



DISTRICT OF INNOVATION

LOCAL INNOVATION PLAN RENEWAL

“Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation
is doing new things.” -Theodore Levitt



2022

Stafford MSD

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District of Innovation Plan

Introduction

HB 1842 was passed during the 84th Texas Legislative Session in Spring 2015, and provides Texas public school districts the opportunity to be designated as Districts of Innovation. 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 exempt from a number of state statutes which allow districts to have:

- greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students;
- increased customization, 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, and academic and financial accountability.

On October 10, 2016, the Stafford Municipal School District (SMSD) Board of Trustees (BOT) approved a resolution to initiate the process of designation for SMSD to become a District of Innovation in order to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of all SMSD students and community. The Board passed this resolution based on its:

- Commitment to the success of every student
- Practice of supporting quality education and innovation for the benefit of students; and
- Embracing the belief that an effective decision-making platform surrounded with freedom will assist in exercising local control over the decision-making process.

SMSD has become a designated District of Innovation for a five year term beginning with the 2017-2018 school year and ending with 2021-2022 school year.

The BOT authorized the superintendent on December 13th, 2021 to appoint a Local Innovation Committee to work on the renewal. This Committee includes stakeholders from the district and community. The current Local Innovation Plan was reviewed on January 20th, 2022 and February 16th, 2022 committee meetings in which the members provided specific feedback on the components of the existing plan and discussed the possible revisions to the plan.

Local Innovation Plan Renewal Committee

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Dr. Robert Bostic | Superintendent of Schools |
| 2. Dr. Kadir Almus | Chief Academic Officer |
| 3. Dr. Dawn Dubose | Chief of Schools |
| 4. Dedrea Norman | Chief Financial Officer |
| 5. Dr. Margaret Patton | Director of Federal and State Programs |
| 6. Dr. Evelyn Castro | Director of Multi-Lingual/ESL Program |
| 7. Debbie Nordt | Director of CTE |
| 8. Lakenya Perry-Allen | Director of STEM |
| 9. Twyla Hynes | Early Childhood Center Principal |
| 10. Claudia Fernandez | ECC Teacher |
| 11. Melinda Fauver | ECC Teacher |
| 12. Joyce Wilkins | Community Member |
| 13. Llonel Pantoja | Community Member |
| 14. Desiree James | Elementary School Principal |
| 15. Widumini Liyanage | ES Teacher |
| 16. James Mas | ES Teacher |
| 17. Lateisha Clark | Community Member |
| 18. Valencia Henderson | Community Member |
| 19. Dr. Sonerka Mouton | Middle School Principal |
| 20. Elvira Lozano | Middle School Teacher |
| 21. Tameika Collins | Middle School Teacher |
| 22. Tim Wood | High School Teacher |
| 23. Alyonna Gonzales Ruiz | Community Member |
| 24. Raymond Root | High School Principal |
| 25. Leontyne Dubose | High School Teacher |
| 26. Phalon Arceneaux | High School Teacher |
| 27. Ashlee Ardoin | Community Member |
| 28. Rosa Hughes | Community Member |
| 29. Ms. Cherise Roberts | Grants Coordinator |
| 30. Dr. Jennifer Warford | Coordinator of Elementary CIA |
| 31. Dr. Kathy Blanco | Coordinator of Secondary CIA |
| 32. Stephanie Jernigan | Instructional Technology Coordinator |
| 33. Horace Kenney | Library Media Service Coordinator |
| 34. Verlincia Prince | Parent and Family Liason |

Renewal Timeline

DECEMBER 2021

Board of Trustees authorized Superintendent to appoint a Local Innovation Committee to work on the renewal of the District Innovation Plan

JANUARY-
FEBRUARY 2022

The committee met in January-February 2022 to discuss, develop, and draft the plan.

MARCH 2022

The plan was posted for public view and comments for 30 days.

APRIL 2022

The Board of Trustees notified the Commissioner of education of the board's intention to vote on adoption of the proposed plan.

APRIL 2022

The Committee held another public meeting to review and consider the feedback received from TEA and consider the possible changes to the plan. The committee then approved the entirety of the plan.

APRIL 2022

The updated plan was posted for public view and comments for 30 days.

MAY 2022

The Board of Trustees notified the Commissioner of education of the board's intention to vote on adoption of the proposed plan.

JUNE 2022

BOT considers adoption of proposed Local Innovation Plan by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the membership of the Board.

JUNE 2022

Texas Education Agency Commissioner Notified

Terms

By law, the term of the designation as a District of Innovation may not exceed five years. The term of the SMSD Local Innovation Plan (“Plan”) is for a period of five years beginning at the start of the 2022-23 school year and ending at the end of the 2026-27 school year, unless rescinded or renewed by a majority vote of the SMSD District of Innovation Committee. An amendment to the Plan does not change/extend the date of the term of designation as an innovation district; exemptions that were already formally approved are not required to be reviewed. The District must notify the TEA within five business days of rescission of the plan and provide a date (not to be later than the start of the following school year) at which time it will be in compliance with all sections of the TEC. During renewal, all sections of the plan and exemptions shall be reviewed and the original statutory adoption process must be followed. The District shall notify the Commissioner of Education of any actions taken to amend, rescind or renew the Plan along with the associated TEC exemptions and local approval dates. The Local Innovation Plan Committee will annually review the plan, unless the Board determines a review must be done prior to the annual review, to ensure the recommendations are continuing to meet the needs of the District as intended and are in line with the SMSD Strategic Plan efforts.

As part of the annual review process, the membership of the Local Innovation Plan Committee will be renewed and/or modified by a majority vote of the Board. Outside of the annual review/renewal process, if a member of the Local Innovation Plan Committee is unable to fulfill his/her duties, the Board may appoint a replacement by majority vote.

The Local Innovation Plan is aligned with the beliefs, vision, mission and motto of Stafford MSD and is guided by the strategies and objectives of the Strategic Design, which is the framework for the comprehensive educational program for the District and focuses the work and the daily operations of the SMSD employees in meeting the needs of the students.

Beliefs



Individuals learn from both success and failure.



Learning is more meaningful when connections are made through relationships and life experiences.



Learning is fueled by curiosity and exploration.



Learning is a reflective process enhanced by the development and pursuit of personal goals.



Success is achieved by addressing the unique learning styles of the individual.



Learning is a shared responsibility.

Our Goals



We will promote student achievement by attracting, retaining, and continuously developing highly effective individuals.



We will increase hands-on activities and real-world experiences for students that support learning and inspire critical thinking.



We will optimize learning for all students by removing barriers and utilizing flexible communication with all stakeholders.



We will positively impact learning and behavioral expectations by establishing an optimal student/teacher ratio and district-wide discipline system.



We will maximize academic performance for students and teachers through the use of state-of-the-art facilities and industry standard equipment that enable students to further enhance their ability to succeed.



We will create long lasting, impactful relationships within the community that help students experience new opportunities through immersion and reflection.

Our Learner Profile

The SMSD learner.....

1. Applies critical-thinking skills to analyze and solve problems.
2. Adapts to global and diverse environments.
3. Approaches learning tasks with confidence, self-motivation, and self-discipline.
4. Enhances his or her learning with literacy skills in media, technology, and finances.
5. Appreciates diverse surroundings and engages in leadership, community services, and social justice.
6. Effectively communicates through various forms of linguistic expression and technological mediums.
7. Exhibits life skills that foster critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication which contributes positively to the community.

Our Learner Outcomes



All learners will engage in meaningful, relevant, hands-on learning experiences.



All learners will be exposed to various fields of interest to cultivate a deeper understanding and passion for a successful future.



All learners will be involved each day in collaborative, challenging, and engaging classroom experiences.



All learners will demonstrate personal and academic progress in a variety of ways.



All learners will take ownership of their educational experience in an environment that enables them to do so.



All learners will be prepared for the college or career pathway of their choice.



All learners will be able to effectively communicate through various methods.



All learners will thrive in an environment where they demonstrate interpersonal skills.

Innovations

The SMUSD vision and goals, alignment of local practices, and operations require flexibility in local control to ensure the following:

1. The instructional calendar positively impacts learning and maximizes student's academic performance;
2. Increased opportunities for professional learning and growth;
3. Ensure a platform is developed that will provide opportunities to cultivate a safe and secure learning environment; and
4. Provide students with relevant, real-world, personalized learning opportunities while ensuring their social and emotional needs are addressed.

Currently, SMUSD is in the process of renewing the DOI status to make sure that the district continues to employ the same opportunities until 2027. To renew the District of Innovation status, SMUSD is following the process established by the Texas Education Code (TEC) Chapter 12A. SMUSD's renewal plan includes all the exemptions included in the previous plan except (1) "Minimum Minutes of Instruction" and "Employee Benefits". The district also added (1) "Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade (90 Percent Rule)" and (2) "Counselor Work Time". In addition, there are minor updates on (1) "Teacher Certification" and "Campus Behavior Coordinator Provisions".

1. First Day of Instruction

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: Section §25.0811

Except as provided by this section, a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August. A school district may:

(1) begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August if the District operates a year-round system under Section 25.084.

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD seeks to utilize the flexibility of having more local control on the school start date, as well as explore non-traditional scheduling options that allow for flexibility. This will allow the district to determine annually what best meets the needs of the students and community as well as balance the number of instructional minutes each semester.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

The flexible start date will allow the district to balance the amount of instructional time available in each semester, providing classroom teachers the opportunity to deliver more equitable learning experiences for students in the fall and spring semesters. In addition, this flexibility would allow the district to align with more college calendars, in the area. An earlier start date would result in an earlier end date, which will assist in creating opportunities for summer enrichment (i.e. credit recovery, Extended School Year (ESY), summer academic camps, etc.).

2. Teacher Certification

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: §21.003

A Person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or a teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B.

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD seeks to hire candidates who qualify for placement in assignments outside their traditional certification areas and to retain them. In addition, the district seeks to establish its own local certification requirements and its own requirements for training of professionals and experts to teach such courses in lieu of state requirements. These exemptions are particularly important for hard-to-fill and high-demand courses (i.e. teachers providing instruction in “Languages Other than English” (LOTE), CTE, and other hard-to-fill high demand courses). The Superintendent and/or designee, after consultation with campus leadership, Personnel Services, and the Career and Technical Education department, will certify candidates that meet local credential guidelines. The Superintendent will notify the Board prior to the individual’s employment start date. Exemption from §21.003 will require the District to review its policies at DBA (LEGAL) and (LOCAL), as well as the policies at DK (LEGAL) and (LOCAL). The candidate’s qualifications may include a combination of the following:

- Professional work experience;
- Formal training and education;
- Relevant industry licensure, certification, or registration; and/or

- Any combination of work experience, training and education, or industry credential(s) related to the subject matter the individual will be teaching.

All candidates must complete the criminal background check in compliance with the State Board of Education Certification (SBEC) rules mandated by TEC§22.0833 for a non-certified employee. Teachers hired under this certification program will be assigned a mentor, receive content specific pedagogy and classroom management training. This exemption excludes special education and bilingual/ESL teachers. They will continue to be SBEC certified.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

By exempting the district from Section §21.003, the district will:

1. Have the flexibility to hire experts in their field even if they do not yet have a teaching certificate
2. Have the flexibility in hiring hard-to-fill positions
3. Have the flexibility to hire those with industry expertise, community college instructors or internal applicants seeking assignments outside of their traditional certification area.

3. Class Size Ratio

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: Section §25.112

Kinder-4th grade class sizes are to remain at or below a 22:1 student/teacher ratio according to state law. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are completed at the start of a school year as well as anytime a child enrolls in an elementary school at a grade level where the ratio is already maintained according to staffing projections the previous year.

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD seeks to maintain continuity for students by eliminating forced balancing due to student/teacher ratio requirements. By seeking an exception from TEC §25.112 the District would have flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation designation and would not be required to submit waivers annually. While SMSD intends to remain within the guidelines of the current education code as much as possible, the district seeks flexibility to provide the best learning environment for our K-4 students.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

Flexibility from the student/teacher ratio statutes will allow principals to make decisions about reasonable class sizes based on local factors such as the needs and interactions of the particular students involved, the age of the students, the subjects to be taught, and the teacher's skill and experience. The administration will continue to consider the timing in the school year, available space and the need for another teacher or teacher aide to ensure decisions about class size continue to be made in the best interest of the students. This exemption would provide relief from the reporting encumbrances currently required by state law.

4. Campus Behavior Coordinator Provisions

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: Section §37.0012

SB 107 requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

Proposed Flexibility

The proposal for SMSD is to seek exemption from the statute requiring each school to have a designated campus behavior coordinator. The relationships established between the campus administrator, students, and parents are the foundation for promoting and maintaining positive behavior. Utilizing a local process allows the administrator, who currently has a relationship with the parent and student, to be the person to make parental contact. The administrator notifies the parent of discipline or behavioral concerns, rather than having contact made by a designated behavior coordinator, who may or may not know all the students, providing a more individual and personalized approach.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

The shared responsibility of discipline among campus principals and assistant principals will minimize the loss of instructional time and ensure the safety of all students as well as provide increased opportunities to build relational capacity with parents and students. All campus administrators engage in comprehensive professional learning communities to support the implementation of the Stafford MSD Discipline Management Plan and Student Code of Conduct. Assigning existing professionals the responsibility for maintaining discipline and for notifying parents of disciplinary removals and/or arrests is a much more cost effective means of fulfilling the duties of the campus behavior coordinator. Since Stafford MSD employs behavior intervention specialists and/or Licensed Specialists in School Psychology (LSSP) that can assist students with behavior or discipline issues, decisions regarding student behavior, and discipline are often collaborative in nature.

5. Teacher Appraisal System

TEC Codes Requiring Exemption: Section §21.352, §21.354

In appraising teachers each school district shall use:

- (1) The appraisal process and performance criteria developed by the commissioner; or*
- (2) An appraisal process and performance criteria*

21.354 (a) The commissioner by rule shall establish and shall administer a comprehensive appraisal and professional development system for principals.

(f) In appraising principals, each school district shall use either:

- 1. the appraisal system and school leadership standards and indicators developed or Established by the commissioner under this section; or*
- 2. a appraisal process and performance criteria:*

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD proposes to allow a district committee of administrators and teachers the option to develop an alternative appraisal instrument for non-core instructional area staff (i.e. Special

Education Life Skills, Inclusion, Fine Arts, Athletics, Career Technical Education (CTE) instructors, Assistant Principals, Instructional Specialists, and Instructional paraprofessionals). SMSD proposes to have locally developed criteria for waiving the annual appraisal. The criteria for eligibility includes teachers who are probationary teachers who are certified via SBEC and who have previous evaluation results.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

SMSD's locally developed appraisal system will benefit the district by aligning the system with job performance expectations and student learning expectations.

6. Transfer Student Provision

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: Section §25.036

Under TEC 25.036, (a). Any child other than a high school graduate, who is younger than 21 years of age and eligible for enrollment on September 1 of any school year 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. (b). A transfer agreement under this section shall be filed and preserved as a receiving district record for audit purposes of the agency. The board or its designee must make transfer decisions on an individual basis and may not consider as a factor in arriving at any decision regarding assignments any matter relating to the national origin of the student or the student's ancestral language. Education Code 25.032 [See also FD]

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (LOCAL) requiring non-resident students who wish to transfer, to file a transfer application each school year. SMSD is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one year commitment to transfer students when they violate district attendance, discipline and/or falsify documentation.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

Stafford MSD will uphold the philosophy that SMSD students will graduate as experienced and empowered critical thinkers equipped to be productive citizens in a global and diverse society. On rare occasions student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative education (DAEP) program or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. This flexibility would allow the district to have the option of immediate revocation of the student's transfer status by the Superintendent or designee at any time during the year, if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension, placement in a DAEP, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

7. Disciplinary Alternative Education Plans

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: Section §37.008

Each school district shall provide a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) that:

- *Is provided in a setting other than the student's classroom*
- *Is located on or off a regular school campus*
- *Provides for the students who are assigned to the district's alternative education program to be separated from the students who are not assigned to the program*
- *Focuses on ELA, mathematics, science, history and self-discipline*
- *Summer programs provided by the District may serve students assigned to a DAEP in conjunction with other students, as determined by local policy*
- *Students in the DAEP shall be separated from students in a juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP)*
- *The school day for a DAEP shall be at least seven hours, but no more than ten hours in length each day, including intermissions and recesses; Provides not less than the minimum amount of instructional time per day required by Section §25.082 (a)*
- *Provide for student's behavioral needs*
- *A program of educational and support services may be provided to a student and the student's parents when the offense involves drugs or alcohol as specified under Education Code 37.006 and 37.007*
- *Provide supervision and counseling*
- *Employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subsection B, Chapter 21*

Proposed Flexibility

The District takes exemption from Section §37.008. The SMSD DAEP will provide a combination of a computer-based and direct instruction model. This will provide students the opportunity for credit recovery and/or remain on track with the courses in which they are enrolled. The DAEP campus administrator will ensure the staff of the DAEP has the necessary support to properly supervise and educate the students assigned to the program.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

Stafford MSD will uphold the philosophy that SMSD students will graduate college and career ready without remediation. The combined delivery of instruction will assist in addressing the varied learning styles of students assigned to the DAEP. In addition, this platform will provide an opportunity for students to recover loss credits, whereby allowing them to remain with their graduation co-hort.

8. Mentors

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: Section 21.458(b)(3)

(b) The commissioner shall adopt rules necessary to administer this section, including rules concerning the duties and qualifications of a teacher who serves as a mentor. The rules concerning qualifications must require that to serve as a mentor a teacher must:

- (3) *have at least three complete years of teaching experience with a superior record of assisting students, as a whole, in achieving improvement in student performance.*

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD seeks flexibility in the number of years of experience required to serve as a mentor teacher. Specifically, SMSD proposes to allow teachers with a minimum of two complete years of teaching experience with a superior record of assisting students, as a whole, in achieving student performance, to serve as mentor teachers.

Benefits of Exemption for SMSD

The ability to allow teachers with two complete years of teaching experience to serve as mentors will enable SMSD to ensure a high-quality mentor-mentee program for its teachers, thereby promoting student achievement by continuously developing highly effective teachers. With this exemption in place, SMSD will not have to assign mentors outside the mentee's content area or assign a mentor more than three mentees in the event that there is not a sufficient number of mentors with three years of teaching experience, thereby preserving a high-quality mentor-mentee program and avoiding overloading teachers with mentor responsibilities.

9. Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade (90 Percent Rule)

TEC Section Requiring Exemption: §25.092

Texas Education Code §25.092: MINIMUM ATTENDANCE FOR CLASS CREDIT OR FINAL GRADE. (a) Except as provided by this section, a student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.

Proposed Flexibility

SMSD seeks an exemption from the law requiring students to be present in the classroom 90 percent of the time in order to earn credit. This exemption would provide flexibility for instructional delivery methods to support students who unable to attend class due to extenuating circumstances.

Rationale and Benefits:

It is our mission that every student will graduate college or career ready, without remediation. In order to achieve this, we need to remove obstacles preventing them from pursuing non-traditional individualized learning opportunities. Currently, the state law mandates that the child must be physically present in the classroom in order to receive credit. Our district needs the flexibility to better meet the needs of all students when it comes to course completion versus attendance. Some students are unable to attend class due to extenuating circumstances.

This exemption would allow us to explore innovative solutions that will best meet the needs of our student population, while still ensuring that students have mastered their coursework. In addition to online learning opportunities, we will investigate the abundant opportunities for active learning outside the classroom in order to receive course credit for content mastery, when not present for 90 percent of the days a class is offered. This flexibility will offer specialized pathways for students who need abbreviated daily schedules because of work, medical issues, or family obligations to have options to gain credit with working on class outside of the traditional school day.

When utilizing this exemption, SMSD shall ensure the following:

- This exemption does not impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (“UIL”) rules,
- This exemption in no way limits or modifies a teacher’s right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214,
- This exemption does not restrict or alter a teacher’s right to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.

10. Counselor Work Time

TEC Code Requiring Exemption: §33.006(d-h)
Related Board Policies: DP (Legal) and (Local)

TEC 33.006 subsections (d) – (h):

(d) Except as provided by Subsection (e), the board of trustees of each school district shall adopt a policy that requires a school counselor to spend at least 80 percent of the school counselor's total work time on duties that are components of a counseling program developed under Section 33.005.

(h) Each school district shall annually assess the district's compliance with the policy adopted under Subsection (d) and, on request by the commissioner, provide a written copy of the assessment to the agency on or before the date specified by the commissioner. The commissioner shall adopt rules to implement this subsection.

Proposed Flexibility

The District will exercise local discretion in determining the additional duties fulfilled by certified counselors in the District, by taking into account each individual counselor’s professional education, certifications, experience, and knowledge. The District will also consider the specific needs of the students and staff on each campus.

The District will exercise local discretion in determining how counselors allocate their work time to perform all duties, including those duties that are not identified in TEC 33.006, enabling the District to meet students’ needs and address local challenges as they arise.

Rationale and Benefits:

TEC 33.006 subsections (d) – (h) place restrictions on the duties that can be fulfilled by school counselors, requires policy adoption and annual review by the school board, and limit contracting options with counselors in the District. Specifically, TEC 33.006(d) requires that a counselor spends 80 percent of total work time on duties identified by statute.

The requirements of TEC 33.006(d) – (h) impede the District’s ability to meet the ever-changing needs of its students and school operations by restricting the ability of SMSD counselors to fulfill other important roles throughout the District, including but not limited to, participating in the special education process, 504 monitoring and/or coordinating, GT coordinating, scheduling, testing coordinating, student assessment, assisting with McKinney-Vento efforts, supervising common areas, etc. Although it is still the intent and goal of SMSD that its certified counselors focus on the school counseling program, temporal restrictions and time logging/tracking requirements, which would be necessary to confirm strict adherence to an 80/20 duty allocation, are an ineffective use of employee time and hinders the District’s ability to use its counseling staff in a variety of roles to best serve the needs of SMSD students and the community.