

Act Now for Our Future 2019 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

#ActNowForOurFuture



INNOVATE

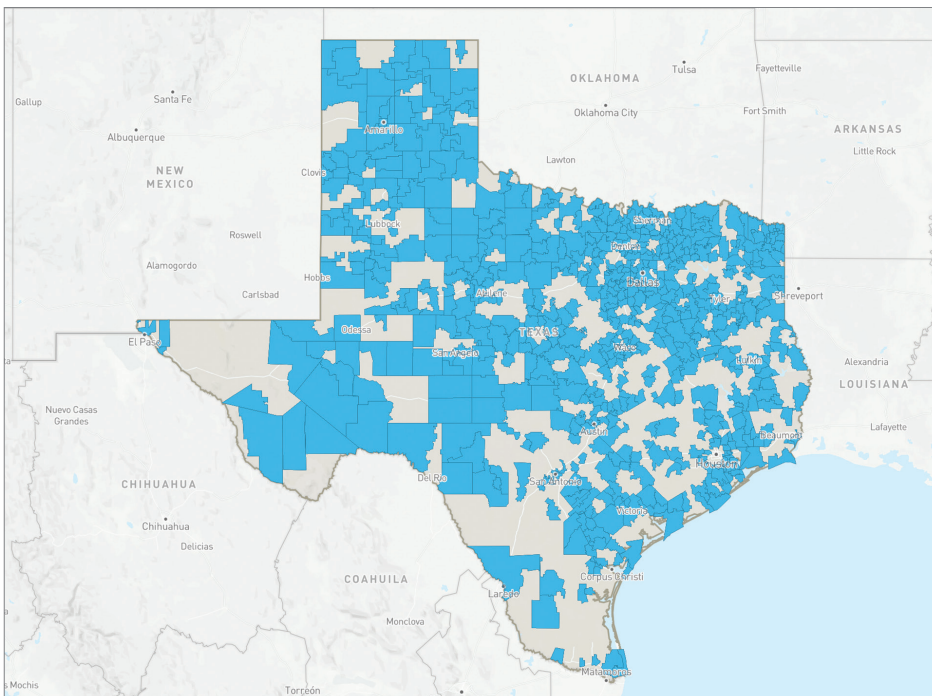
Districts of Innovation

The Districts of Innovation law empowers school districts with tools to make decisions based on community and student needs.

What are Districts of Innovation (DOI)?

Since 2015, the Districts of Innovation (DOI) law has allowed school districts to access the same Texas Education Code exemptions as charter schools.

The DOI process helps districts improve student performance by accessing exemptions that free up resources or allow more flexible services. Like charters, DOI districts are still subject to required state curriculum and assessments, accountability ratings, the school finance system, and federal requirements. The statute requires a plan specifying the exemptions chosen, a public notice and hearing, and a two-thirds vote of the elected school board.



Districts of Innovation Across Texas¹

Nearly 800 districts have adopted DOI plans since 2015 (highlighted in blue).

What kinds of exemptions are available through DOI?

The Texas Education Agency is required to collect information on DOI exemptions. To date, nearly 800 districts have exempted themselves from more than 100 state requirements.

The most common exemption used by districts is from the statute regulating school start date. Approximately 800 districts have claimed that ability to determine their school calendar in accordance with their local needs.

The Commissioner of Education has notified the legislature that the school boards representing a majority of the students in the state have voted by a super-majority to access this exemption, providing feedback on the proliferation of state requirements.

Other common exemptions claimed are from certification for teachers in Career and Technology courses, the mandated probationary period for new teachers, maximum class sizes, and limits on student transfers between districts.

How does the DOI process work?

The DOI process may be started either by a school board, or by a majority of the district-level advisory committee. The school board is required to hold a public hearing, after which it may appoint a local committee to draft an “Innovation Plan” for the district. The proposed plan must be available on the district’s website for 30 days and be approved by the district-level advisory committee before being approved by a vote of the school board. An Innovation Plan may be valid for up to five years and may be amended or renewed by following the same process.

Are there safeguards to protect students and parents?

The DOI statute recognizes that districts must maintain basic services and cannot neglect any student accountability group. A district must have an acceptable rating in the state accountability system to begin the process. The statute empowers the Commissioner to terminate or require modification of a DOI plan if the district has an unacceptable accountability or financial rating for two consecutive years. The Commissioner is required to terminate the plan if poor performance extends for three years.

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Maintain the ability of school districts to innovate with the same flexibility as charter schools through a local District of Innovation process.



References

- ¹ Texas Education Agency Districts of Innovation Data. Retrieved from https://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Schools/District_Initiatives/Districts_of_Innovation/

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