

Sonora Independent School District

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Michael Kissire, Superintendent

District of Innovation Plan

Introduction

With the passage of House Bill 1842 during the 84th legislative session, a district of innovation gives public schools flexible strategies to meet the unique climate and needs of a school district. Similar to the state's open enrollment charter schools, HB 1842 delivers Sonora ISD an opportunity to transform state requirements at the local level to satisfy the essentials of our student population. This will prepare them for life-long success and learning. Our district has an academic performance rating of at least Met Standard, which allows SISD to adopt an innovation plan.

Sonora ISD took the first step in exploring this opportunity when the SISD Board of Trustees approved a resolution initiating the process in February 2017. The District Advisory Committee was appointed to review the district of innovation plan. The Committee met April 6, 2022 to discuss renewal. The proposed renewal of the plan is posted online. The District Advisory Committee will have a public meeting to approve it before it can go back to the Board.

District of Innovation Team (Initial Plan)

Pam Thorp, Parent
Rachel Duran, Community Member
Christina Barker, RTI Elementary
Pam Hailey, HS Assistant Principal
Brandon Duncan, MS Principal
Shelly Shannon, MS Science
Wheless Baker, Elementary Dyslexia
Karen Evans, Technology Director
Kay Friess, HS Counselor

Marisol Gutierrez, Parent
Ross Aschenbeck, Superintendent
Julie Martin, HS Math
Sean Leamon, HS Principal
Michael Kissire, Elementary Principal
Denise Arispe, MS ELAR
Stefanie Taylor, Special Programs Director
Joetta Friess, Elementary ELAR

District of Innovation Timeline

August-November 2016

Informal discussions with Administrators

December 2016

Initial meeting with Administrative Team to discuss District of Innovation

February 12, 2017

Board of Trustees approves resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation, open discussion of becoming a District of Innovation.

February 22, 2017

Initial meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

March 8, 2017

Review and develop the draft plan by the District of Innovation Committee

March 27, 2017

Public meeting at 5:30 pm with the District of Innovation Committee to vote on the plan. Vote tabulation: unanimous, 14 For and 0 Against.

March 29, 2017

Innovation plan posted on the district website for 30 days (TEC 12A.005(a)(1)). Commissioner notified of Sonora ISD District of Innovation Plan.

May 15, 2017

Sonora ISD Board Meeting to adopt District of Innovation Plan

District of Innovation Team (Renewal)

April Ramirez, Parent

Heather Cearley, Business Leader

Michael Kissire, Superintendent

Stefanie Taylor, Special Programs Director

Romy Castaneda, Special Programs Facilitator

Christina Rodriguez, Secondary Principal

Tamie Love, Secondary Teacher

Leticia Garcia, Secondary Teacher

Stephanie Hernandez, Parent

Victoria Segura, Community Member

Karen Evans, Technology Director

Shawna Rogers, Educational Diagnostician

Brittany Welborn, Elementary Principal

Maria Jimenez, Elementary Teacher

Jennifer Fox, Elementary Teacher

District of Innovation Renewal Timeline**April 6, 2022**

District Improvement Planning Committee Renewal Review meeting. Committee consensus to renew the plan as previously adopted with no changes.

May 3, 2022

Proposed Innovation Plan renewal posted on the district website. To be posted 30 days (TEC 12A.005(a)(1)).

July 11, 2022

Sonora ISD Board of Trustees adopted the renewal of the District of Innovation Plan.

Innovation #1: School Start Date

State Law states a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August. (TEC 25.0811a)

Rationale for Exemption:

Two thirds of Sonora HS students are involved in cross country, band, cheerleading, volleyball, and football. Therefore, our students are already at school the first week of August. Secondly, starting school prior to the 4th Monday in August allows our teachers more professional development opportunities later in the year to help meet the T-TESS evaluation. Third, starting school early allows for a more balanced semester, thus ending the first semester before Christmas break. Finally, starting school earlier will ensure we are not going to school in June, when college courses are offered. Moreover, the EOC retesting has been moved up to the end of June, the more time we have to remediate the more successful our student will be.

Innovation Strategy

Sonora ISD would have the ability to create a calendar that could start no earlier than the second Monday in August.

Innovation #2: Probationary Contracts

State law states that a probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district. (TEC 21.102)

Rationale for Exemption

Even though we may have hired an experienced teacher on a probationary contract, we really do not get a full year evaluation on a teacher. Contracts are annually renewed before the final data on STAAR and EOC's come in. Allowing Sonora ISD to expand the probationary contract to two years will allow us to have a better evaluation of the new employee.

Innovation Strategy

Experienced teachers and counselors new to Sonora ISD that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, may be issued a probationary contract for one additional year. The employee may be issued a probationary contract up to two years from the last date of district employment. This allows Sonora ISD more time to evaluate a staff member's effectiveness.

Innovation #3: Teacher Certification

State law states that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate of 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 of Educator Certification. (TEC 21.003)

Rationale for Exemption

Sonora ISD is a rural county-wide school 60 miles from the nearest city. Being able to recruit and maintain quality certified teachers is a struggle each year. Being able to waive the rule of being appropriately certified will help us fill hard-to-find positions and alleviate shortage areas. As we try to meet the A-F certification rules for career-ready students, the ability to hire industry-certified people to help our students develop vocational skills is imperative for success in industry-based certifications.

Innovation Strategies

1. The campus principals may submit to the superintendent, a request to allow a certified teacher to teach a subject(s) out of his or her certified field. The principals must provide reasoning for the request and document the credentials that the certified teacher possesses which qualify them to teach the subject. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.
2. An individual with a college degree or a certificate in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a CTE course or academic course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with the individual's credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if it is determined that the individual is an asset to the students. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual beginning employment.
3. Special Education, Bilingual Education, and ESL are not exempt from certification requirements.

Duration of Plan

The term for this plan is five years beginning August 1, 2022, and ending July 31, 2027. Amendments or termination of the plan must be approved by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas Law. The DOI committee will review the plan annually. In the event Sonora ISD feels other exemptions would benefit the district, community, and/or students, the Board of Trustees will follow procedures to amend the plan.