Board of Trustees of the San Antonio Independent School District approved the Local Innovation Plan as part of the District of Innovation designation process on June 13, 2016 following a public hearing on the same day. The plan was presented and approved on May 12 by SAISD's District Leadership Team, which is composed of members elected from the Campus Leadership Teams.

SAISD Local Innovation Plan

In 2015, the 84th session of the Texas Legislature passed HB 1842 which allows districts to pursue a **District of Innovation Designation**. This designation allows districts freedom from state-level regulations to deliver instructional and support services in novel ways that improve student educational outcomes. The bill provides districts with opportunities similar to those previously enjoyed by charter schools and prompts districts to determine how exactly to best utilize the designation to better serve students.

Our Process

In SAISD, the district chose to pursue this designation to inspire innovative practices and increase autonomy at the campus level. Campuses were asked to meet with their individual school communities to discuss the creation of a campus innovation plan and determine whether or not their students would benefit from state law exceptions.

The process by which campuses developed their plans was as important as the plans themselves. The district acknowledged that an anticipated consequence of engaging in the planning process was that campuses might identify additional areas in which greater flexibility was desired. Campus innovation plans were required to include the following:

- Identify the challenge the campus hopes to overcome.
- Describe how the campus will utilize state law exception(s) to address the identified challenge(s).
- Discuss how the plan assists in achieving the campus' goals.
- List any budget considerations/requests the plan requires.
- Determine the outcomes that will be used to measure whether or not the plan assists in meeting the campus goals
- Explain the process used to develop the plan.
- Describe how the plan is being shared with the campus community.

The District Leadership Team, a body composed of elected representatives from all stakeholder groups within the district community, reviewed the statutes within Texas Education Code that, if waived, could result in greater student achievement. They voted and approved the plan on Thursday, May 12, 2016.

The Board of Trustees, on June 13, 2016, will take action to seek the District of Innovation Designation on behalf of SAISD and will seek the following legal exemptions:

I. Requirements Imposed by the Education Code from which SAISD Seeks Exemption:

a. §25.112 (Class Size) and §25.113 (Notice of Class Size)

§25.112 addresses the number of students that may be in a single kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class and limits that number to 22. The intent of this statute was to ensure that classrooms maintained a small teacher/student ratio under the belief that smaller classes led to improved achievement for students who benefited from more individualized teacher attention. While the maximum number of students in k-4 classrooms may be addressed by a state waiver, said waivers must be applied for annually and must be applied for by each district, each year. By seeking an exception from §25.112 the District would have flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation Designation and would not be required to seek waivers annually.

Research has shown that students with additional needs such as English Language Learners, students in poverty, and those with IEPs tend to benefit the most from smaller class sizes. By reducing class sizes for these students, we would likely slightly increase class sizes for other students. The district believes this arrangement will benefit student achievement more than the current situation.

At Graebner Elementary in SAISD, the school's leadership team found it unacceptable that their 5th grade bilingual teacher had to teach 34 students due to the 22:1 class size rule in grades K-4. By removing the cap, they will be able to create smaller class sizes for English Language Learners and other students with additional needs. No class in the lower grades should have to go above 24:1 and the entire faculty voted and approved this plan. Removing the 22:1 cap here should increase student achievement at this campus.

Waiver §25.113 is only sought as its notice requirements relate to 25.112.

b. §25.081 and §25.082 (Length of Instructional Day)

Both §25.081 and §25.082 address the length of the instructional day by limiting it to "420 minutes of instruction" (§25.081(e)) or "seven hours each day including intermissions and recesses" (§25.082(a)). While the intent of the Legislature was to standardize across all districts the amount of time students spent learning in a classroom, SAISD wishes to meet the goal of 75,600 minutes of instruction per year, but seeks an exemption from these statutes so that it may reach the 75,600 minute total in a more creative manner without being limited to either 420 minutes or seven

hours of instruction every day. The length of the instructional day cannot be changed absent the District becoming a District of Innovation.

As a district where 92% of students are economically disadvantaged, SAISD students are frequently coming in behind their affluent peers. The district needs to be able to lengthen and adjust the school day so students can have more time with teachers and teachers can have more built in time for professional development. By boosting teacher cooperation and planning time, not at the expense of student learning time, student achievement has increased in schools with longer days and more common planning time according to Farbman (2015). Most of the charters within the district's boundaries have longer school days and many families intentionally choose these schools for their longer days, which often is easier for working families.

At Lamar Elementary in SAISD, they plan on starting the day 45 minutes earlier, so that students can eat breakfast during the day without taking up limited instructional time. With the extra minutes, they plan to reallocate the time so that Wednesday afternoons are filled with time for professional development and professional learning communities. During that time, kids will stay on campus and engage in extracurricular activities with community partners. This different schedule should benefit teachers, students, and the whole community.

c. §25.0811 (First Day of Instruction)

SAISD seeks an exemption from the implementation of 25.0811 so as to obtain flexibility, should campuses or the District as a whole seek it, to begin instruction for students before the fourth (4^{th}) Monday in August. Texas has debated the school start date for three decades beginning in 1984 when the Legislature established September 1 as the uniform start date. In 1991, the Legislature repealed the uniform start date but reinstated it in 2001. In 2004, the Legislature amended the uniform start date to its current form. The argument has been that with schools starting earlier and earlier students and teachers are no longer getting a true summer break; however, Districts such as SAISD have seen that there is significant student regression over the summer and to truly have continuous learning and maximize student performance, districts should have the flexibility to begin school earlier than the 4^{th} Monday in August.

Most of the charters within the district's boundaries start two to three weeks earlier than SAISD. By moving up the start of the school year, the fall semester can be completed before Winter Break. Therefore, the first few weeks of January are not taken up by review and testing. That arrangement would benefit teachers and students.

II. Given Assumptions Regarding Compensation and Consensus-Building

a. Compensation

The District of Innovation status will have no effect on the District's per campus funding allocations. Campuses are expected to develop their innovation plans in a cost-effective manner. New personnel allocations will not be provided to campuses, however, the District will offer supplemental pay or stipends to teachers at campuses requesting additional planning time or extended school days. Supplemental pay of $25 per hour will be provided to teachers who are required to work beyond their normal work days for planning, professional development, and other activities where students are not present. Annual stipends of up to $3,500 will be provided to teachers at campuses with extended school days, where teachers are required to provide additional instruction to students on a daily basis.

b. Consensus-Building

Inclusion of our teachers and their feedback is critical to the success of the campus plans. The principal should consider including representatives from multiple stakeholder groups to develop the plan. If the plan includes any of the three "district of innovation designations" (class size, potentially increasing the instructional day and calendar year), teachers directly affected by the proposed plan will be required to participate in a blind vote. (Eighty percent of the affected teachers must approve the recommended change(s).)

SAISD's Future with the District of Innovation Designation

As campuses develop their future plans, some freedoms might be beneficial to all campuses and could be considered for inclusion in future revisions of the district's innovation plan while others may be specific to individual campuses. Additionally, every spring, school leadership will be encouraged to consider the creation of a campus innovation plan in an effort to increase student achievement.

Following the submission of the plans, a committee will be formed annually to review the plans for reasonableness and feasibility. Campuses may revise their plans based on the committee's feedback, the most current student data, or changes to staff and/or leadership. The district will continue to accept campus innovation plans up to the day teachers are scheduled to return for the new school year. This will allow for the development of plans that are more responsive and relevant to the students and staff who make up the school community from one year to the next.