

Sweet Home Independent School District District of Innovation Plan 2022 – 2027



Board of Trustees

Ray Peagler, President

Nathan Wenske, Vice President

Amy Picha, Secretary

Robin Boswell, Member

Jessica Kusak, Member

Jeff Points, Member

Johnny Turk, Member

“Quality Education with a Country Flavor”

What is a District of Innovation?

House Bill 1842 was passed by the 84th Texas Legislature in the spring of 2015. This bill allows public school districts to be designated as Districts of Innovation and obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. This designation will provide for more local control at the district level, providing the opportunity for Sweet Home ISD to better serve our community and focus on the unique needs of each student. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan, as set forth in Texas Education Code Chapter 12A.

Districts of Innovation may be exempted from a number of state statutes and will have:

- Greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students
- Increased freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Empowerment to innovate and think differently.

Districts are not exempt from statutes including curriculum and graduation requirements as well as academic and financial accountability. Sweet Home ISD believes this is a great opportunity for our local district to establish plans based on the unique needs of our students and community.

Term

The term of the plan is for five years, June 2022 and ending March 2027, 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, an amendment to the Plan will be presented to the Board for adoption.

District of Innovation Timeline

January 24, 2022	Initial meeting with faculty and staff to discuss District of Innovation
March 11, 2022	Board approves a resolution to initiate the renewal process of designation of a District of Innovation
April 18, 2022	Board Notifies the Commissioner of Intent to Renew the Plan, Draft of Plan is Posted for Public Comment on Website for 30 days.
May 18, 2022	District Level Committee Holds Public Hearing and Votes on Innovation Plan
June 13, 2022	Board Adopts the Plan with 2/3 Vote, Notifies the Commissioner of Adoption, and Posts Final Plan to the District Website

Amended: February 10, 2025

January 16, 2025	District Level Committee Meeting to Discuss and Vote on Proposed Amendment to the Innovation Plan
February 10, 2025	Board Approves the Amendment of the Innovation Plan with a Unanimous Vote
February 20, 2025	Notification Sent to Commissioner of Amendment and Posts Amended Plan to the District Website

Sweet Home ISD Comprehensive Educational Program

The district's educational program follows all provisions of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and all mandates as required expanded upon pursuant to and as written into the SHISD Improvement Plan.

Initial Innovation Committee Members

Michelle Turek, Interim Superintendent
Kim Shannon, Elementary Teacher
Tammy Steinmann, Elementary Teacher
Jenny Pohler, Special Education Coordinator
Shara Steffek, Junior High Teacher
Tracey Jaquez, Paraprofessional
Mindy De La Rosa, Elementary Parent
Anna Jacobs, Junior High Parent

2025 Updated Innovation Committee Members

Dr. Candace Pohl, Superintendent
Kim Shannon, Elementary Teacher
Danette Anthony, Elementary Teacher
Jenny Pohler, Special Education Coordinator
Shara Steffek, Junior High Teacher
Diana Jurena, Paraprofessional
Madison Beard, Elementary Parent
Mindy De La Rosa, Junior High Parent

Local Innovation Plan Components

1. First Day of School Instruction (School Calendar)

Education Code: 25.0811; 25.0812 **Policy:** EB Legal

Requirement:

Students may not begin school before the 4th Monday of August nor may the school year end before May 15. In the past, districts could apply for a waiver to start the school calendar earlier in August to meet the needs of the local community. The Texas Legislature removed the waiver process and as a result, all districts were required to begin school on the 4th Monday with no exceptions.

Approved Flexibility:

SHISD seeks exemption from this statute. Beginning school prior to the 4th Monday enables the district flexibility in beginning and meeting the needs of our students and staff. Benefits of this flexibility include:

- Increased local control of the instructional calendar to be more responsive to the needs of students, teachers, and the community.
- Enhanced responsiveness to bad weather or disaster needs.
- Equitable distribution of days in a grading period.
- Increased flexibility in scheduling professional development.
- Adequate time for summer school programming.
- Increased instructional time before state-mandated testing.

2. Minimum Minutes of Instruction and length of School Day

Education Code: TEC 25.081 & TEC 25.082 **Policy:** EC Legal & EB Legal

Requirement:

House Bill 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amended Texas Education Code TEC 25.081 by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring the district to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermission and recess) each school year. Additionally, TEC 25.082(a) requires that a school day be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

Approved Flexibility:

Exemption from the seven-hour school day requirement would allow SHISD the flexibility to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is an existing waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a six-day maximum per school year.

SHISD does not intend to shorten the school day without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days will be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar which is approved by the Board of Trustees and published and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year.

3. Teacher Contract Days

Education Code: TEC 21.401 **Policy:** DCB Legal & DCB Local

Requirement:

Texas Education Code 21.401 currently requires a contract between the district and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Approved Flexibility:

This proposal will allow the district to reduce the contract of a teacher by two to five days. Depending on the adopted calendar and number of instructional days, teachers may be on a contract anywhere from 182 to 185 days. This is an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days.

- This proposal will increase the daily rate the pays teachers.
- This proposal should enhance teacher recruitment.
- This proposal will significantly improve teacher morale.
- This proposal could give teachers more opportunities during the year to seek out beneficial staff development that relates to their field.

4. Teacher Certification

Education Code: TEC 21.003 **Policy:** DK Legal, DK Local & DK Exhibit

Requirement:

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 submit a request to the Texas Education Agency and provide notification to parents of each student assigned to a classroom taught by the non-certified teacher. There is a lot of bureaucracy and unnecessary paperwork in this process.

Approved Flexibility:

SHISD is committed to placing great teachers in the classroom to meet the needs of all scholars. To best serve SHISD students, decisions on certification requirements will be managed locally. This exemption will also afford the district the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades or vocations to teach the crafts of those trades or vocations.

Please note that special education and bilingual/ESL teachers must continue to be SBEC certified.

5. District and Campus Level Planning Requirement

Education Code: 11.1511(b)(5);11.251-253;11.255 **Policy:** BQA, BQB

Requirement:

Currently, TEC requires District/campus-level planning and decision-making committees to include representative professional staff, including, if practicable, at least one representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities, parents of students enrolled in the district, business representatives, and community members. The committees shall include a business representative without regard to whether the representative resides in the district or whether the business the person represents is located in the district. Community members must reside in the district and must be at least 18 years of age. A parent who is an employee of the district is not considered a parent representative on the committee. A parent is not considered a representative of community members on the committee.

Approved Flexibility:

The district will continue efforts to ensure that all required stakeholders are represented. Due to the size of the community, it is often a challenging task to secure appropriate representation on all committees. The required committee membership limits the degree of parent involvement in the decision-making process. The limited number of professional staff-members available to serve makes it unnecessary to nominate and elect members. Flexibility will allow the district/campus to establish membership that ensures the most effective decisions are made.

6. Probationary Contracts

Education Code: TEC 21.102 **Policy:** DCA Legal

Requirement:

A probationary contract may not exceed one year for new teachers to the district who have been employed as a teacher in public school for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district.

Approved Flexibility:

This limited period of time is insufficient in some cases to fully determine the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Relief from Texas Educational Code 21.102 will permit the district the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two years for experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses newly hired in SHISD.

7. School District Depositories

Education Code: TEC 45.205 & TEC 45.206 **Policy:** BDAE Legal

Requirement:

Currently, the District must renew its depository contract every two years. The two-year contract term begins and ends in odd-numbered years. In accordance with the Texas Education Code, the District must use a uniform bid or proposal in the form prescribed by the State Board of Education.

Approved Flexibility:

Sweet Home ISD seeks an exemption from TEC 45.205 and 45.206. By gaining exemption from these statutes, SHISD would be able to allow the district's existing bank contract to be extended beyond the total eight-year allowable contract term if the district determines contract pricing remains competitive and there is no operational or financial reason to send the district's banking services out to bid. This exemption would lessen the administrative and financial burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP). In addition, this would afford the district flexibility with respect to local banking relationships. At the end of each two-year term, the district and the depository bank may agree to extend the contract for an additional two-year period. The district must review the contract to ensure the best value and support for the district and obtain Board approval for each extension and contract renewal. This exemption does not hinder the district's ability to release a formal procurement for depository contract services, in lieu of negotiating an extension to the existing bank contract, if deemed necessary based on operational or financial reasons.

8. Student Transfers

Education Code: TEC 25.036 **Policy:** FDA(LEGAL) & FDA(LOCAL)

Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 25.036 states that a student, "...may transfer annually from the child's school district of residence to another district in this state if both the receiving district and the applicant parent or guardian or person having lawful control of the child jointly approve and timely agree in writing to the transfer." This provision has been interpreted to require a school transfer to be for a period of one school year.

Approved Flexibility:

This proposal will allow the District to revoke a transfer at any time of the year when the school superintendent determines that the student has violated the terms of the transfer agreement, is not meeting disciplinary expectations by being assigned discipline consequences, has excessive absence issues, whose behavior repeatedly interferes with the school district's ability to educate the student body, or the availability of space and staff is impacted by the enrollment of new resident students. The decision to revoke a transfer student's enrollment can be made at any time of the instructional calendar. Students are able to reapply for transfer readmission after one full school year following the revocation of their transfer.

Exempting from TEC 25.036 will have the following benefits:

- Student will be held to high expectations for appropriate behavior and conduct on school campuses;
- Students will meet the attendance expectations for the campuses or be withdrawn;
- An unexpected increase in non-transfer enrollment will not put the District in a need for additional staff or programs; and
- Transfer students will not add a hardship to the campuses or District.