

# STERLING CITY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## DISTRICT OF INNOVATION PLAN

June 1, 2022 – May 31, 2027

### DISTRICT OF INNOVATION OVERVIEW

The District of Innovation concept, passed by the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, gives traditional independent school districts many of the flexibilities available to Texas' open enrollment charter schools.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BECOMING A DISTRICT OF INNOVATION

**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.

The Sterling City Independent School District believes that this level of local control adds flexibility and empowers our district to think and act in innovative ways to meet our district goals.

### TERM

The term of the District of Innovation (DOI) plan, as outlined by the Texas Education Agency, is five years. The District of Innovation Plan was originally adopted on April 10, 2017 and was set to conclude at the end of the 2021 – 2022 school year, unless terminated earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. During the summer of 2021, the District began and completed the process of amending the original DOI plan. In the Spring of 2022, the District began the process to renew the District of Innovation plan. The term of the renewal will commence June 1, 2022, and conclude at the end of the 2026 – 2027 school year unless terminated earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law.

# DISTRICT OF INNOVATION COMMITTEE

STERLING CITY ISD 2021-2022

ELEM. PRINCIPAL	Jami Keele
SECONDARY PRINCIPAL	Ty Stevens
PARENT	Melinda Martinez
PARENT	Starr Foster
TEACHER	Desiree Clinkscales
TEACHER	Kayton Abbott
TEACHER	Courtney Beck
TEACHER	Jessica McCrea
TEACHER	Wendy Justiss
COUNSELOR	Stephanie Stafford
SPECIAL PROGRAMS	Sara Miller
DISTRICT STAFF	Bob Rauch
DISTRICT STAFF	Michele Guetersloh
COMMUNITY MEMBER	Sonya Venzor Rodriguez
BUSINESS REP.	Oscar Galaviz

## **Texas Education Code Exemptions**

The Sterling City ISD in conjunction with the District of Innovation Committee has reviewed the Texas Education Code and determined which exemptions currently inhibit the local district from making the best use of time for student instruction and educational opportunities for our students at Sterling City ISD.

### **I. UNIFORM START DATE (TEC §25.0811)**

Current State law prohibits a school district from starting school before the fourth Monday in August unless the District participates in a year-round calendar.

#### **RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION**

If the District has the flexibility in the start of school date, we can determine locally what best fits the needs of our students and school. This flexibility will help coordinate dates with the students that are taking dual credit courses through a college and create more balance in the number of days in each semester.

### **II. LENGTH OF SCHOOL DAY (TEC §25.081)**

Current State law requires that all school days must be 420 minutes long each day for ADA funding and calculations. The total number of minutes for the year must be at least 75,600.

#### **RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION**

Exemption from the 420 minute day requirement would allow Sterling City ISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule on selected days whenever it is locally determined as necessary or beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is a waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6 day maximum for the school year.

Exempting completely from the 420 minute requirement would give the District a significant amount of local control over scheduling (above and beyond the 6 day maximum as needed) without the fear of diminishing state funding or losing credit for instructional time.

Sterling City ISD does not intend to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. Superintendent approval is required for any time adjustment in a regularly scheduled school day. Any adjustments shall not reduce annual school instructional minutes below 75,600 minutes.

**III. TEACHER CERTIFICATION (TEC §21.003, §21.053 AND §21.057)**

Current State Law requires that a person may not be employed as a teacher/instructor by a District unless they hold the appropriate permit or certification issued by an appropriate State Agency. Currently, districts must notify the State in order to request an emergency certification if we are unable to find a certified individual.

**RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION**

In order to best serve SCISD students, decisions on teacher certification will be handled locally.

- The campus principals may submit to the Superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach a subject(s) out of their certified field. The Principal must provide reasoning for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which qualify this individual to teach this subject.
- An individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The Principal will submit the request to the Superintendent with all the individual's credentials. The Superintendent will review the request. If approved, the Superintendent will present the request to the Board of Trustees for approval. Local teaching certificates will require an employment agreement rather than a contract.
- This process will allow more flexibility in our scheduling and more options for our students in class offerings leading to industry recognized certifications.

**IV. SUBMITTING WAIVERS FOR KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 4 CLASS SIZE (TEC §25.112, and TEC §25.113)**

Current State law requires Kindergarten-4<sup>th</sup> grade classes to meet the 22 student to 1 teacher ratio. When a class exceeds this limit, the District must submit a waiver to TEA. These waivers are rarely, if ever, rejected, which creates a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.

**RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION**

In certain circumstances small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, however in most cases master teachers who are highly skilled in student engagement strategies are equally effective with larger class size environments.

Typically, it is not the number of students, but the classroom environment that influences positive student learning outcomes.

- SCISD will attempt to keep all core K-4 classrooms to a 22:1 ratio.
- The required TEA waiver and parental notification will not be required when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.
- This will give SCISD flexibility without having the bureaucracy of waivers within TEA.

**V. CONTRACT SERVICE DAYS (TEC §21.401)**

Current State law requires educators that are employed on a 10 month contract to work a minimum of 187 days.

**RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION**

With the passage of HB 2610 and TEC §25.081 which changed the required instructional days to minutes, the law did not address the contract days for 10 month employees. The number of days required for teachers should be a local decision.

**VI. HEALTH BENEFIT REQUIREMENTS (TEC §22.004)**

Current State law requires school districts to exclusively offer TRS Health Plans to employees.

**RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION**

Exemption from this requirement increases local control of group health benefit options to allow Sterling City ISD to stay competitive in recruitment and retention of high quality staff.

**VII. DEPOSITORY CONTRACTS (TEC §45.205 and TEC §45.206)**

Current State law allows a district to extend an existing bank depository contract for 3 two-year terms for a total of 6 additional years.

## RATIONALE FOR EXEMPTION

Sterling City ISD only has one bank within its District boundaries. This exemption allows Sterling City ISD to extend an existing bank depository contract beyond the total 6 year allowable contract renewal term. This exemption will reduce the administrative burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposals (RFP), allow local flexibility in the length of the depository contract, and ensure that District resources are concentrated on student achievement.