

Freer Independent School District
District of Innovation

Five Year Renewal
February 26, 2025-2030



Freer ISD District of Innovation Plan

Introduction

House Bill 1842, passed in the 84th Legislative Session, provides an opportunity for Texas public school districts to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of their unique student populations in order to prepare them for success and lifelong learning. To access these flexibilities, a school district must adopt an innovation plan as outlined in the Texas Education Code, Chapter 12A. To be eligible for a District of Innovation designation, a school district's most recent academic performance rating must be at least acceptable. Once formally approved, an innovation plan is effective for five years. The plan may be amended, rescinded, or renewed in the same way it was developed and approved at any time.

Each school district may pursue designation as a District of Innovation for different reasons. As a District of Innovation, Freer ISD will be able to increase the flexibility necessary to personalize the learning experiences of our students. We also believe Freer ISD must have the ability to make important educational decisions for our students at the local level. As we developed our District of Innovation Plan, Freer ISD stakeholders have been involved throughout the process, giving ongoing feedback on what they want for their children to prepare them to be positive contributors to the world.

Process

February 17, 2020: Freer ISD Board of Trustees voted to approve the original district of innovation plan

June 3, 2025: The District of Innovation Committee will hold a public meeting to consider the final version of the proposed plan and vote to approve with a majority vote of the committee membership.

June 4, 2025-July 21, 2025: The approved proposed plan will be available on the district's website which will meet the 30-day criteria to be posted for the public.

July 21, 2025: The Freer ISD Board of Trustees will vote to adopt the proposed district of innovation plan and must pass it with a 2/3 vote.

July 22, 2025: Freer ISD will post the final District of Innovation Plan, provide a copy TEA within 15 days, and notify the TEA Commissioner using the appropriate form.

District of Innovation Committee Members

This committee was selected on June 3, 2025 and is intended to reflect stakeholders for Freer ISD and is comprised of board members, community members, parents, teachers, staff members, and administration.

- Cresencio Acevedo, Board Member
- Marci Almendarez, Elementary Teacher
- Russel Buhidar, Chief Financial Officer
- Jacki Canales, Elementary Assistant Principal
- Conrad Cantu, Superintendent
- Mary Alice Cantu, High School Teacher/Medical Academy Director
- Lanette Carballeira, Junior High Teacher
- Linda Hinojosa, Junior High Principal
- Emily Huey, Parent
- Anne Martinez, Community Member
- Jessica Montez, Elementary Teacher
- Elaina Perez, Special Education Director
- Dr. Frances Perez, Board Member
- Greg Perez, Technology Director
- Juan Puig, High School Principal
- Diego Saenz, Board Member
- Amanda Salinas, Elementary Principal
- Randi Salinas, High School Teacher
- Kim Villarreal, Junior High Teacher

Innovation Plan

I. First Day of Instruction (School Start Date):

Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 [Related to board policy EB]:

A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Innovation: Freer ISD believes that increased flexibility in determining the start and end of the instructional calendar is essential to increase student attendance, improve attendance, and meet the instructional needs of our students. In addition, this will allow our school district to align calendar with universities/colleges, balance instructional days per semester, and align to state assessment calendars.

II. Teacher Certification:

Texas Education Code 21.003, 21.053, and TAC Chapter 231 [Related to board policy DBA, DK]:

A school district may not employ teachers unless this person holds an appropriate certificate and uncertified teacher may not earn a teacher salary until effective date of valid certificate.

Innovation: Freer ISD is committed to seeking highly qualified educators in all positions. Challenges in recruitment due to geography and general teacher shortage in all areas of teachers is an issue. In order to provide more students opportunities to take specialized and or advanced courses, the district would like to establish local requirements such as courses in lieu of requirement in the above statute for certified teachers. Flexibility would allow the district to employ high quality educators that might not qualify under traditional teacher certification pathways. Qualifications for local certification would include, but not limited to professional work experience, formal training/education in the content area, active/relevant professional industry certification, a combination of work experience, training, and education. The superintendent or designee would approve the request for local certification to employ if the candidate possesses the knowledge, skills, and experience required of the position. Employment would be dependent on school board approval and acceptance of non-Chapter 21 contract. Exemption does not apply to bilingual/ESL and special education teachers.

III. Teacher Contract Days

Texas Education Code 21.401 [Related to board policy DEA]:

A contract between a school district and an educator must be for a minimum of 10 months of service. An educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Innovation: Exemption to this statute would allow flexibility of teacher contract days to allow local control for 10-month contract employees. The plan could reduce the number of days' teachers work without effect to teacher salaries. This could serve as a recruitment tool, increase teacher daily rate without budget implications, and provide teachers more flexibility during the

summer months for professional development.

IV. Transfer Students

Texas Education Code 25.036 [Related to board policy FDA]:

Under this provision, a district may choose to accept student transfers but must accept for one school year. This restricts the district's ability to revoke a transfer approval in the middle of the school year.

Innovation: In an effort to provide quality instruction to Freer students, the district would prefer the flexibility to revoke transfer of students who do not meet expectations of behavior, attendance, and academic efforts that interfere with our school district's ability to educate students of the community. The district would like the option to apply mid-year revocation of the student transfer.

V. Minimum Minutes of Instruction Per Day

Texas Education Code 25.081 [Related to board policy EB]

Requires that school districts must operate at a minimum of 75,600 minutes each school year. Minutes of operations include time allotted for instruction, intermissions, and recesses for students.

Innovation: Have local flexibility to alter designated school days for specific purposes such as bad weather, professional development, early dismissal for community events, and implementation of innovative instructional strategies.

VI. DAEP

Texas Education Code 37.008 (a)(7) and 37.006 (f) [Related to board policy FOCA]:

TEC 37.008 (a)(7) requires a DAEP program to employ teachers who meet the teacher certification requirements. TEC 37.006 (f) prohibits elementary students placed in a DAEP setting from being placed with students who are not elementary.

Innovation: Due to staffing and building capacity it is sometimes difficult to meet the above-named provisions. Being exempt from this statute provides flexibility to staff the DAEP program with individuals who meet local requirements based on work experience, formal training, or education. The superintendent will make determination of eligibility of candidate for local certification based on, but not limited to, the local requirements. In addition, the district will have flexibility to place an elementary student with students who are not in elementary so other elementary students are not displaced from their normal classroom environment in the event that an elementary student is required to be placed in DAEP.