exemption would include but not be limited to:

- Allowing flexibility to schedule “flex” days into the school calendar. Examples would include days for intensive accelerated instruction for identified students, preparation days for staff, data analysis days, ongoing professional development days for staff or a combination of each.
- The District would be able to be more strategic in its approach to learning styles and learning environments.
- More preparation time is a challenge for every teacher. Allowing teachers to more frequently plan high quality lessons and improved classroom management.

Innovation Strategy

Sidney ISD does not have any intentions to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days would be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar, which is approved by the Board of Trustees, published, and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year and continuously published using school media. Sidney ISD will stay inside the state minimum number of minutes (75,600) required for funding for the year.

Probationary Contracts

Texas Education Code 21.102 Subsection B

State law currently states for experienced teachers new to the district, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years.

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.

Innovation Strategy

For experienced teachers, counselors, or librarians, new to Sidney ISD that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, the probationary period when becoming employed by Sidney ISD shall be for a period of two years with probationary contracts issued for each of the two years.

Grievance Policy (Ed. Code 26A.001, 26.011, and 26A.002)

Current Law: 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. Under current law, each board of trustees must develop grievance procedures in accordance with Section 26A.001 of the Texas Education Code. Section 26A.001(g) requires each school district to adopt a standardized complaint policy and to annually submit a report to the Texas Education Agency on grievances filed in the district. The report must include the resolution and corrective action of each grievance filed.

Rationale for exemption Current law further 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. If the parent engaged in informal attempts to resolve the grievance, the parent could have 90 calendar days to file a grievance. State 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 session, rather than the person against whom the complaint is brought.

Innovation Strategy SISD has always and will continue to adhere to an established grievance policy with procedures and timelines outlined in 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 well as to taking corrective action, where appropriate. Sidney 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. Sidney ISD follows established grievance procedures as outlined in district policy, specifically in relation to the timelines for filing an appeal prior to Texas Education Code §26.002 and for hearing such complaints.

The district believes that a requirement for complaints to be submitted within 15 school business days from the date the student or parent either knew, or with reasonable diligence should have known, of the decision or action that is the subject of the grievance ensures prompt attention and resolution of parent concerns. In cases where the student or parent does not receive the requested relief at the prior grievance level, or if the response deadline has passed without a reply, the parent may proceed by requesting a conference with the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee to appeal the previous decision. This appeal Revised July 2025 must be submitted in writing, using the district-provided form, within ten school business days of receiving the written response from Level One or Level Two. If no written response is provided, the appeal must be submitted within ten days following the deadline for the response at the applicable level. Accuracy of information and access to individuals that are needed to provide necessary information surrounding an issue could be compromised after 60 to 90 days. It is imperative that grievances and complaints are filed in a timely manner to ensure the best prompt response.

