



SAN FELIPE DEL RIO

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

DISTRICT OF INNOVATION 2023-2028 LOCAL INNOVATION PLAN

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES – SEPT. 15, 2025

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 1842, passed in 2015 by the 84th Session of the Texas Legislature, in part amended Chapter 12A of the Texas Education Code (TEC) to create Districts of Innovation. The designation allows school districts to be exempt from certain sections of the TEC, providing more flexibility and local control in meeting the needs of students and the communities served.

The original District of Innovation Plan (2019-2023) was adopted in March 2019. On June 16, 2020, the District of Innovation Plan was amended and the DOI Plan expired in March 2023. The District of Innovation (DOI) Committee met on April 25, 2023 to discuss the process to restart the DOI Plan since the timeline had expired. On May 10, 2023, the San Felipe Del Rio CISD Board of Trustees (Board) adopted a resolution to re-initiate the process of becoming a District of Innovation. On May 15, 2023, the Board held a public hearing on the subject and on this same day appointed a District Advisory Committee (DAC) comprised of parents, teachers and community representatives. The DAC held a public meeting on June 28, 2023 to approve the final DOI plan, and the San Felipe Del Rio CISD Board of Trustees met on June 29, 2023 to adopt the 2023-2028 Local Innovation Plan (Plan).

TERMS

By law, the term of the designation as a District of Innovation may not exceed five years. The term of the San Felipe Del Rio CISD Local Innovation Plan begins on June 30, 2023, and ends on June 30, 2028, unless rescinded or renewed by the Board in accordance with law, or terminated by the Commissioner of Education. The plan may be amended, rescinded or renewed by recommendation of the Committee, a majority vote of the district-level committee established under TEC 11.251 (District of Innovation Advisory Committee) along with a two-thirds majority vote of the Board. An amendment to the Plan does not change/extend the date of the term of designation as an innovation district; exemptions that were already formally approved are not required to be reviewed. The District must notify the Texas Education Agency (TEA) within five business days of rescission of the plan and provide a date (not to be later than the start of the following school year) at which time it will be in compliance with all sections of the TEC. During renewal, all sections of the plan and exemptions shall be reviewed and the original statutory adoption process must be followed. The District shall notify the Commissioner of any actions taken to amend, rescind or renew the Plan along with the associated TEC exemptions and local approval dates. The Committee will review the plan annually in the spring, unless the Board determines a review must be done prior to the annual review, to ensure that the recommendations are continuing to meet the needs of the District as intended and are aligned with San Felipe Del Rio CISD (SFDR CISD) Strategic Design efforts. An annual report will be provided to the Board based on the outcome of this review.

As part of the annual review process, the membership of the Committee will be renewed and/or modified by a majority vote of the Board. Outside of the annual review/renewal process, if a member of the Committee is unable to fulfill his/her duties, the Board may appoint a replacement by majority vote. The intent of the Board is to maintain balanced representation on the Committee of parents/community members and staff.

The SFDR CISD District of Innovation – Local Innovation Plan is aligned with the beliefs, vision and goals of SFDR CISD as approved by the Board.

SFDR CISD SHARED BELIEFS

We believe:

- ✓ Communication and collaboration among families, community, and educators are vital.
- ✓ In equity by providing the resources, support, and motivation necessary to differentiate instruction.
- ✓ All students should be equipped with a strong foundation of knowledge, including 21st century skills, so they are life-long learners prepared to be successful after high school.

SFDR CISD VISION

San Felipe Del Rio CISD, in partnership with our families and community, empowers every student to excel through a culture of collaboration, innovation, and achievement.

SFDR CISD MISSION

San Felipe Del Rio provides a high-quality, innovative curriculum with engaging, relevant instruction. We meet the individual needs of students and staff in a safe, nurturing, and collaborative environment which encourages development and growth.

SFDR CISD GOALS

District Goal 1: Finance and Operations

By May 2030, the District will provide a strong plan for effective use of staff and district resources to produce a balanced budget while continuing district improvement and/or construction projects.

District Goal 2 – Focused Leadership

By May 2030, 100% of campus and district leaders will effectively support and communicate high expectations for student learning.

District Goal 3 – Highly Effective Instruction

By May 2030, 100% of SFDR-CISD students will meet or exceed grade-level standards.

District Goal 4 – Innovation

By May 2030, SFDR-CISD will offer well-established innovative programs to 100% of the students.

District Goal 5 – Integrated Student Support

By May 2030, 100% of SFDR-CISD students will receive services to meet their social-emotional and academic needs.

In order to better meet the needs of our students and focus on prioritizing district goals for student performance, results-driven accountability, and other district goals, the District seeks the following exemptions from the Texas Education Code:

INNOVATION PLAN

INNOVATION PLAN EXEMPTION 1: UNIFORM START DATE

San Felipe Del Rio CISD requests an exemption from TEC §25.0811a. FIRST DAY OF INSTRUCTION. (a) ...a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.

RATIONALE

Texas Education Code §25.0811(a) does not allow school districts to begin school before the fourth Monday of August. This requirement restricts the local community from designing a calendar that best meets the needs of students and families. This requirement limits the amount of instructional time available before local and state testing. Exemption from this requirement allows SFDR CISD to collaboratively design an academic calendar based on the needs of and input from the community.

STRATEGY

Implement an earlier school start date, specifically on the second Monday in August, which would allow SFDR CISD to:

- ✓ Provide a balanced distribution of instructional time for one-semester coursework, as students who currently take a one-semester course in the fall have fewer instructional days to master course content than students who take the same one-semester course in the spring.
- ✓ Provide more instructional days in advance of standardized assessments, such as Advanced Placement and STAAR exams;
- ✓ Provide additional instructional time after the last official day of school for students retaking a STAAR exam over the summer;
- ✓ Complete fall semester exams before dismissing for Winter Break;
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for students to take advantage of the full array of summer offerings at institutions of higher education.
- ✓ Provide for additional days to mitigate health or emergency-related school closures.

INNOVATION PLAN EXEMPTION 2: EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION FOR CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) AND ART AND MUSIC PROGRAMS

San Felipe Del Rio CISD requests an exemption from TEC §21.003 (a). CERTIFICATION REQUIRED. (a) A person may not be employed as a teacher by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for the 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.

RATIONALE

The number of Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs of Study, Career Clusters, course offerings and endorsements have grown exponentially since the adoption of the first local innovation plan

in 2018. An exemption from TEC §21.003 would allow SFDR CISD the flexibility to consider workforce professionals to teach CTE courses specifically in hard-to-fill career clusters including Architecture and Construction, Arts, Audio-Visual Technology and Communication, Health Science, Hospitality and Tourism, Human Services, Information Technology, Business, Marketing and Finance, Law and Public Service, Manufacturing, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math; and Transportation, Distribution and Logistics, for which a traditionally, certified candidate is not available.

Similarly, the San Felipe Del Rio CISD has experienced a shortage of certified Art and Music Teachers for our Fine Arts programs. An exemption from TEC §21.003 would allow SFDR CISD the flexibility to hire teaching professionals in hard-to-fill Art and Music classes.

STRATEGY

San Felipe Del Rio CISD prides itself on hiring the highest quality teaching staff to benefit all learners. The District will make every attempt to hire fully certified individuals who can teach CTE courses in the critical areas listed above. However, when it is not reasonably possible, San Felipe Del Rio CISD will have the flexibility to hire highly credentialed workforce professionals, who are fully equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in the hard-to-fill CTE course.

Eligible CTE candidates for hard-to-fill positions must have the following TEA Career and Technical Education Chart criteria:

- ✓ Degree or formal training/education in the Academic Content Area or Career Cluster
- ✓ Professional work experience
- ✓ Current licensure by a state or nationally recognized accrediting agency in any approved occupations for the classes the instructor will be teaching
- ✓ Requirement of an appropriate Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification for instructors of Business Information Management (BIM) courses

Eligible Art and Music Program candidates for hard-to-fill positions must have the following criteria:

- ✓ Degree or formal training/education in music or art
- ✓ Professional work experience

All candidates will be carefully considered to ensure the individuals have sufficient education and expertise to provide instruction necessary to carry out the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the course(s) to be taught.

Staff hired under a school district teaching permit will benefit from the same rights and responsibilities as certified teachers within the district. After the required posting period and candidate interviews, the designated Principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what specific credentials (i.e. experiences and expertise) the prospective teacher possesses that would qualify the individual to teach that subject(s). The Superintendent must approve the selection and recommend to the Board for final approval. The District and local campus will assess appropriate training needs for any teacher hired under this exemption. Finally, this is a local certification only and does not transfer to another school district.

INNOVATION PLAN EXEMPTION 3: CLASS SIZE AND NOTICE OF CLASS SIZE

San Felipe Del Rio CISD requests an exemption from TEC §25.112. CLASS SIZE. (a) Except as otherwise authorized by this section, a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a prekindergarten, kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class; and TEC §25.113 NOTICE OF CLASS SIZE (a) A campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112(d) from class size limits shall provide written notice of the exception to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception.

RATIONALE

Based on historical data, San Felipe Del Rio CISD applies annually for Class Size waivers. State law limits class sizes to a maximum of 22 students in kindergarten through grade four. If any class exceeds that limit, the district notifies the Board and is required to file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency that is typically approved without exception. Upon notification of TEA's approval, the district is then required to notify parents of the approved class size exception via a highly specified notice. Frequently, these class sizes fluctuate during the course of the year with this process only accounting for the often limited time during which a class exceeds 22 students. The District also experiences occasions in which a certified teacher is not available to create a new setting and alleviate the exceeding enrollment in a particular grade level. An exemption from the Class Size statute would provide a much needed solution from a temporary issue and relief from the reporting encumbrances currently required by state law.

STRATEGY

The district fully intends to continue its practice of maintaining reasonable class sizes in prekindergarten through grade four. However, flexibility from these statutes would allow district and campus leadership to make reasonable decisions when the class size in PK-4 classrooms exceeds the 22:1 ratio and when a qualified teacher is not available for hire.

The administration will continue to consider the timing in the school year, available space, and the need for another teacher or teacher aide to ensure that decisions regarding class size are made in the best interest of the students.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SFDR CISD will annually review the 2023-2028 Local Innovation Plan to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the District. It is noted that through the annual review process, further innovation and exemptions may be proposed in order to support the growing needs of the district.