



## **Sherman ISD District of Innovation Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is a “District of Innovation”?**

An exciting opportunity! District of Innovation (DOI) is a concept passed by the 84th Texas Legislature that gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to open enrollment charter schools, including exemption from many requirements mandated in the Texas Education Code. To create a DOI, a school district must adopt an innovation plan for its district.

### **Why become a District of Innovation?**

Becoming a District of Innovation provides freedom to make decisions about Sherman ISD at the local level. The process allows local school districts to pursue specific innovations in curriculum, instruction, governance, parent or community involvement, school calendar, budgeting, or other ideas. Essentially, innovation plans are about local control. Sherman ISD's innovation plan will be unique to the school district and the community.

### **Is there a funding impact?**

Innovative instructional programs not meeting on a traditional daily schedule, like online courses and professional internships, can now be considered for our students since the District of Innovation plan allows student attendance in these programs to be fully counted for funding purposes.

### **How long does an innovation plan stay in effect?**

District of Innovation plans remain in effect up to five years or as long as the district committee and Board of Trustees determine the plan benefits our district. It will be reviewed annually by our site based decision making committee and may be amended, rescinded, or renewed during that time period.

### **What areas of flexibility can SISD consider in its District of Innovation journey?**

A District of Innovation may adopt a plan seeking exemptions from state laws in the same manner that charter schools are currently exempted. The SISD District of Innovation Committee is proposing that our district maintain local control over the following topics:

- School start date
- Class size
- Length of the school day
- The 90 percent attendance rule (but compulsory attendance still applies)
- Teacher certification (except as required by federal law)

The proposed plan and accompanying video can be accessed on the Sherman ISD website at <http://www.shermanisd.net/district.cfm?subpage=1511335>

### **Who's on the Committee?**

The District of Innovation Committee is a subcommittee of our District Site Based Decision Making Team. Membership includes the following:

- Community/Business Representatives
- University Representatives
- Local Civic Officials
- Teachers from each campus including representatives from our local educator professional organizations
- Parents
- PTA leaders
- High School Students (4)

### **Why would a school district schools to pursue this option?**

Essentially, innovation plans will be about local control. Each district will pursue designation for different reasons to match the needs of the district and no two plans will look the same. Each innovation plan will be unique to each local school district.

### **Where can a person find more details about District of Innovation?**

Sherman ISD has created a resource page with multiple links to provide information for students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members. This information can be found on the SISD website: <http://www.shermanisd.net/district.cfm?subpage=1518446>

### **What if I have some questions or would like comment on the proposed plan?**

We invite everyone to provide feedback or ask questions on our district website: <http://www.shermanisd.net/forms.cfm?myform=20504>. In addition, this Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) document was developed to answer some of the common questions we have received. The direct link to offer feedback this is located here

### **How did SISD ensure teachers, parents and community were informed about the proposed DOI Plan?**

Input from the across the school district was provided through campus faculty presentations, parent and staff newsletters, the SISD website and social media.

### **Will the Local Innovation Plan affect teachers' contracts or duty-free lunch?**

No, the Local Innovation Plan has no impact on contracts or duty free lunch.

### **How will the Local Innovation Plan affect my planning time?**

The proposed District of Innovation Plan will have no effect on planning times.

### **Would faculty/staff have to work longer days/hours?**

This proposed exemption is around instructional minutes, and will not change staff work hours or increase contract days.

### **If the District were to adopt a calendar with an earlier start date, would it require more work days for staff and/or shorter summer break for students?**

The number of work days on the academic calendar would not increase. If the District started the year earlier, it would either end earlier or have additional professional learning/student holidays built in throughout the year. Teachers will not be required to work extra days outside of their contract.

**Would this plan allow teachers without certification to be hired for academic classes?**

The purpose of the DOI Plan allows SISD to be creative and flexible using local certification approval for the “hard to fill” courses, such as bilingual education, or career/technical courses.

**How will the DOI Plan affect my class sizes?**

We believe that small class size plays a positive role in learning and we are committed to continuing to staff K-4 classrooms with a 22:1 ratio. In fact, many of our classrooms currently are well below this ratio.

Under the proposed District of Innovation plan, we will continue to enroll students in a nearby school when classrooms at a campus reach the 22:1 capacity. However, there may be limited circumstances during a school year when it would be best for a student to be enrolled at his/her neighborhood school as the additional student in a class. Our plan will allow campus principals and teachers to have additional flexibility and control to make this decision without requiring TEA approval.

**Why can't Sherman ISD adhere to a strict ratio of 22-to-1 for grades K-4?**

We remain committed to class sizes of 22 or fewer and to providing the necessary resources to support student growth in grades K-4. When a student moves in to our community and a class size exceeds the cap, moving that child to another campus or hiring a new teacher and creating a new class may not be the best decision. Principals and teachers can make the most child-centered decisions when allowed flexibility to determine what should be done on a classroom-by-classroom basis. This plan would allow that flexibility.

**Under the plan, how big will class sizes be in in grades 5-12?**

The plan does not address class sizes in grades 5 -12. However, we will continue to staff classes in these grades with a commitment to maintain class sizes that are as small as possible.

**What would be the benefit of starting the school year earlier?**

The proposed District of Innovation Plan allows for local control and flexibility in designing the instructional calendar to supports district needs. Through the DOI, teachers, parents, and community can design a calendar that affords the district the following advantages:

- Balancing the number of semester days while still finishing the first semester before the holiday break in December.
- Number of instructional days that will support Advance Placement Exams, STAAR/EOC timelines and local colleges for dual credit.
- Partial or full days available for professional learning.
- Capability to honor classroom preparation time for high quality instruction.
- Built in additional time for inclement weather days.
- Better opportunities for summer school, internships, and professional certification experiences.
- The local control and flexibility to develop innovative scheduling for a variety of programs for students.

**What is the process for becoming a District of Innovation?**

Overview of the Sherman ISD timeline and process is as follows:

<b>DATES</b>	<b>WHAT</b>	<b>OBJECTIVE</b>
October 10	Initial meeting	What is DOI?
		FAQ Guidelines
		Review SISD Vision & Mission - Graduate Profile
		District Improvement Plan - what we know? what we want to achieve?
		What if....Areas of exemption - what can we be exempt from?
		Discuss some of these areas
		Group given sample districts - link to TEA/TASB website with details
		Homework page - research, review, plan, ideas
October 20	Meeting #2	Members come to meeting with an area of interest, research completed
		Understand area of exemption - which chapter from Texas Education Code
		Think about the District Improvement Plan - Tie it to your 'exempted' area
		Start drafting the innovative strategies with team members
		Other
October 27	Meeting #3	Complete final draft for school board.
		Begin seeking input from teachers, parents, students, community members
		Draft of exemptions with list of innovative plan
November 3	Meeting #4	Each team presented proposals to entire committee
		Answer any questions
		Finalize draft for review & feedback
		Prepare for board meeting
		Seek feedback from parents, teachers, students & community members
Nov 14	School Board Mtg.	Present to School Board for initial review
Nov – Dec.	Public feedback	Public review - open feedback from the community