



*Advocacy + Access  
+ Partnership = Opportunity*

## **SINTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**P.O. Box 1337 • 322 South Archer Street**

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***Dr. Chad Jones  
Superintendent***

*Dana Allen  
Assistant Superintendent  
for Curriculum/Support Services*

*Melissa Villarreal  
Assistant Superintendent  
for Business*

### **Sinton ISD Proposed District of Innovation Plan (Posted January 16, 2019)**

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842, which allows public school districts to declare exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code by becoming a designated District of Innovation. We feel this is a great opportunity for our local district to create a plan based on the needs of our students and community that could remain in effect for up to five years.

On December 17, 2018 during the regularly scheduled board meeting, the Sinton ISD Board of Trustees voted 7-0 to adopt a resolution to pursue becoming a District of Innovation. Also, on December 17, 2018, the Board of Trustees voted to approve pursuing designation as a District of Innovation and appointed the Local Innovation Committee to begin development of the plan. The committee met on January 9, 2019 to review, discuss, and begin development of the local innovation plan and met again on January 16, 2019 to finalize the proposed plan. The proposed plan was posted online for public viewing on January 16, 2019 and will remain online until February 14, 2019. The Local Innovation Committee will meet on February 14, 2019 to review the plan and obtain feedback in a public meeting. The Local Innovation Planning Committee will vote on the final version of the plan on February 14, 2019. On February 18, 2019 the Board of Trustees will review the plan and vote. If approved, the plan will be sent to the Texas Commissioner of Education for review.

#### **District of Innovation Timeline**

- December 17, 2018 - Board Meeting to consider the resolution. Approved a motion to pass a resolution with a vote of 7-0
- December 17, 2018 - Public Meeting to review District of Innovation with community
- December 17, 2018 - Board Meeting to vote to approve pursuing designation of District of Innovation. Approved a motion with a vote of 6-0
- January 9, 2019 - Local Innovation Planning Committee Meeting
- January 16, 2019 - Local Innovation Planning Committee Meeting
- January 16, 2019 - Posted Sinton ISD Local Innovation Plan for minimum of 30 days
- February 14, 2019 - Public Meeting to discuss and vote on Local Innovation Plan
- February 18, 2019 - Board Meeting to approve/reject the Local Innovation Plan
- February 19, 2019 – Sinton ISD Board of Trustees will notify the commissioner

### **Local Innovation Committee**

Dr. Chad Jones, Superintendent	Michelle Christner, Choir Director
Dana Allen, Assistant Superintendent/Parent	Omar Garcia, Middle School Teacher/Coach/Parent
Eileen Troup, School/Community Coordinator	Lori Trevino, Sinton Elementary Principal
Gina Guajardo, AVID Coordinator/Parent	Kristey Wiese, Sinton Elementary Teacher/Parent
Mary Lankford, STEM Coordinator	Stephanie Reagan, Sinton Elementary Teacher/Parent
Dan Smith, High School Principal	Holly Houser, Sinton Elementary Teacher/Parent
Brian Allen, High School Teacher	Luci Rodriguez, Welder Elementary Principal/Parent
Marta Garza, High School Teacher	Erica Reyna, Welder Elementary Teacher
Keith Talbert, High School Teacher	Kim Loreda, Welder Elementary Teacher
Jennifer Davis, Middle School Principal/Parent	Deseray Garcia, Welder Elementary Teacher/Parent
Elizabeth Moody, Middle School Teacher/Parent	Rosie Salinas, Instructional Technology Coordinator

### **Sinton ISD Board of Trustees**

Linda Rodriguez, President	Patrick Houser, Member
Carol Reagan, Vice-President	Sam Lankford, Member
Ethan Garza, Secretary	Danny Lorberau, Member
Jimmie Alaniz, Member	

## **Texas Education Code Exemptions**

The Local Innovation Committee reviewed the subchapters of the Texas Education Code to determine which permissible exemptions may benefit Sinton ISD students and staff.

### **Uniform Start Date (TEC §25.0811)**

#### Current Law

State law currently prohibits school districts from starting class before the fourth Monday in August, unless they are year-round districts.

#### Proposed

Sinton ISD would like to exempt TEC 25.0811, thus allowing us to start school prior to the fourth Monday of August. Sinton ISD would not start school before the third Monday in August.

#### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Children?

Starting one week earlier adds more instructional days prior to state testing in the spring. It balances the fall and spring semester minutes and allows periodic breaks throughout the school year. It ensures the school year will end prior to June. It also allows our calendar to better align with local colleges so our graduating class has time to prepare for their upcoming summer college courses. Professional development for teachers throughout the school year can be focused directly on what the students need at that point in time.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Teachers?

Professional development will be spread throughout the year, rather than having all of it before school starts. This way, professional development can be designed to meet the needs of teachers at various points during the year.

### Rationale for Exemption

The restriction of flexibility in the annual calendars prohibits the balance of days in the academic calendar. The flexibility to begin instruction earlier in August, based on the needs of the district and community, will allow a better balance between semesters, as well as more instructional days in the fall semester. The exemption would allow the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students, the school, and the community. Sinton ISD would also have the flexibility to align the academic calendar to accommodate those students in dual credit courses, thus working with our local colleges.

### **Teacher Certification (TEC §21.003, §21.044, §21.053, §21.055 and §21.057)**

#### Current Law

State law states that 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 a 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.

#### Proposed

Sinton ISD will maintain its current expectation for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who have knowledge or life experiences in the area and is able to perform the duties assigned to that position.

All certified positions will be posted for a minimum of two weeks and if no suitable applicant is found, campus principals may submit a request for local certification to the superintendent. The principal must specify the reason for the request and list any life experience or credentials the applicant possesses that would qualify that individual to teach the proposed subject. Any non-certified hires will be required to attend professional development in classroom management, components of effective instruction, and differentiating instruction for learners. They will also be assigned a mentor teacher with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience who will assist them with their instructional planning. Any non-certified hires will be required to meet the same requirements of all employees (background checks, reference checks, etc.). The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first Board meeting following the assignment.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Students?

This exemption will allow flexibility to add coherent sequences using local practitioners and business people as instructors. Therefore, students would benefit from the knowledge and expertise of an instructor with real-life professional or industry experience. Additionally, students may have the opportunity to earn certifications or endorsements.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Teachers?

Teachers who are certified in a specific content area may have professional experience from another field, prior to their teaching experience. This exemption would possibly allow these teachers to share their expertise with students in our district and add to our course offerings. The added benefit of hands-on experiences will open discussion between students and teachers, allowing the teacher to exemplify the relevance of their instruction in all classes.

### Rationale for Exemption

Sinton ISD believes school district leadership should decide what is best for its students in determining the candidate most suited to teach our students. As a rural community and school, the current requirements for certification inhibit the District's ability to hire personnel with professional and/or industry experience to teach academic courses that have limited certified applicants. In order to provide more students the opportunity to take such courses and obtain professional certifications, the District seeks to establish its own local qualification requirements for such courses. Any uncertified teacher will be on a one year, non-Chapter 21 contract and the position will be posted each year to look for a certified candidate for that position.

### **Contract Service Days (TEC §21.401)**

#### Current Law

Current education law located in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a ten-month contract equivalent to 187 days.

#### Proposed

Sinton ISD would like to more closely align teacher contract days with the student calendar by reducing the number of teacher days, by up to five days, from 187 with no effect on teacher salaries. The exact number of required teacher days would be dependent upon the specific calendar for that specific school year, but would fall between 182 and 187 days.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Students?

The number one predictor of student success is an outstanding classroom teacher, and this added benefit will assist with the recruitment and retention of outstanding teachers. The added stability in instructional staff is beneficial to student learning.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Teachers?

This proposal could increase the daily rate the district pays teachers. This will enhance teacher recruitment and retention, therefore putting the district on a more level playing field with surrounding districts. It will also align the required number of teacher days more closely with the number of required student minutes.

### Rationale for Exemption

With the passage of §25.081 which changed the required days of instruction to minutes the law did not address contract days for 10-month contract employees. The determination of how many days are required to fulfill an employee's contract should be a local decision. This is a benefit that will help us hire and retain good teachers in Sinton ISD.

## **Inter-district Transfers (TEC §25.001)**

### Current Law

A district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC 25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year. Sinton ISD 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.

### Proposed

The District is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. If a transfer student commits an egregious offense, has a pattern of misbehavior over time or falls below the TEA truancy standards for attendance, the campus principal may recommend to the superintendent that the student's transfer be revoked.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Students?

This change would help assure that we have a productive, safe environment that is conducive to learning for our students.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Teachers?

This change would help assure that teachers have a productive, safe teaching environment

### Rationale for Exemption

Exempting TEC §25.001 will allow our district to revoke a student transfer when their discipline or attendance becomes a detrimental to Sinton ISD.

## **Probationary Contracts (TEC §21.102b)**

### Current Law

For experienced teachers new to the district, 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.

### Proposed

For experienced principals, teachers, counselors, librarians, or nurses new to Sinton ISD that have been employed in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to three years from the first day of employment with Sinton ISD.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Students?

This exemption will help us assure that we have the absolute best teachers possible in every classroom, thus helping our students be more successful and productive.

### How does this benefit Sinton ISD Teachers?

A few months is just not enough time for administrators to effectively evaluate staff who are new to the district, so this exemption will allow them time to effectively evaluate and provide those new teachers with the feedback, resources and training they need to be as effective as possible.

### Rationale for Exemption

One of the most critical decisions an administrator makes is the decision to move someone from a probationary contract to a term contract. This exemption will allow our administrators ample time to evaluate and, where needed, remediate before having to make this decision. A one-year probationary period is not a sufficient amount of time to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Currently, contracts for Sinton ISD employees occur in April, which demands that employment decisions must be made with very little time for evaluating teacher effectiveness and prior to receiving state assessment results.