Utopia Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

2018-2023

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in the spring of 2015, providing public school districts the opportunity to become Districts of Innovation. To qualify, an eligible school district must adopt a five-year innovation plan according to the Texas Education Code.

Utopia ISD is utilizing HB 1842, of the 84th Legislative Session, in order to have more local control in certain areas. HB 1842 allows for a traditional public school to have some of the same local flexibility that public charter schools have always been allowed. We feel this is a great opportunity for our local district to customize a plan based on the needs of our students and community.

Districts of Innovation may be exempt from state statues to:

- Take greater control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students;
- Increase freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and
- Increase empowerment and encourage innovative thinking.

This plan will be in effect for the 2018-2019 school year through the 2022-2023 school year. This plan may be amended at any time by the committee with approval of the Board of Trustees.
Utopia ISD - District of Innovation Timeline

June 7, 2018 - Initial meeting with district leadership team to discuss District of Innovation (DOI) advantages and potential members of the DOI Committee.

June 11, 2018 - Board adopts resolution to initiate District Of Innovation designation for Utopia ISD.

June 25, 2018 - Public hearing held regarding DOI Plan.

June 25, 2018 - Board approves members to DOI Committee.

September 24, 2018 - DOI Committee meeting develop DOI Plan and post to district website. The District notifies the Commissioner of Education of the Board’s initiation of the District of Innovation development process, and intent to vote on the adoption of a proposed plan.

October 15, 2018 - Board Meeting – DOI Committee presents plan to Board. The DOI Committee will hold a public hearing at 6:30 pm in the UISD Boardroom to consider the final version of the proposed plan.

November 12, 2018 - Board votes on DOI Plan (2/3 vote required).

November 13, 2018 - The District will notify the Commissioner of Education that the plan has been approved and will provide notice of the approved exemptions.
Utopia ISD - District of Innovation Planning Committee

Jessi Milam - Superintendent
Bryan Hernandez - Principal
Ashleigh Kay - Federal Programs Coordinator
Cammie Morgan - Counselor
Patty McCaleb - Health Services
Cindy Cockerill - Foreign Language Coordinator / Facilitator
Jennifer Keeney - Secondary Math Coordinator / Facilitator
Lynn Scotty - Journalism Coordinator / Facilitator
Gerry Gebhard - Elementary Facilitator
Sarah Graham - Elementary Facilitator
Kathy Lewis - Community Member
Amanda McBeth - Community Member
Sugar Manis - Community Member
Tanya Moore - Community Member
Utopia ISD - Board of Trustees

Steve Darden - President
Wayne Moore - Vice President
Betty Boyce - Secretary
Chase Hathorn - Member
Eleanor Duke - Member
Jena Smothers - Member
Tanya Cox - Member
Innovations

Utopia ISD, in conjunction with the District of Innovation Committee, proposes the following flexibilities with the Texas Education Code to provide the best educational opportunities for students at Utopia ISD.

School Start & End Date
(EB Legal) (Texas Education Code 25.0811)
(EB Legal) (Texas Education Code 25.0812)

Currently
A District may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August unless the district operates a year-round system. A school district may not schedule the last day of school for students for a school year before May 15. A District may not receive a waiver for the requirement.

UISD Proposed
The flexibility of a locally approved start and end date allows the district to determine, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and the local community. The district calendar is created and approved by a district committee and is then voted on by the Board.

The flexibility of this start date also offers the following opportunities:

Balancing the number of semester days while still finishing the semester before the holiday break in December.
An early start date permits the student an additional week of instruction prior to state assessments.
Students participating in Dual Enrollment opportunities will work with balanced semesters, which align with our local colleges.
This would allow an option to start semesters with a shorter week, easing the transition for students entering elementary, middle school, and high school.
Creates flexibility for the district to pursue other calendar options best suited for our identified populations.
**UISD Guidelines**
The district will determine, on an annual basis, when each school year will begin and end.

**Inter-District Transfers**
(FDA Local) (Texas Education Code 25.036)

**Currently**
Currently, under Texas Education Code 25.036, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC 25.036, has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year.

**UISD Proposed**
Utopia ISD maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services the student’s disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules and regulations of the district. TEC 25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one-year commitment by the district. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in and or out of school), placement in disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, and following reasonable corrective measures, Utopia ISD seeks exemption from the one-year transfer commitment.

**UISD Guidelines**
Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State’s 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.
Teacher Certification
(DK Legal, Local) (Texas Education Code 21.003)

Currently
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. TEA then approves or denies the request. In certain circumstances, a district can use a local one-year permit.

UISD Proposed
In order to best serve Utopia ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. Based on local need, this exemption from teacher certification requirements will enable greater flexibility in staffing and will enrich applicant pools in specific areas of need. The district’s exemption from TEC 21.003 would allow the district to consider full-time or part-time professional to teach courses, allow industry expert professionals to transition into the teaching profession in Career and Technology, and also assist in staffing high need STEM and dual credit course offerings. Out-of-state certified teachers could be considered for positions upon a local review of experience, education, and credentials. Often there are experienced certified teachers in our district that could teach a course outside of their certification area due to their education, background, and/or experience. Local decisions outside of state certification requirements would allow innovation and flexibility in scheduling to meet student needs.

UISD Guidelines
The campus principal may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach a subject and/or grade level out of their field. The principal must specify the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses qualifying this individual to teach the subject.

An individual with experience in a Career and Technology field may be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course. An individual may hold a teaching certification in another state for Core areas or Career and Technology. An individual may have background, experience, skills, or
work related/industry experience to work full time or part time in a designated area. The principal will submit a request to the superintendent for local certification. The principal must specify the reason for the request and document what credentials the individual possesses qualifying this individual to teach the subject.

The superintendent will approve or deny requests for local certification.