

INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation (DOI) and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices that support local needs, including exemptions from certain mandates such as the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a District of Innovation Plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

On January 21, 2026, the Rule ISD Board of Trustees passed a resolution to explore the development of a District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The adoption of this plan seeks to increase the district's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. A District of Innovation Committee was then assembled to convene at a later date to start the planning. The committee met on Wednesday, February 4, 2026 to discuss, gain input from the stakeholders including teachers, principals, administrators, district employees, parents, students, and community members and draft the Local Innovation Plan. The District of Innovation Plan developed by this committee was reviewed by the Board of Trustees in March of 2026 with no action due to state laws requiring a public opportunity to comment on the plan. The board of trustees then tabled the plan to wait for the new principal to review the plan and make comments and recommendations. After review by new administration, the Rule ISD Board of Trustees reviewed the plan on September 30, 2026 and requested the Superintendent post the plan for the public to review and offer any comments. With no comments/with comments, the Board of Trustees voted to approve the district of innovation plan and notify the Texas Commissioner of Education on the new plan

TERM

The term of the initial DOI Plan was for five years, beginning at some date 2022 and ending in the year of 2027. The Rule ISD Superintendent has not able to find the exact date in past board minutes so the renewed and amended DOI will begin 1 January, 2027. This new DOI will cover five years (2027-2032), unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this plan, other areas of operations are to be considered, a new committee will convene to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the plan. Any amendment adopted by the board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

The term of the renewed DOI Plan will begin January 1, 2027 and end December 31, 2032, unless terminated or amended earlier by the board of trustees in accordance with the law. The

following timeline was followed by Rule ISD as required by House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permitting Texas public schools to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the TEC.

Board of Trustees Initial Actions	
January 21, 2026	Board of Trustees Overview The Rule ISD School Board of Trustees will receive an overview of TEC Chapter 12A District of Innovation renewal provisions.
Renewal Plan Development	
January 21, 2026	Innovation Plan Renewal Development The Rule ISD School Board of Trustees will authorize the Superintendent to assemble a local innovation committee to develop the proposed new plan.
February 4, 2026	District Advisory Committee Approval The Rule ISD Advisory committee will hold a public meeting to create/amend/add and consider the final version of the proposed plan and approve the plan by majority vote of the committee members.
February 17, 2026	Rule ISD Board of Trustee Review The Rule ISD Board of Trustees will review the proposed District of Innovation plan but no vote will occur.
February 18, 2026	Proposed District of Innovation Plan Posted The The proposed Rule ISD Innovation plan will be posted on the district website for 30 days for community input.
February 18, 2026	Commissioner Notification of Intent to Renew The Rule ISD Superintendent will notify the Commissioner of Education of the intent to renew Rule ISD's District of Innovation Plan.
Renewal Plan Approval	
March 25, 2026	Board of Trustee Approval The The Rule ISD Board of Trustees will adopt the proposed Rule ISD District of Innovation by vote of two-thirds of the membership of the board.
April 1, 2026	Commissioner Notification Approval The Rule ISD Superintendent will notify the commissioner of approval of the renewal plan with the list of approved TEC exemptions, using the provided document.
April 1, 2026	Local Innovation Plan Posting The Rule ISD Superintendent shall ensure that a copy of the local innovation plan is posted on the district's website for the term of the designation as a District of Innovation.
April 1, 2026	Texas Education Agency Submission The Rule ISD Superintendent will provide a copy of the link to the local innovation plan to the Texas Education Agency for posting on the agency website.

District of Innovation Committee Members

Name	Appointment
Paul Harris	Superintendent
Jana Hinkle	Principal
Sabra Turner	1st Grade Teacher
Joni Manske	Art/Health Teacher
Renee Harris	SPED Director
Cortney Kittley	Counselor
Leslie Kupatt	Special Populations
Sandy Flores	Business Manager
Stacy Medford	PEIMS
Emily Dudensing	Parent/PTO President
Jodi Andress	JH ELAR
Kortney Smith	Parent

AREAS OF INNOVATION

With regard to each area of innovation, the District declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

1. School Start and End Date

Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812

Related Board Policies: EB (LEGAL)

The manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC §25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. 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.

Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. Several years ago the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. Increased local control of the instructional calendar will allow the district to be responsive to community needs.
- b. Relief from the statute will allow Rule ISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minutes requirement, rather than days.
- c. Alignment of the district calendar with local universities, local school districts, and county cooperatives with shared services arrangements, etc. will be possible.

1. Probationary Contracts

Exemption from: TEC §21.102(b)

Relevant Board Policies: DCA (LEGAL)

The manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

For experienced teachers new to Rule ISD, the probationary period may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years. A one year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior to the teacher having completed a full year of service.

Innovation Strategies:

For experienced teachers, counselors, or nurses new to Rule ISD that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to three years. All other teachers hired in the District may remain on probationary status for three years, and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC §21.102(c).

3. 90 Percent Attendance Rule

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.092

Relevant Board Policies: FEC (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

Texas Education Code §25.092 requires students to attend class for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered in order to earn class credit or be given a final grade for the class. The 90 percent rule is an arbitrary standard, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Currently, a student who is in attendance for at least 75 percent but less than 90 percent of the days a class is offered may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the school's principal that provides for the student to meet the instructional requirements of the class.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. The expectation of Rule ISD is that students will continue to meet the requirement of attending at least 90 percent of the days that class is offered and that any absences that resulted in a student not meeting that standard would be reviewed.
- b. The attendance committee, with the final approval of the district superintendent/principal, will be able to award credit to students based on mastery of required content if there were extenuating circumstances leading to a student not meeting the 90 percent attendance requirement. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus their efforts to students who are truly at risk.
- c. Flexibility for this requirement would extend to seeking relief for the 75 percent rule as well. Students with serious illness or other extenuating circumstances who can still display mastery of the class content and if approved by a campus attendance committee and the campus superintendent/principal could still receive credit.
- d. The exemption supports our district's overarching goals and provides the flexibility necessary to implement tools, resources, and training that supports personalized learning for both students and teachers.
- e. Exempting the District from the 90 percent rule does not impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section §25.092 does limit or modify a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section §28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with a District grading policy adopted pursuant to Texas Education Code Section §28.0216.

4. Teacher Contract Days

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §21.401

Relevant Board Policies: DCB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

The manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

Texas Education Code §21.401 currently requires a contract between the District and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. This inhibits the local districts ability to build a calendar that provides the greatest flexibility to meet the LEA's staff development and planning needs.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. Rule teacher contract days will be based on the yearly needs of the student calendar, professional development goals and needs, and learning objectives of Rule ISD students.
- b. The District Improvement Committee will be provided with calendar options annually that indicate the required number of staff days in order to provide input and feedback.
- c. The Board of Trustees will be notified annually of the number of staff days in the calendar before taking action on the school calendar.
- d. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days less than 187 days.

5. INTER-DISTRICT TRANSFERS

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.036

Relevant Board Policies: FDA (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TEC §25.036 states that a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC §25.036, has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year.

Innovation Strategies:

a. The district maintains a transfer policy under FDA (Local) requiring nonresident students wishing to transfer to file a transfer application each school year. In approving transfer requests, the availability of space and instructional staff, availability of programs and services the student's disciplinary history records, work habits, and attendance records are also evaluated. Transfer students are expected to follow the attendance requirements, rules and regulations of the district. TEC §25.036 has been interpreted to establish the acceptance of a transfer as a one-year commitment by the district. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, and following reasonable corrective measures, Rule ISD seeks exemption from the one-year transfer commitment.

b. Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

7. ABSENCES FOR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY VISITS
Education Code §25.087 b-2 (1)(2)

Exemption from: Texas

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TEC 25.087 states that students are excused for a limit of two days for college or university visits. Rule ISD believes that students should be encouraged to visit colleges and universities prior to a commitment before graduation. Rule ISD acknowledges that sometimes it takes more than two days to visit a prospective college or university when you have to travel a long distance. Rule ISD believes that students should be able to explore more than two possible college campuses.

Innovation Strategies:

Exempting from TEC §25.087 b-2 (1) (2) will have the following benefits:

- Students will have time to visit more than two colleges or universities.
- Students will be able to experience a variety of college experiences or events to assist with their decision.
- Students will have time away from school to travel to and from a prospective college.
- Students will be given 3 excused days during their junior year and 4 excused days during their senior year for visiting prospective colleges or universities.
- All excused absences for college visits must be approved by the campus administration prior to the absences.

8. EJECTION OF INDIVIDUALS FROM FACILITIES Code §37.105

Exemption from: Texas Education

Relevant Board Policies: GKA (LEGAL)/GKA (LOCAL)/GF (LOCAL); FNG (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

The TEC allows a school administrator, school resource officer, or school district peace officer to refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from district property if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request and either the person poses a substantial risk of harm to any person or the person behaves in a manner that is inappropriate for a school setting and persists in the behavior despite being given a verbal warning. Under current law, the administrator, resource officer, or peace officer must maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from a school facility that is issued, including the name of the person to whom the warning was issued and the date of issuance. At the time a person is refused entry to or ejected from a school district's property, the district shall provide to the person written information explaining the appeal process. And, under the commissioner's rules adopted under the authority granted in the TEC, the person refused entry or ejected from the facility must be given the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees within 90 calendar days. These additional, administratively burdensome requirements, are impractical and potentially impossible to fulfill when an individual is dealing with an unruly individual. It is reasonable to believe that requesting such information could also escalate a situation that is already proving to be disruptive. Further, it is impractical to provide written notice of an appeal process at many events, like athletic events or public meetings, when the removal is only the immediate event and there is not ready access to forms or a computer or printer.

Innovation Strategies:

Rule ISD administrators officers will retain their authority to refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from district property if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request and either (1) the person poses a substantial risk of harm to any person or (2) the person behaves in a manner that is inappropriate for a school setting and persists in the behavior despite being given a verbal warning. However, the following requirements will no longer be applicable: maintaining a written log of verbal warnings; providing written notice of the appeal process at the time of ejection; internet posting of the requirements and appeal process; and the ability to appeal the decision to the Board of Trustees within 90 calendar days. Exemption from these requirements will allow the District to exercise appropriate authority to individuals on campuses and at other facilities in an effective and efficient manner, but do so without conducting burdensome requirements and avoiding potential escalation of already difficult situations. If an individual is banned from returning to Rule ISD property for an extended period of time, the individual will receive written notification.

9. SCHOOL DISTRICT DEPOSITORIES CONTRACT
Education Code Subchapter G. 45.206)

Exemption from: Texas

Relevant Board Policies: BDAE Legal & Local

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TERM OF CONTRACT. (A) Except as provided by Subsection (b), the depository bank when selected shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified. (B) A school district and the district's depository bank may agree to extend a depository contract for two additional two-year-terms. An extension under this subsection is not subject to the requirements of Section 45.206. (C) The contract term and any extension must coincide with the school district's fiscal year.

Innovation Strategies:

By gaining exemption from these statutes, Rule ISD would be able to allow the district's existing bank contract to be extended beyond the total 6-year allowable contract term if the district determines contract pricing remains competitive and there is no operational or financial reason to Renewal Plan send the district's banking services out to bid. This exemption would lessen the administrative burden related to preparing and reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP) when there is are no other banking institutions within district boundaries available to bid on the district's business. In addition, this would further mitigate any impact to employees that would have to alter their direct deposit instructions and afford district flexibility with respect to local banking relationships.

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

Current: Texas Education Code § 33.006(d)-(h), passed during the 87th legislative session, requires a school counselor to spend at least 80 percent of the school counselor's total work time on duties that are components of a counseling program, requires the Board to adopt a related policy, and requires the District to provide documentation relating to compliance to the Commissioner of Education.

District Goal: Exemption from this statute will allow the District, in consultation with district counselors, to utilize school counselors' time in a manner that best meets student and District needs, without concern as to whether counselors are complying with TEC §33.006(d)-(h). Furthermore, exemption will eliminate the administrative burden of responding to requests from the State regarding compliance with the new law and avoid the possibility of extra paperwork for counselors to prove compliance with this new law.

Innovation Strategies:

While the District seeks exemption from this law, the District of Innovation Committee encourages the Administration to consider the following:

- Ensure counselors spend the maximum amount of time appropriately performing duties contemplated by Chapter 33 of the Texas Education Code and helping students and their families.
- Rule ISD values the importance of campus counselors and recognizes that they are called on to do many jobs within our small district. By seeking relief from this statute, Rule ISD will be better able to meet the varied needs of our students.

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

Districts must pay a retired teacher a salary based upon the TEA minimum salary pay scale. “Teacher” refers to a classroom teacher, full-time speech pathologist, full-time librarian, full-time counselor, and full-time school nurse. Texas Education Code Section 21.402 further requires the district to pay a TRS surcharge. Therefore, a retire/rehire employee comes with a great financial burden.

Innovation Strategies:

The district would like the option of hiring an experienced, well-vetted employee without an extra strain on the budget. The district would like the flexibility to hire eligible retired teachers at a negotiated salary that may be below the TEA minimum pay scale. The district would continue to pay the required surcharge. Additionally:

- This negotiated salary will only be for situations in hiring retired educators.
- The salary will be negotiated between the superintendent and the retired educator.
- The negotiated salary will be in writing.
- The negotiated salary will be decreased by the surcharge amount minus the percentage the district pays to TRS for all other employees.

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TEC Section 21.404 states that 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 Strategies:

Rule ISD recognizes that effective teaching requires both individual planning time and meaningful opportunities for teachers to collaborate, analyze student performance, improve instructional practices, and participate in ongoing professional learning. As a small rural district, scheduling flexibility is especially important because teachers often serve multiple grade levels, content areas, and instructional roles.

Rule ISD's participation in the **Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA)** has increased the need for structured opportunities for teachers to review student growth data, examine instructional practices, collaborate with colleagues, and receive feedback and support from campus and district administrators. Teachers also need regular opportunities to participate in **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)** focused on curriculum alignment, assessment data, student growth, intervention, acceleration, and effective instructional strategies.

This exemption would not reduce the District's commitment to providing teachers appropriate planning and preparation time. Instead, it would provide Rule ISD flexibility in determining **when and how planning, collaboration, and professional development occur**. This flexibility would allow the District to schedule time for TIA data analysis, PLC meetings, instructional coaching, curriculum and lesson planning, peer and mentor observations, intervention planning, and meetings with administrators for instructional support, feedback, teaching, and training.

For Rule ISD, professional planning extends beyond individual lesson preparation. Effective planning requires teachers to work collaboratively with colleagues and administrators to analyze student needs, strengthen instruction, and improve student outcomes. Providing flexibility to structure these opportunities before, during, or after the instructional day will allow the District to maximize student learning time while ensuring teachers receive meaningful planning, professional development, collaboration, and administrative support.

Ultimately, this flexibility will allow Rule ISD to integrate **teacher planning, PLC collaboration, TIA implementation, data analysis, instructional coaching, and professional training** into a continuous cycle of instructional improvement designed to strengthen teacher effectiveness and increase student achievement.

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan:

TEC §11.251 currently states that the school board shall adopt a policy to involve professional staff of the district, parents, and community members in the establishment of a district and campus-level planning entity. Additionally, TEC §11.251 states that a person who stands in parental relation to a student is considered a parent, a parent who is an employee of the school district is not considered a parent representative on the committee, and a parent is not considered a representative of community members on the committee. The designation is also made that two-thirds of the elected professional staff representatives must be classroom teachers and the remaining staff representatives shall include both campus-and district-level professional staff members.

Innovation Strategies:

While Rule ISD will continue to create a diverse group in the development of the SBDM and utilize the committee for the purposes intended within TEC §11.251 such as reviewing the district and campus educational plans, goals, performance objectives, major instructional programs, etc., Rule ISD also believes local control of the makeup of the committee will encourage authentic participation and will better meet the needs of the campus/district. Rule ISD will recruit and elect staff and community members with a range of perspectives and interests. A variety of the members may fill more than one role as defined by TEC §11.251 (ie. a teacher representative may also be a parent member and a parent representative may serve as a community member).

Exemption from TEC §11.251 will have the following benefits:

- The SBDM will include members that participate with authentic influence in planning and not just in name alone as many of the business and community members cannot attend the meetings due to various influences (ie. work schedules, lack of interest, no association with the school district, etc.).
- The Campus and District Improvement Plans will be driven by involved parties.
- The committee will meet and review content in accordance with TEC §11.251.
- The committee will plan according to the specific needs of the district and campus.
- An authentic product will be produced annually due to the involved and informed committee members.