



# South San Antonio Independent School District Local Innovation Plan



Local Innovation Committee Members	
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Rosanna Mercado	Principal, Zamora Middle School
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Robert Blankenberg	Teacher, Zamora Middle School
Marisa Mendez	Principal, Kindred Elementary School
Cynthia Hernandez	Teacher, Palo Alto Elementary School
Katie Hellum	Teacher, Palo Alto Elementary School
Gloria Galvan	Teacher, Price Elementary School
Yvonne Cardona	Teacher, Carrillo Elementary School
Veronica Bacigalupo	Teacher, Athens Elementary School
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Judy Delgado Speer	Community Member
Rosemary Segura	Community Member
Rudy Lopez	Community Member
Marcy Lockridge	Community Member
Bill Hernandez	Community Member
Petra Ortega	Community Member
Dr. Aja Gardner	Director of STEM, Advanced Academics, and Instructional Technology
Ad Hoc Members	
Dr. Abelardo Saavedra	Superintendent of Schools
Delinda Castro	Chief Academic Officer
Lorraine DeLeon	Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction



# South San Antonio Independent School District Local Innovation Plan



## 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 December 14, 2016 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 December 14, 2016.

On January 12, 2017, the Board of Trustees, working with the input of the Superintendent of Schools, took action to appoint a twenty-one member District of Innovation Committee. The Committee, comprised of school district leaders, teachers, and community members, represented a diverse cohort of the District’s stakeholders.

The District of Innovation Committee met on January 12 and 26, 2017, February 9 and 23, 2017, and March 9, 2017 to prepare a Local Innovation Plan to address the needs and challenges of the District. On March 10, 2017, 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 March 10, 2017, and remained online until April 10, 2017. The plan was then presented to the Board of Trustees for consideration on April 12, 2017. The Local Innovation Plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees on April 19, 2017.

## II. Term

The term of the Local Innovation Plan will begin at the start of the 2017-2018 school year and end at the end of the 2021-2022 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.



Approved by SSAISD School Board  
April 19, 2017



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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.

#### Call to Action

All students will enjoy successful education experiences to empower them to make decisions and enrich their lives in the future they create.

#### Culture

South San Antonio ISD is a culture of Building Relationships, Collaboration & Growth.

#### Core Beliefs

- We believe in engagement of the school community for the success of our district.
- We believe in a strong support system for the school community to achieve excellence.
- We believe that innovative and challenging experiences produce successful learners.
- We believe that trusting relationships among the school community are essential to student success.
- We believe that an inclusive school culture promotes positive student development.
- We believe strong and effective leadership is essential to build a culture of high expectations.

#### Goals/ Strategies

1. We will engage all school community members through transparency and effective communication to create an inclusive environment for all students.
2. We will develop a strong support system offering opportunities across the curriculum to create an innovative school experience, teaching students to value their education and motivate them to achieve excellence.
3. We will provide meaningful and innovative instruction that promotes critical thinking and problem solving.
4. We will recruit, attract, retain, and develop exceptional personnel in order to accomplish the goals of the school community.
5. We will prioritize district revenues to guide student future choices.
6. We will promote and ensure a safe and secure learning environment for all students.



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## 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 of Innovation 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

#### TEC Code Requiring Exemption

*TEC §25.0811 and §25.0812 First day of Instruction and 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 school one week early, the third Monday in August. 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 be able to start and end their high school courses at the same time as their college courses. 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 the District to recruit highly qualified faculty who desire to coordinate their work schedule with the local college.

#### Local Guidelines

The District Educational Improvement Council, comprised 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

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

*TEC §25.092 Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade*

### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

Currently, students who have already mastered course material, yet have unique attendance issues are required to re-take the course for “seat time” credit. Additionally, students who are able to advance more rapidly, due to the ability to work above grade level, are not allowed to do so. Students are required to earn “seat time” regardless of their level of content mastery. The District will need an exemption from the 90% “seat time” attendance rule.

The District strives to implement innovative ways for learners to learn. Virtual classroom learning opportunities and service learning opportunities are examples of innovative learning. Additionally, students will be afforded the opportunity to pursue potential career passions.

## C. SSAISD Strategic Plan

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

*TEC §25.081 Minimum Minutes of Instruction- 75,600 minutes/year, 420 Minutes/Day*

### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

The District seeks to establish an alternative education program designed to meet the needs of non-traditional students. Students who are overage and who are at risk of dropping out need customized learning plans to meet their needs, and exempting the District from the minimum minutes of instruction requirement would allow the necessary flexibility to help these students. Students will only attend school for the classes they are lacking, or to complete the requirements for passing STAAR/ EOC exams. The goal is to provide an opportunity for students who may have difficulty being successful in a traditional school setting due to special circumstances.

In order to better meet the needs of individual students, the District requests the flexibility to adjust minutes of instruction. This exemption will provide educational advantages to students by promoting innovative learning with flexible methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students.



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## D. SSAISD Strategic Plan

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

*TEC §21.003 and TEC §21.051 Certification and Required Field-based Experience*

### 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 establishing and sustaining the middle schools as magnet schools—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Fine Arts and Humanities, Business and Industry, and Public Services. 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 make a determination as to 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.



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## E. SSAISD Strategic Plan

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

*TEC §25.112 and §25.1113 Class Size and Notice of Class Size*

### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

While we acknowledge that the student-teacher ratio impacts the classroom and student achievement, the mobility rate of South San Antonio ISD must be considered along with the challenge of hiring quality staff in a timely manner to be in compliance. Also, the addition of one or two students beyond the recommended ratio may not hinder the learning environment; however, moving students can be detrimental to the continuity and stability of their academic and emotional growth.

### Local Guidelines

South San Antonio ISD strives to adhere to the current Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.112 of the 22:1 ratio in grades K-4. The District requests flexibility to make the best possible decisions regarding the academic and emotional needs of our students. In the event a classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio in grades K-4, campus and district administration in collaboration with the teacher would request an exemption from the Superintendent of Schools. The Superintendent will then report to the Board of Trustees the number of exemptions granted. At any time, the Board may request that the Superintendent bring the exemptions for Board approval.



# South San Antonio Independent School District Local Innovation Plan



## F. SSAISD Strategic Plan

TEC Code Requiring Exemption

*TEC §29.151 Free Kindergarten*

### Benefit of Exemption for SSAISD

In order to best serve the students of South San Antonio ISD, the majority of which would be considered economically disadvantaged according to the state guidelines, the district would welcome the opportunity to provide educational access as early as possible to ensure long-term academic success. Research says the sooner students are served in an academic setting, the gaps they potentially come with could be eliminated.

The current statute states that children must be five years of age by September 1st in order for them to begin Kindergarten in a public school district and for that district to receive state funding. Children mature and learn at varying rates. Many children miss the cut-off-date to start school and would benefit from attending school sooner instead of waiting another academic year to begin.

### Local Guidelines

The district requests flexibility in determining readiness for Kindergarten by allowing students who are not age 5 by September 1 to meet locally established eligibility requirements and to optionally enroll with all the same district financial benefits of those students who are 5 years old by September 1st. The district will establish a local committee comprised of various stakeholders (e.g., teachers, campus administrators, district staff) to develop and recommend local criteria for Kindergarten readiness to the Superintendent/Board of Trustees, as appropriate. Students who are ready for school can develop a strong foundation of literacy and numeracy to prevent potential gaps in achievement and accelerate their learning.