

SLIDELL INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

"On track and leading the pack"



Slidell ISD District of Innovation Plan

INTRODUCTION

During the 84th Legislative Session, HB1842 passed that allows Texas public schools to become Districts of Innovation which would allow them to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. Slidell ISD is exercising this opportunity to gain more local control and will request the following exemptions from the Texas Education Code.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

- Local control: Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- Customization: Districts can create an innovation plan for a level of school (e.g. only high schools), grade level, or a single campus.
- Autonomy: Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.
- Flexibility: Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from mandates such as:
 - School start date
 - 90% attendance rule
 - Class-size ratios
 - Site-based decision-making process
 - Use of planning and preparation periods
 - Teacher appraisal requirements
 - Certification of Educators

Slidell ISD feels that this level of local control would add flexibility and empower our district make innovative decisions for our students.

TERM:

Slidell ISD's Innovation Plan will begin with the 2026-2027 school year and conclude at the end of the 2030-2031 school year unless the plan is terminated or amended by the Slidell ISD Board in accordance with HB1842. If at any time within this 5-year plan, other areas of exemptions are to be considered, the Board will nominate a new committee to consider new exemptions. Any future amendments will adhere to the same term of the original plan.

INNOVATIONS:

Goal #1: Kindergarten - Grade 4 Class Size (TEC 25.112a-g) (TEC 25.113a-b) (EEB LEGAL)

Statutes that relate to this goal:

- TEC 25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten - 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency.
- TEC 25.113 requires district to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits.

Innovation Strategies:

1. At the beginning of each school year, Slidell ISD will meet the suggested student to teacher ratio of 22:1 per K-4 homeroom class. In the event that any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustees and to the parents of the affected students. The determination of whether to add another teacher to bring the class under the 22:1 mandate will be made by the campus administration and this recommendation will be reported to the Board of Trustees.
2. A TEA waiver will not be filed when a K-4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

Goal #2: First Day of Instruction/School start date (TEC 25.0811a) (EB LEGAL)

Statutes that relate to this goal: TEC 25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Innovation Strategies

1. Slidell ISD students will begin instruction no earlier than the first day of August. This change will create better flexibility in the creation of the district calendar as well as allowing more opportunities in scheduling meaningful and balanced staff development days.
2. The earlier start date will allow the district to move instructional days that occur after state mandated testing dates to the front of the school year.
3. The earlier start date will provide more balance to the first 3 six weeks grading periods during the first semester.

Goal #3: Length of School Day (TEC §25.082a) (SAAH 3.8.1)

Statutes that relate to this goal: TEC 25.082a states that a school day must be 7 hours each day including recesses and intermissions. SAAH 3.8.1 states that a school day must be at least 420 minutes including recesses and intermissions. School districts are subject to this requirement. The current rules allow no flexibility in the design of district and campus schedules.

Innovation Strategies

1. The opportunity to exempt from the 420-minute school day requirement will provide the district with the opportunity to provide each campus with the flexibility of creating a daily schedule that will better serve the students and teachers on each campus. This flexibility will give local control to the district in meeting the yearly requirement of 75,600 minutes in relation to the district calendar for each specific school year.
2. This exemption will provide greater flexibility than the current 6-day waiver maximum that relates to the length of the school day.
3. The opportunity to be exempt from the 7-hour day requirement will allow the district to create more flexibility within the daily schedule for students and staff. This flexibility will be used to create a unique bell schedule instead of the static schedule required of schools by this mandate.
4. The district will provide teachers and administrators the opportunity for weekly and monthly staff development opportunities through the creation of these unique schedules.

Goal #4: Teacher Certification – General (TEC §21.003/21.051/21.053) (HB 2) (DBA LEGAL) (DBA Local)

Statutes that relate to this goal: TEC 21.003 states a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or 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.

TEC 21.051 states that before a school district may employ a candidate for certification as a teacher of record and, except as provided by Subsection (b-1), after the candidate's admission to an educator preparation program, the candidate must complete at least 15 hours of field-based experience in which the candidate is actively engaged in instructional or educational activities involving a diverse student population that, to the greatest extent practicable, includes students with disabilities under supervision at:

- (1) a public-school campus accredited or approved for the purpose by the agency; or
- (2) a private school recognized or approved for the purpose by the agency.

TEC 21.053 states that a person who desires to teach in a public school shall present the person's certificate for filing with the employing district before the person's contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding. It also states that an educator who does not hold a valid certificate may not be paid for teaching or work done before the effective date of issuance of a valid certificate.

Innovation Strategies

The district has been granted approval by the Commissioner of Education under TEC §21.0032 to delay implementation of certification requirements for identified uncertified teachers of record in foundational curriculum courses. This Innovation Plan addresses necessary exemptions under TEC §21.003, §21.051, and §21.053 to ensure continuity of instruction, compliance with House Bill 2, and long-term certification alignment.

1. Teacher Certification Requirements - TEC §21.003 requires appropriate certification for teachers of record. As a rural district with documented recruitment challenges and a limited applicant pool, strict adherence without flexibility would result in unfilled vacancies, course reductions, or program limitations for students.

Through this Innovation Plan and in accordance with the Commissioner-approved HB 2 delay:

- The district may continue employing identified uncertified foundational subject teachers during the approved transition period. A teacher certification waiver, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency.
- All foundational subject teachers will be fully certified by the 2029–2030 school year.

This approach allows the district to:

- Maintain instructional continuity.
- Avoid emergency vacancies or long-term substitutes.
- Provide stability for students in core academic areas.
- Transition teachers thoughtfully and strategically into full certification.

The plan balances workforce realities with statutory compliance and prioritizes long-term instructional quality.

2. Field-Based Experience Requirements - TEC §21.051 requires candidates to complete field-based experience prior to employment as teacher of record. Under this Innovation Plan, and consistent with HB 2 requirements:

- Candidates enrolled in a district-approved Educator Preparation Program (EPP) may complete required field-based experience in conjunction with their teaching assignment.
- All candidates will receive structured mentoring and supervision.
- The district will document enrollment, progress benchmarks, and anticipated certification timelines in partnership with its approved EPP.

This strategy:

- Removes barriers that would otherwise delay placement of qualified candidates.
- Creates a grow-your-own pathway for local talent.
- Ensure candidates are supported, coached, and monitored.
- Increases long-term teacher retention by building internal capacity.

3. Contract and Compensation Provisions - TEC §21.053 requires certificate presentation prior to contract binding and restricts payment before certification issuance. Under the Commissioner-approved delay and Board-approved transition plan:

- Identified uncertified foundational teachers may continue employment and compensation during the delay period.
- Candidates enrolled in an approved EPP and meeting progress benchmarks may be compensated in accordance with board-approved salary structures.
- Continued employment is contingent upon documented progress toward certification.

This ensures:

- Staffing stability.
- Financial fairness for teachers actively completing certification.
- Accountability through required progress benchmarks.
- A structured pathway rather than indefinite exemption.

4. Continued Flexibility in Non-Foundational Areas - House Bill 2 does not prohibit District of Innovation flexibility in non-foundational subject areas (e.g., CTE, fine arts, health, LOTE, PE, technology applications).

The district will continue to use local qualification flexibility in these allowable areas to:

- Expand career and technical programming.
- Provide industry-certified professionals access to classrooms.
- Increase advanced coursework and enrichment opportunities.
- Strengthen workforce readiness and community partnerships.

All such assignments will be documented and reported to the Board.

Goal #5: Uniform Group Coverage Program - General (TEC 22.004(i) and Related Board Policies- CRD (LEGAL) and CRD (LOCAL), TEC 22.004 (i)

Statutes that relate to this goal: TEC 22.004(i) and Related Board Policies- CRD (LEGAL) and CRD (LOCAL), TEC 22.004 (i) states that a school district may not make group health coverage available to its employees pursuant to TEC 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code. The current process allows no

flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all Slidell ISD employees. This provision also prohibits the district from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. TEC 22.004 (i) is not in any of the prohibited exemptions that can be included in a school district's Innovation Plan pursuant to TEC 12A.004 and the list of the Commissioner's prohibited exemptions in the TAC Title 19, Chapter 102, subchapter JJ, Section 102.1309.

Innovation Strategy

1. Increase local control of the group health benefits plan to allow Slidell ISD and the Board of Trustees to be responsive to employee and community needs.

Goal #6: Teacher Contract Days – (TEC 21.401)

Statutes that relate to this goal: Current education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a 10-month contract equivalent to 187 days.

Innovation Strategy

1. Proposal would reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. This would be an attempt to better align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students.
 - a. Will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers
 - b. Enhance teacher recruitment
 - c. Improve teacher morale
2. SISD will present a recommendation to the SISD School Board regarding the number of contract days as a part of the total compensation and benefits program.

Goal #7: Interdistrict Transfers

Statutes that relate to this goal: FDA (LOCAL)-TEC 25.036-students attending a district through an interdistrict transfer may apply for transfer annually. This is interpreted that the interdistrict transfer must be for a term of one school year.

Innovation Strategy

1. If student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in DAEP, expulsion, or student attendance drops below the 90% TEA standard, SISD seeks exemption from the one-year transfer commitment and an interdistrict transfer student may have transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time if any of these apply.
2. SISD will continue to accept transfers as space and local policy allows.

Goal #8: Planning and Decision-Making Process (TEC 11.251 (e))

Statutes that relate to this goal: This code states the board shall adopt a procedure, consistent with Section [21.407\(a\)](#), for the professional staff in the district to nominate and ~~select~~ **select** the professional staff representatives who shall meet with the board or the board designee as required under this section. At least two-thirds of the ~~selected~~ **selected** professional staff representatives must be classroom teachers. The remaining staff representatives shall include both campus- and district-level professional staff members. If practicable, the committee membership shall include at least one professional staff representative with the primary responsibility for educating students with disabilities.

Innovation Strategy

1. To be fair to all professional staff, a selection process that rotates membership on the various committees is better utilized due to the smaller size of the district staff which includes approximately 80 total staff members.
2. This rotation also allows all staff to be involved in the decision-making process at some point, have a voice, and contribute to being more inclusive.

Goal #9: Planning and Preparation Time (TEC 21.404)

Statutes that relate to this goal: Each classroom teacher is entitled to at least 450 minutes within each two-week period for instructional preparation, including parent-teacher conferences, evaluating students' work, and planning. A planning and preparation period under this section may not be less than 45 minutes within the instructional day. During a planning and preparation period, a classroom teacher may not be required to participate in any other activity.

Innovation Strategy

The district seeks flexibility under TEC §21.404 to align planning and preparation time with its adopted 4-day instructional calendar while continuing to support instructional quality and teacher effectiveness.

1. The district will maintain a commitment to providing meaningful instructional planning and preparation time for classroom teachers. Under this Innovation Plan, the district may adjust when and how planning time is scheduled to accommodate a modified instructional calendar, including a 4-day week structure.
2. The district recognizes that planning and preparation time is intended to be protected for instructional purposes. However, in rare and unforeseen circumstances involving student safety or the inability to secure substitute coverage, the district may request a teacher to assist with temporary class coverage.

Such coverage will:

- Be used only as a last resort after all other staffing options have been exhausted.
- Be monitored by campus administration to limit frequency.
- Not become routine practice.
- Be documented to ensure equitable distribution, when applicable.

The district will prioritize alternative coverage options, including administrators and non-instructional personnel, before requesting coverage from classroom teachers.

3. The district may incorporate structured collaborative planning, team meetings, data review sessions, or professional learning activities into designated planning times when such activities directly support instructional preparation and student achievement.

Goal #10: Staff Professional Development (TEC 21.451)

Statutes that relate to this goal: TEC 21.451 provides that the staff development provided by a school district to an educator other than a principal must be: 1) conducted in accordance with standards developed by the district; and 2) designed to improve education in the district.

Innovation Strategy

Slidell ISD recognizes that mandating annual compliance training only serves to add redundancy to back-to-school work that can be better utilized in preparing for the students to return. The District will require all staff to review and retrain on required compliance training every three years.

The district will compile and maintain an updated document for all employees with a 2026-2027 baseline. All employees new to the district will complete specified compliance training during the first year of employment in the district. District and campus administration may assign training to an employee or group of employees as needed during the three-year cycle.

Workers in specified groups, such as coaches, those who handle food or bodily fluids, are not exempt from annual training mandated for their specific job types, roles, responsibilities, and duties.

Goal #11: Grievance (FNG(LOCAL), SB 12, SEC 26.011a)

Statutes Related to the Goal: The following statutes guide the district's grievance process and parental rights procedures. TEC §26A establishes requirements for school districts to adopt grievance procedures that allow parents to raise concerns related to alleged violations of state law, board policy, or parental rights. TEC §11.251 establishes the authority of the board of trustees to adopt policies governing the operation of the school district, including procedures for addressing complaints and grievances. TEC §11.252 requires districts to implement processes that support effective district governance and communication with stakeholders. TEC §37.105 addresses the removal or refusal of entry to district property and establishes related grievance procedures. FNG (LOCAL) outlines the district's procedures for student and parent complaints and grievances, including the administrative levels of review and timelines for resolving complaints.

Innovation Strategies

To ensure the district's grievance process complies with SB 12 while maintaining an orderly and efficient administrative process, Slidell ISD will implement the following innovation strategies within its grievance procedures.

1. Grievances must clearly identify:

- the specific decision, action, or event giving rise to the grievance; and
- the specific state law, board policy, or parental right alleged to have been violated.

The district may require grievances to clearly identify the staff member, administrator, or district action that is the subject of the complaint. This requirement ensures grievances are clearly defined and allows the district to conduct an appropriate review.

2. A grievance must arise from a single event or a series of related events. If a grievance raises claims involving separate or unrelated incidents, the district may require the complainant to file separate grievances for each unrelated issue. This provision ensures that grievances remain focused and that each issue receives appropriate administrative review.

3. In accordance with SB 12, individuals filing grievances may supplement the grievance record with additional documentation or claims. However, if additional claims are introduced after the Level One conference that were not part of the original grievance, the district may:

- remand the grievance to the appropriate administrative level for review; or
- require the newly raised issue to be filed as a separate grievance.

This strategy ensures that all issues receive appropriate administrative review before reaching the board of trustees.

4. To ensure fairness to all parties and to support an orderly review process, the district will maintain preexisting procedural timelines for submission of supporting documentation. Additional documentation related to a grievance must be submitted no later than a

reasonable deadline prior to the next level of review to ensure administrators and trustees have adequate time to review the information. This provision ensures that the grievance process remains transparent and prevents the introduction of last-minute documentation that could hinder fair review.

5. The grievance process will continue to prioritize resolution at the lowest possible administrative level. If new issues arise during the grievance process that were not addressed during earlier levels of review, the district may return the grievance to the appropriate administrative level to ensure the issue is fully reviewed before consideration by the board of trustees.

6. When grievances are appealed to the board of trustees, the board's review will focus on determining whether the administrative decision:

- was reasonable; and
- was consistent with district policy and applicable law.

This approach preserves the board's governance role while allowing administrative staff to address operational concerns.

7. The district will continue to encourage parents and students to seek resolution of concerns through informal discussions with teachers, campus administrators, and district staff prior to initiating the formal grievance process. Informal resolution promotes communication and allows many concerns to be addressed quickly and effectively at the campus level.

Slidell ISD District of Innovation Committee Members

Name	Relationship to SISD
Dr. Chris Heskett	Superintendent
Theresa Stevens	Assistant Superintendent
Brad Hayhurst	Secondary Principal
Lauren Luig	Elementary Principal
Morgan Brown	Dean of Students
Rowdy Wilson	Campus Behavior Coordinator
Amberly Carter	Elementary Paraprofessional/Child Nutrition
Carrie Ricketts	District Dyslexia Teacher
Cathy Bradshaw	CTE/CCMR Counselor
Cheryl Bostick	Secondary Science Teacher
Cody Wilson	Secondary Math Teacher
Deputy Sherman	District SRO
Gina McCollough	Director of Special Programs
Halee Wilson	Elementary SPED Teacher
K'Leigh Espedal	Parent
Shelby Klement	Elementary Teacher
Shelia Hooker	Parent
Tabetha Gardner	Secondary ELAR
Tiffany Crisp	Secondary SPED Teacher
Yanet Fernandez	District ESL/Bilingual Interventionist

Slidell ISD District of Innovation Plan Timeline

March 6th, 2016 – 5:00 pm – March 2016 Board Meeting

- Public Hearing to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation (TEC 12A.002(b)(2), 12A.003)
- Board approval of Resolution that will begin the decision process (TEC 12A.001 (c)(1))
- Resolution attached.

April 24th, 2016 – 5:00 pm – April 2016 Board Meeting

- Board approval of members of District of Innovation Committee (TEC 12A.002(b)(2), 12A.003)

May 5th, 2016 – 3:30 pm

- First meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

May 26th, 2016 – 3:30 pm

- Second meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

June 2nd & 6th, 2016 – 9:00 am

- Teacher staff development meetings to discuss specific exemptions of TEC as it relates to HB 1842.

June 10th, 2016 – 9:00 am

- Final meeting of the District of Innovation Committee.
- Creation of the Proposed Slidell ISD District of Innovation Plan.

June 10th, 2016 – 10:30 am

- Proposed Slidell ISD District of Innovation Plan approved by the District Site Based Committee.

June 10th, 2016

- Proposed Slidell ISD District of Innovation Plan posted to www.slidellisd.net

June 20th, 2016 – 6pm Regular June Meeting

- Proposed SISD District of Innovation Plan is reviewed by the SISD Board of Trustees.
- Slidell ISD Board of Trustees notification to the TEA Commissioner of the District's intention to vote on the District of Innovation Plan.

July 10th – 5:00pm, Regular July Board Meeting

- Approve the District of Innovation plan by a vote of (4 - 0) (TEC 12A.005(b))
- District of Innovation Plan along with the TEA form relating to the specific TEC exemptions in the plan is submitted to TEA and the Commissioner.

Timeline of Events for Uniform Group Coverage Program Amendment

April 2020 - Amendment formation by District DOI

May 21, 2020 - Slidell ISD Board of Trustees takes action to pursue Amendment to current District Of Innovation Plan and requests for SBDM/DOI members to review proposed Amendment

June 11, 2020 -SBDM/DOI Members review and approve proposed amendment

June-July 2020 - Proposed Amendment posted for public view for 30 days and Slidell ISD Board of Trustees notifies Commissioner of Education of intent to vote on Amendment

July 20, 2020 - Board approves the amendment to current Slidell ISD District of Innovation Plan. District notifies Commissioner of Education of approval of Amended District of Innovation Plan.

Timeline of Events for District of Innovation Renewal

June 2021 -SBDM/DOI Members review renewal and amendments to SISD DOI Plan

June 25, 2021- Slidell ISD posts final version of the proposed plan on the district's website and notifies Commissioner of Education of the board's intention to vote on adoption of the proposed plan.

July 29, 2021- Slidell ISD Board of Trustees takes action to pursue renewal and amendments to District Of Innovation Plan.

Timeline of Events for District of Innovation Renewal

February 25, 2026 – DEIC/DOI Members review renewal and amendments to SISD DOI Plan

March 11, 2026 – DEIC/DOI Members complete final review renewal and amendments to SISD DOI Plan

April 2026 – Slidell ISD posts final version of the proposed plan on the district's website and notifies Commissioner of Education of the board's intention to vote on adoption of the proposed plan.

May 2026 – Slidell ISD Board of Trustees takes action to pursue renewal and amendments to District of Innovation Plan.