



SOUTH SAN ANTONIO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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What Is A “District Of Innovation”?

The District of Innovation concept was passed into law by the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, which created Texas Education Code chapter 12A.

The law allows traditional independent school districts to access most of the flexibilities available to Texas’ open enrollment charter schools. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Chapter 12A.

What School Districts Are Eligible To Be Districts Of Innovation?

To be eligible for designation as a District of Innovation, a school district’s most recent academic performance rating must be at least acceptable.

Why Would A School District Choose To Pursue This Option?

A local school district may want to pursue specific innovations in curriculum, instruction, governance, parent or community involvement, school calendar, budgeting, or other ideas. An innovation plan also allows a school district to gain exemption from many Texas Education Code requirements.

Essentially, innovation plans will be about local control. Each district will pursue designation as a District of Innovation for different reasons, and no two plans may look the same. Community members should note that each innovation plan will be unique to the local school district. The experiences of other school districts may be informative, but may not directly relate to the purpose or progress of a plan in another location.

What Process Is Required To Adopt An Innovation Plan?

The process is initiated by either:

- *a resolution of the board of trustees; or*
- *a petition signed by a majority of the members of the district-level advisory committee.*

Promptly after the resolution or petition, the board must hold a public hearing to consider whether the district should develop an innovation plan. Under TEA’s proposed rules, a board must hold the public hearing as soon as possible, but no later than the next scheduled board of trustees meeting, to consider whether the district should develop a local innovation plan. The board’s resolution may outline the parameters around which the innovation committee may develop the plan.

At the conclusion of the hearing or soon thereafter, the board may:

- *decline to pursue the designation as a District of Innovation; or appoint a committee to develop a plan.*
- *The membership of the committee is not specified in statute, but as a practical matter, the members of the committee must be able to write a comprehensive plan with the elements specified below, clearly articulate the purpose of the plan, and persuade the school community of the value of the plan.*

The plan must:

- *provide for a comprehensive educational program for the district which may include innovations in curriculum, instructional methods, community and parent involvement, campus governance, modifications to the school day or year, budgeting and sustainable funding, local accountability, and other innovations prescribed by the board; and identify the Texas Education Code provisions from which the District of Innovation should be exempted, within the parameters described above.*
- *The board cannot approve the plan until the final plan has been posted online for 30 days, the commissioner has been notified, the district-level advisory committee (DLC) has held a public meeting to consider the final plan, and the DLC has approved the plan by a majority vote. The public hearing and vote of the DLC may occur at the same meeting.*
- *The board of trustees may then vote to approve the plan. The vote must pass by a two-thirds majority vote. The district may then function in accordance with the plan and be exempt from the specified Texas Education Code mandates.*
- *Districts are encouraged to use an abundance of caution throughout the adoption process to adhere to Chapter 12A, TEA rules, and state laws regarding open meetings and open records. Questions will inevitably arise about the application of the Texas Open Meetings Act to committee meetings and meetings of the DAC. School districts should consult their school attorneys regularly and keep the process as transparent as possible to avoid legal challenges that could delay the implementation of an innovation plan.*