

Districts of Innovation Q&A

What is the process for becoming a District of Innovation?

The steps include: the Board passes a resolution to initiate the process (completed); a public hearing is held at a Board meeting (completed); a committee is formed to write an innovation plan (completed); an innovation plan is developed, the plan is posted online for 30 days, the District Advisory Council (DAC) holds a public meeting; and the DAC approves the plan by at least a two-thirds majority. If the Board approves the plan by a two-thirds majority, the Commissioner would be notified.

Who will serve on the committee that is developing the innovation plan?

The District Advisory Council served as the base membership. The Board appointed additional staff, parent and community representatives, bringing the membership to about 40.

What are opportunities for public comment?

A public hearing was held at the April 18, 2016, Board meeting, prior to trustees approving a resolution to start the process of developing a District of Innovation plan. In addition, a second public hearing to be held in conjunction with a District Advisory Council meeting (as per the stated process) is scheduled for May 18, 2016.

How does this align with the strategic plan?

The flexibility allowed with Districts of Innovation aligns extremely well with the DSISD 2016-21 Strategic Plan. Removing barriers for educators will enhance their opportunities to provide personalized learning opportunities for their students.

Is there a financial impact to becoming a District of Innovation?

Not directly. The designation does not change anything as it relates to state funding formulas. There may be potential for savings if certain flexibilities are pursued, but nothing directly results from the designation.

How would this affect teacher contract length?

Currently teachers have one-year contracts. That would not be affected by the DOI designation.

How would this affect class sizes?

If class size ratio is included in the DSISD plan, the district could have the opportunity to seek flexibility from applying for waivers any time K-4th grade class exceeds the 22:1 ratio. This could provide relief, especially in the case of mid-year move-ins, which are not uncommon in a fast-growth district.

Are the rules (from Commissioner) firmly established for the long term or could they potentially change over time?

Because this is a new concept, nothing is set in stone. If DSISD takes action now, the rules that were released this spring apply. There is no guarantee that the rules would not change in the future and there is no way to predict if districts that already have been designated would be grandfathered in any way.

What are the metrics for success?

The district will still fall under the same state accountability system including state assessments. Dripping Springs ISD also is broadening the way it defines success for students through personalized learning and the new strategic plan.

Will the district have the ability to modify the plan?

As with the strategic plan, the innovation plan is a “living” document that will be modified if needed over time. The plan can be modified through a similar vetting process that created the original plan.

Could the state remove this designation?

Again, there is no guarantee that the rules would not change in the future and, if they do, no way to know how districts that already have completed the process would be affected. Each legislative session presents opportunities for bills impacting education to be introduced, which is how Districts of Innovations came about in the first place (HB 1842). Also, District of Innovation designation could be terminated if a district’s rating dropped to Academically Unacceptable (in two out of three years).