



District of Innovation Q and A

This Q&A document provides answers to questions about the District of Innovation distinction. It is intended to be a living document and will be updated throughout the process.

What is a District of Innovation?

The District of Innovation concept, established by the 84th Texas Legislature, allows traditional independent school districts to access most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open enrollment charter schools. To access these flexibilities, districts must adopt an innovation plan.

While many Texas plans have included exemptions from the mandatory school start date, the length of the school day and class-size ratios, Fort Bend ISD administrators and trustees have stressed that the creation of Fort Bend ISD's Local Innovation Plan would be a committee-driven process.

Why did Fort Bend ISD decide to pursue this distinction?

In an effort to personalize Fort Bend ISD's approach to student learning, the Fort Bend ISD Board of Trustees voted unanimously to pursue a District of Innovation designation following a public hearing on November 14, 2016. The District of Innovation concept provides local communities the opportunity to decide how they can best deliver their District's goals – moving away from mandated compliance to innovative possibilities that are determined by the local community, instead of the state.

How did Fort Bend ISD create a Local Innovation Plan?

Following a public hearing on November 14, 2016, and in accordance with rules established by the Texas Education Agency, Fort Bend ISD established a Local Innovation Committee to create a Local Innovation Plan.

Each member of the Board of Trustees appointed three representatives to the Local Innovation Committee, while the superintendent appointed nine. The committee was comprised of various stakeholder groups, including community members, parents, teachers, students and administrators. Beginning in December, the committee began meeting to explore creative and innovative ways Fort Bend ISD could better meet student needs, moving away from state mandates to local control. These meetings were facilitated by a K12 Insight facilitator and an outside attorney, and the results of a Community Priorities survey were reviewed and considered as the committee began their work.

Following its final meeting on January 18, 2017, members of the committee selected a writing development team who drafted a plan to be considered by the District's Academic Advisory Council (AAC).

During the Academic Advisory Council's quarterly meeting on February 8, 2017, the Local Innovation Committee presented the plan to the AAC for approval, in accordance with statute.

What exemptions are included in Fort Bend ISD's Local Innovation Plan?

Fort Bend ISD's Local Innovation Plan proposes flexibility in the following areas:

- School Calendar (4 Texas Education Code Sections Requiring Exemption)
- Teacher Certification (1 Texas Education Code Section Requiring Exemption)
- Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade – 90 percent rule (1 Texas Education Code Section Requiring Exemption)

The full Local Innovation Plan and its proposed benefits are posted on the District's website.

How can the public learn more and provide input on the Local Innovation Plan?

Following AAC approval and in accordance with the statute, Fort Bend ISD's Local Innovation Plan will be posted online for 30 days beginning February 10, 2016, prior to a public meeting of the Fort Bend ISD Board of Trustees in late March.

Additionally, a public meeting will be held February 21, 2017 at the FBISD Administrative Annex beginning at 7:00 p.m. We encourage the community to learn more about the plan and provide feedback via Let's Talk.

How will this feedback be considered?

Fort Bend ISD will carefully review all feedback and inform the Board of public comment, prior to presenting the Local Innovation Plan for consideration in late March.

If the Local Innovation Plan is adopted, this feedback will also be used to inform decisions for the implementation of the plan, including policy revisions and District Strategic Planning.

What happens if the Board of Trustees approves the plan? Does it need to be approved by the Texas Education Agency?

No, but the TEA has rulemaking authority regarding the implementation of the District of Innovation. A District that has proposed an innovation plan is required to notify the TEA, and the TEA is required to maintain information about the statutory exemptions adopted by districts in their innovation plans.

How long does an innovation plan stay in effect?

The term of the Local Innovation Plan is for a period of five years, beginning at the start of the 2017-18 school year and ending at the end of the of the 2021-22 school year, unless the Plan is terminated or amended earlier by the Board in accordance with statute.

How soon could Fort Bend ISD implement the exemptions included in the plan?

Fort Bend ISD believes very strongly in collaboration throughout the decision-making processes. Although the Local Innovation Plan contains several exemptions, we believe the only exemptions that could be implemented immediately relate to the 2017-18 calendar. Others would involve extensive planning, policy revisions, and collaboration with stakeholders that may be impacted, including teachers.

What about the District's 2017-18 Calendar? When will it be adopted?

Although it has been customary to have our District calendar approved in January, the District decided to delay decisions on the 2017-18 calendar until the Local Innovation Committee finalized their Local Innovation Plan and it was approved by the Board of Trustees. This delay will allow an opportunity for the Board to consider a calendar that is more balanced and better meets the needs of our students, staff and community. The District Calendar Committee has been working on a traditional calendar option and one that is more innovative pending approval of the Local Innovation plan. The consideration and adoption of the 2017-18 calendar is planned for the March 27, 2017 Board meeting.

Why would Fort Bend ISD hire teachers who are not certified?

Fort Bend ISD strives to recruit, develop, and retain effective teachers. In recent years, however, the District has experienced difficulty in finding teachers certified to teach certain high school courses, especially in Career and Technical Education (CTE) and World Languages.

The District will limit the use of this exemption to hard-to-fill vacancies, and only after systems and policies are adopted to define how candidates should be identified and vetted. Qualified teacher applicants certified through the state of Texas will be given priority.

During the Academic Advisory Council meeting, members of the Local Innovation Committee referenced other discussions that were ultimately not included in the Local Innovation Plan. What will happen to those ideas?

While members of the Local Innovation Committee met to explore ways the District could better serve students, some of their ideas did not require a statutory exemption, and therefore, are not part of Fort Bend ISD's Local Innovation Plan. Instead, these ideas will be submitted to the administration so that they can be considered in future planning efforts.

For Teachers:

Will the creation of a more "innovative" calendar result in an increase in the number of days a teacher works?

The 2017-18 calendar options include a 187-day contract for teachers, which has not changed.

What about a duty-free lunch and conference period? Could that change, under the proposed Local Innovation Plan?

The Local Innovation Plan will not affect a teacher's duty free lunch and conference period.