



**Cotulla Independent School District
District of Innovation Plan
2019-2024**

INTRODUCTION

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.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices that support local needs, including exemptions from certain mandates such as the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a District of Innovation Plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On May 2, 2019 the Cotulla Independent School District's Board of Trustees approved a Resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. A District of Innovation Committee was then assembled to convene at a later date to start the planning. The Committee met on March 4, 2019 to discuss and draft the Local Innovation Plan.

TERM

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning August 2019 and ending July, 2024, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, a new committee will convene to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

Timeline of Events

October 19, 2017:	Districtwide Education Improvement Council voted to pursue and develop a local innovation plan
March 2, 2018:	Districtwide Education Improvement Council voted to present local innovation plan to the CISD Board of Trustees
March 26, 2018:	Districtwide Education Improvement Council presented the local innovation plan to the CISD Board of Trustees. CISD Board of Trustees rejected the plan and asked to continue research regarding a local plan of Innovation
December 18, 2018:	Districtwide Education Improvement Council voted to pursue local innovation plan again and formed a District of Innovation Committee
January 14, 2019 to March 4, 2019	District of Innovation Committee met and developed a new local innovation plan and approved the new local innovation plan on March 4, 2019
March 25, 2019:	District of Innovation Committee presented the new District of Innovation Plan to the CISD Board of Trustees. The CISD School Board of Trustees passed a resolution to begin District of Innovation Process/Plan Development
March 25, 2019:	CISD School Board of Trustees ratified the DOI Committee members
March 28, 2019:	DOI Plan posted online for 30 Days
April 1, 2019:	DOI plan voted on by DOI Committee members after Board Public Hearing on March 25, 2019
April 1, 2019:	Public Hearing held by the District of Innovation Committee on the published District of Innovation plan. DOI Committee voted on and passed the DOI plan by majority vote
April 2, 2019:	Notify the Commissioner of Education of the CISD Board of Trustee's intent to approve the DOI Plan at the May, 2019 School Board Meeting
Board Meeting after April 24, 2019	Board of Trustees voted on final DOI Plan by 2/3 majority vote Cotulla ISD Innovation Plan posted and TAC Checklist submitted to Commissioner of Education Request to update all policy changes required by plan submitted to TASB

District of Innovation Committee Members

Central Office

Dr. Jack Seals	Superintendent
Heather Ramirez	Director of Federal Programs
Jamie Whitwell	Board Member
Raquel Nuñez-Yañez	Board Member

Cotulla HS

Dr. Scott Norris	Principal
Cissy Allen	Teacher
William Ziller	Teacher
Georgia Martinez	Parent

Newman MS

Dr. Brenda Jirasek	Principal
Natalie Garcia	Teacher
Marleni Garcia-Ramirez	Teacher
Rachel Del Real	Parent

Ramirez-Burks Elementary

Shane Johnston	Assistant Principal
Erica Adams	Teacher
Tanya Murdoch	Teacher
Jackie Garcia	Parent

Encinal Elementary

Louisa Franklin	Principal
Shannon Flores	Teacher
Nadia Perusquia	Teacher
Nadia Kennedy	Parent

AREAS OF INNOVATION

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

1. School Start and End Date

Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812

Related Board Policies: EB (LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC §25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. Several years ago, the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Innovation Strategies

- a. Increased local control of the instructional calendar will allow the District to be responsive to community needs. CISD will begin student instruction no sooner than the second Monday in August and end no later than the first week of July.
- b. Relief from the statute will allow CISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.

2. Teacher Certification

Exemption from: TEC §21.003 & TEC §21.057

Relevant Board Policies: DBA and DK (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency.

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 the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board for Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.

Innovation Strategies

- a. The campus principal may submit to the Superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a CTE non-core or elective course for which he/she is not certified (not English, Math, Science or Social Studies). The teacher will submit a written request with his or her principal. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.
- b. Cotulla ISD will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The district will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position. Certified applicants will take priority over non-certified applicants. If there has not been a certified applicant who has applied and been approved by the campus hiring committee, the District will have the flexibility to hire non-certified individuals for that school year who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

If the person has not fulfilled the requirements to be a certified teacher by contract renewal time for the current school year, then the job will be reposted and opened for certified applicants. The school board may offer a grace period to a teacher waiting for certification results.

- c. An individual with experience and appropriate certifications, skills and/or licensure in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a CTE non-core or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.

- d. Whenever possible, instructional planning for the non-certified and locally certified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Non-certified and locally certified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, and may be subject to increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.
- e. The Superintendent will notify the Board each time the District exercises this flexibility.
- f. Only certified teachers are allowed to receive extracurricular district approved stipends. Locally certified teachers must wait one year in order to be eligible to receive extracurricular district approved stipends. Non-certified teachers will not be eligible to receive extracurricular district approved stipends.

Disclaimer:

Certified and locally certified teachers will maintain their legal rights and responsibilities including, but not limited to, duty free lunch and planning preparation time. Non-certified and locally certified teachers are not entitled to due process rights or protections under Chapter 21 and will be employed as at will employees or under non-Chapter 21 contracts, as applicable.