

**Local Innovation Plan**  
**Santa Gertrudis Independent School**  
**District**  
**District of Innovation 2017-2022**



Approved March 29, 2017 by the SGISD Board of Trustees



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## **Santa Gertrudis Independent School District Local Innovation Plan**

### **I. Introduction**

The 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session passed House Bill 1842, allowing Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and thus permitting exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. Santa Gertrudis ISD seeks to become a District of Innovation, in an effort to transform systemic improvement to better serve and accommodate the diverse and unique needs of small rural-connected stakeholders, including students, staff, parents and community members. The distinction allows the District increased local control over District operations to improve the quality of services benefiting all stakeholders.

A petition to pursue the development of a local innovation plan was initiated by the Superintendent Teacher Round Table for District Improvement (SRTDI) on November 15, 2017. On February 7, 2017, Dr. Seymour held a District meeting to share information regarding the District of Innovation process and the District's intention to seek permission from the Santa Gertrudis ISD Board of Trustees to pursue designation as a District of Innovation. The petition initiated by SRTDI was presented to the Santa Gertrudis ISD Board of Trustees with an 100% in-favor response on February 15, 2017. In turn, a resolution to initiate the process of Santa Gertrudis ISD becoming a District of Innovation was adopted by the Board of Trustees on February 15, 2017.

On February 15, 2017, the Santa Gertrudis ISD Board of Trustees appointed the Superintendent Round Table for District Improvement amended to include additional stakeholders to serve as the District Innovation Plan Committee. The team was assigned the role of developing a cohesive local innovative plan to improve the outcomes of all stakeholders. The District Innovation Plan Committee held a planning session on February 28, 2017, to discuss and develop the draft local innovation plan. The District Innovation Plan Committee considered multiple data points in an effort to construct a local innovation plan to bring about systemic change in Santa Gertrudis ISD.

On March 25, 2017, a public hearing was held to discuss the Local Innovation Plan to include reviewing public comments received from the required 30 day posting, recommendations from our attorney, and recommendations received from the accreditation department of the Texas Education Agency. Based on the feedback that was received, no major changes were necessary although clarifications based on feedback were made. The District Innovation Plan Committee reached a consensus and 100% of the members in attendance voted to forward the plan to the Santa Gertrudis ISD Board of Trustees for approval consideration.

On March 29, 2017, the Santa Gertrudis ISD Board of Trustees voted to approve the Santa Gertrudis ISD District of Innovation Plan with 100% in favor of the plan.



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The Santa Gertrudis ISD Local Innovation Plan is for five years from the date of Board of Trustee approval (March 29, 2017), beginning in the 2017-2018 school year and ending in the 2021-2022 school year. The local innovation plan may be terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees at any time in accordance with the law. With the exception of the laws applying to the school calendar, each law proposed for exemption shall continue to apply until local policies are adopted that implement the local innovation plan. The District Innovation Plan Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the local innovation plan and provide updates and/or necessary modifications to the Board of Trustees on a regular basis.



## II. Timeline

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Activity / Task</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
November	Superintendent Teacher Round Table for District Improvement (STRTDI) discusses rules and process for becoming an Innovation District.	November 15, 2017
February	Superintendent Teacher Round Table for District Improvement (STRTDI) members sign and indicate level of support towards submitting a petition to the Board of Trustees to pursue designation as a District of Innovation.	November 15, 2017
	Board Meeting- Board votes to adopt Resolution to initiate consideration for being designated as an Innovation District.	February 15, 2017
	Board Meeting – Board holds public meeting.	February 15, 2017
	Board Meeting – Board votes to appoint the District Innovation Plan Committee, the current Santa Gertrudis District Education Improvement Council, to develop a draft local innovation plan.	February 15, 2017
	Board Meeting – The Board delegates authority to the Superintendent to notify the Commissioner of Education of its intention to vote on adopting the final local innovation plan	February 15, 2017
	The District Innovation Plan Committee convenes a planning session to review data, determine focus areas, and develop a proposed local innovation plan.	February 28, 2017
March	District Innovation Plan Committee hosts public meeting to consider final version of the proposed Santa Gertrudis ISD District Innovation Plan.	March 25, 2017
	District presents the proposed District Innovation Plan to Board of Trustees for approval with a unanimous vote.	March 29, 2017
	Post proposed District Innovation Plan on District website.	March 30, 2017
	District sends approved plan and Figure 19 TAC 102.1307(d) to the Commissioner of Education.	May 2, 2017



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### III. District Innovation Planning Committee

- a. Dr. Corey Seymour, Superintendent
- b. Dr. Veronica Alfaro, Ex. Dir of School Improvement & Instruction
- c. Dr. Melly Guerra, Director of Special Programs & Compliance
- d. Mr. Les Dragon, Principal
- e. Mr. Adam Canales, Interim Principal
- f. Linda Garcia-Mireles, Teach
- g. Marcy Cavazos, Teacher
- h. Melissa Garcia, Teacher
- i. Elizabeth Brown, Teacher
- j. Lillie Ruiz, Teacher
- k. Courtney Mrazek, Teacher
- l. Corina Moreno, Teacher
- m. Susan Rutherford, Teacher
- n. Margie Yaklin, Paraprofessional
- o. Dave Delaney, Local Business Representative\*
- p. Amanda Ramirez, Parent \*

\*Members added to the committee.

### IV. Comprehensive Educational Program

The Local Innovation Plan's comprehensive education program is guided by and aligned to Santa Gertrudis ISD's vision, mission, beliefs, and strategic goals.

- a. **District Vision:** The vision of Santa Gertrudis Independent School District is to develop successful high school and college graduates who will serve as the next generation of leaders in our country. Santa Gertrudis Independent School District ensures students are on a path to college and career starting in the primary grades. We believe all children, regardless of race, background, or socioeconomic status can achieve at high levels. Through a structured, disciplined and academically rigorous environment, our students will be prepared to live a life of scholarship, independence, and honor. By exposing students to life's opportunities, urgently pursuing rigorous academic goals, and laying the foundations for focused dedication, our students will be prepared to succeed in college, career and beyond.
- b. **District Mission:** The mission of Santa Gertrudis Independent School District is to engage in unique educational experiences and opportunities for student success. Through classroom technology, rigorous instruction, hard work, and focused dedication, Santa Gertrudis Independent School District produces scholars ready for the demands of high school, college and career.



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V. **District Philosophy:**

a. **All students have the ability to achieve academic success**

Core to our mission, we hold the unequivocal belief that all children, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or incoming academic placement can achieve at high levels when provided with the appropriate structures and supports. It is the fundamental right of all children in this country to receive a high-quality, free, public education.

b. **Quality teachers, with a focus on data and reflection, drive exceptional results.**

We must invest in exceptional teachers to achieve exceptional results. Though our mission, curriculum and school culture are the foundation from which our students will excel, we must recruit, support, and retain the nation's highest quality teachers. We firmly believe that this investment is critical to the success of our students.

c. **A culture of respect and discipline is core to student success.**

A highly disciplined school environment allows students to learn and teachers to teach. It is our responsibility to implement a culture of discipline, respect, and hard work every minute of every day. School staff explicitly teach values like respect, integrity, and hard work. Through clear rules and constant positive reinforcement, all Santa Gertrudis students learn to take responsibility for themselves, their school, and their community.

d. **District Motto:** "Hard work and focused dedication"

VI. **Strategic Goals:**

- We will create a transparent environment in which the teacher is an active facilitator and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century framework is paramount.
- We will incorporate a variety of individual performance tasks in our assessments.
- We will measure accountability through continuous growth and mastery of goals for individual students and student groups.
- We will only foster a climate that adds value.
- We will provide a clear and attainable framework of learning that is engaging, flexible, and relevant that utilizes a full range of student capabilities.
- We will grow interconnected partnerships within the extended communities.
- We will capitalize on the innate digital abilities of our students.



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**a. Focus on High School, College and Career**

We believe that high school, college and career preparation starts immediately upon enrollment. Every student in SGISD will understand that their hard work and focused dedication will prepare them to attend, succeed in and graduate from high school and college. College and career is infused in every facet of the school: from classrooms named after staff alma maters to college field lessons.

**b. Intense Focus on Literacy, Technology and Math**

Studies show that success in literacy, technology and math in school are the strongest predictors of success in college. SGISD students spend extensive time in all three core areas – EVERY DAY!

**c. Tutoring for All Students**

The academic expectations are rigorous at SGISD. Many students may enter performing behind grade level, and even those students who start on grade level are likely to struggle somewhere along their path to college. As a result, SGISD provides small group and/or individual tutoring for struggling students. All students participating in extra-curricular activities must attend tutorials before attending practice, if needed. Much of this tutoring time is built into the academic school day through pullouts. Additional tutoring for struggling students will be available before/after school and, if necessary, during Saturday School.

**d. High Behavioral Expectations**

We firmly believe that learning cannot occur in chaos. All students at SGISD are held to high behavioral expectations. A detailed Code of Conduct, with a reward and punishment system, is adhered to in all classrooms. The highest performing schools in the country continue to prove that students learn best in a structured and consistent environment. We also believe good behavior should be explicitly taught and rewarded. Staff should go out of the way to recognize students who exhibit positive and scholarly behavior.

**e. Frequent Communication with Parents**

At SGISD, we believe parents are critical partners in their student's education. Parents/guardians receive weekly progress reports detailing student behavior and academics. Staff contact families, at minimum, once every two weeks to discuss how their students are progressing. Additionally, it is our policy to respond to all non-emergency phone calls and emails within 24 hours of receipt.



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## **VII. Santa Gertrudis ISD District of Innovation District-Wide Focus Areas**

Santa Gertrudis Independent School District aims to ensure a minimum of one year of academic progress in all core subject areas and full engagement in advanced, innovative, and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) courses to include career and technical education to maximize opportunities for college and career choice. Small Rural and military-connected students continue to face challenges related to course offerings and their ability to fully engage due to course timelines, social- emotional challenges related to transitions, and limited course availability related to district size and location. Our goal is to alleviate these obstacles through innovative approaches.

The District Innovation Plan Committee chose to focus our plan on innovative systemic changes that will yield results for all stakeholders: Students, staff, parents, and community members. District of Innovation focus areas include, but are not limited to:

- System-wide practices to support social-emotional growth in small rural-and military-connected students.
  - i. Multi-tiered systems of support to include access to relevant counseling services to include school counselors, Rural and Military Support Transition Consultants, and behavior consultants.
  - ii. Increased opportunities to engage socially and professionally with community agencies.
  - iii. Increased opportunities to grow through ongoing engagement in volunteer opportunities.
  
- System-wide practices to support access to advanced and aligned curriculum for Small Rural and military-connected students.
  - i. Data-driven decision-making procedures.
  - ii. Differentiated instruction.
  - iii. High-yield instructional strategies.
  - iv. Participation in assessment bridge classes.
  - v. Professional Learning Communities.
  - vi. Vertically and horizontally aligned curriculum.





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- System-wide practices to support access to 21st – Century career offerings through participation in industry-applicable career and technology education.
    - i. Opportunities to receive course credit through participation in career based engagement.
    - ii. Increased opportunities for industry-based certifications through career and technology education.

### **VIII. Exemptions Requested in the Texas Education Code to Benefit Identified Focus Areas**

#### **a. § 25.0811 (EB LEGAL) First Day of Instruction- States that a School District may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August.**

##### **i. Innovation Strategy**

1. Flexible Calendar – Santa Gertrudis ISD will begin instruction no earlier than the first week of August in an effort to create greater flexibility in the school calendar. Although small rural-and military related transitions are somewhat unpredictable, there is a pattern of transitions that occur in alignment with winter break. Due to this pattern of transitions, it has been our practice, based on community input, to complete first-semester course offerings prior to the beginning of winter break. This practice allows military-connected and small rural students a concurrent transition.

This practice also supports Santa Gertrudis ISD’s ability to reduce stressors related to grades and course completion, a strong contribution to positive social–emotional growth.

2. Balanced Semesters – In an effort to support student ability to complete course work prior to transitions that occur in conjunction with winter break, the fall semester has significantly fewer days than the spring semester. Flexible start dates allow the District to ensure that fall semester courses have the same opportunity to provide curricular depth and complexity as provided in the spring semester.

3. Participation in College Courses – By having flexibility in the start and end of the school year, students will be able to enroll in college courses that may start in early June, thereby increasing college and career readiness. There is also a greater opportunity for students to take dual credit courses that match a college academic calendar: which, includes the period of intersession.



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**ii. Local Guidelines:**

1. The District Calendar Committee will receive staff and community input to build the school calendar.
2. The draft calendar will be posted for additional feedback.
3. The District Calendar Committee will consider feedback and recommend a school calendar for Board approval.
4. The recommended school calendar is subject to Board approval.

- c. § 25.112 **Class Size and Student Teacher Ratios (EEB LEGAL) (TEC 25.111, 112, & 113)** – 25.111 requires each school district to employ the number of teachers necessary to maintain an average ratio of not less than one teacher for each group of 20 students. 25.112- requires districts to maintain a class size of twenty– two students or less for kindergarten – fourth-grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the District must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. 25.113 requires that a letter is sent home to each parent in the section that exceeds the 22:1 ratio, informing them the waiver has been submitted.

**i. Innovation Strategy**

1. **Flexible Class Sizes** – Student mobility and the high number of transfer students presents a significant challenge to Santa Gertrudis ISD’s ability to meet class size requirements. Waivers to required class size limitations are often submitted when highly-effective, experienced, and culturally adept teachers are not available for employment during irregular times of need.
2. **Flexible Instructional Arrangements** – To promote equitable opportunities for student growth, class ratios will be conducive to providing the instructional support that all learners require.

For example:

- a. Struggling learners may require smaller instructional ratios.
- b. Academically advanced students may have appropriate and innovative learning opportunities which include collaborative and independent activities in ratios exceeding 22:1.
- c. Students moving into the district during certain seasons, due to employment opportunities for their parents may also create a ratio that exceeds the recommendation by the state.

**ii. Local Guidelines**

1. Santa Gertrudis ISD will attempt to keep all K-4th core classrooms to a 22:1 ratio. However, in the event the class size / student to teacher ratios exceed this ratio, the following will occur:



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- a. The Campus Principal will notify the Superintendent of the current ratios with a recommendation based on the best interest of the students.
  - b. The Superintendent will notify the Board of current ratios.
  - c. Core classroom ratios should not exceed 24:1.
  - d. In the event a K-4th core classroom exceeds a 22:1 ratio, the campus will notify the parents of the students in the classroom and inform them of the situation.
  - e. **§ 21.102 b(DCA LEGAL) Chapter 21 Employment Contracts (Probationary Contracts)** - Currently, experienced teachers and other certified personnel new to the District have a probationary period that 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.
    - i. **Innovation Strategy**
      1. **Probationary Contracts** – For experienced teachers and other certified personnel new to Santa Gertrudis ISD who 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 date of hire. Partial years would not count toward the full year requirement. This will allow the District more time to evaluate a staff member’s effectiveness.
    - ii. **Local Guidelines**
      1. Campus Principals will inform the individual certified personnel of performance standards that warrant improvement as determined by the evaluation tool and other performance-based documents.
      2. During the first year of employment, Campus Principals will make a recommendation to the Superintendent to non-renew, continue employment on a probationary contract for a second year, or offer a term contract.
      3. The Superintendent will determine if the decision is in the best interest of the District and make a recommendation to the Board.
      4. The Board may terminate a probationary contract or extend the probationary contract to a second or third year and shall give notice to the employee no later than the tenth day before the last day of instruction required in the contract.
  - f. **§ 21.003 Teacher Certification / Local Teaching Permit**- Currently, Districts must hire certified teachers and if a qualified certified teacher cannot be located, the District must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency or hire the teacher through a School District teaching permit.



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### **i. Innovation Strategy**

1. Expanded CTE Offerings – A certified individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach vocational skills or courses. The Principal will submit the request to the Superintendent with the individual’s credentials. The Superintendent will approve or deny the request based on whether the individual will be an asset for students. The Superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees. These exemptions would allow greater latitude for Santa Gertrudis ISD to hire personnel for Career and Technical Education hard to fill positions and to hire nontraditional candidates who bring authentic field and industry knowledge and skills which would provide students with unparalleled learning experiences. Although it is the District’s intent to limit the use of this exemption, the current statute inhibits the District’s ability to recruit and employ highly qualified professionals with industry and field experience to successfully teach Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. Potential areas of local certification may include, but are not limited to: culinary arts, automotive technology, cosmetology, criminal justice, engineering, Cisco networking, veterinary science, manufacturing, and media courses. These individuals often hold multiple certifications in their areas of expertise that would be far more beneficial in their ability to prepare students for success in these areas than would a Texas teaching certificate.

### **ii. Local Guidelines**

1. Local teaching permits will be issued for CTE teaching positions.
2. Local teaching permits will only be issued for hard to fill positions.
3. The District will establish local criteria such as, but not limited to, demonstrated subject matter expertise, any combination of work experience, years of experience, qualifications, college degree, training and education or industry certification related to the subject matter he or she will be teaching, to qualify for a local teaching permit.
4. Campus Principals will submit candidates to the Superintendent with credentials. The Superintendent will determine whether it is in the best interest of the students to locally certify the individual.
5. Candidates will be required to go through the established hiring process and will be thoroughly vetted to ensure they have not surrendered any teaching certificates in the past or been terminated from a teaching position for reasons unacceptable to the District. Candidates would receive pedagogy and classroom management training.
6. Local teaching permits are only valid for one year but may be renewed annually based on District need.
7. The Superintendent will notify the Board prior to beginning employment.
8. Parents will receive notification of teacher credentials.



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- g. **§ 37.0012 (FO Legal and Local) Student Discipline Provisions** – Senate Bill 107 requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

**i. Innovation Strategy**

1. Administrator Responsibility – This exemption would allow Santa Gertrudis ISD to abstain from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. Campus Principals and Assistant Principals already serve in this capacity and a requirement to designate someone for this position is not necessary.

**ii. Local Guidelines**

1. The District will continue its current practice of parent notification to include prompt notification from teachers and staff. An administrator will provide appropriate follow up regarding all matters of discipline.

- h. **§ 25.092 (FEC Local) Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade** – requires the District to issue class credit or a final grade for a class based on “seat time” rather than based on content mastery. The requested exemption from § 25.092 does not in any way impact or change existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. Moreover, opting out of § 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher’s right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code § 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher’s right to assign grades in accordance with TEC § 28.0216

**Innovation Strategy**

1. Flexible Learning Environments - The District will design and implement more responsive learning environments, where blended and personalized learning opportunities are available. Blended learning occurs when instruction is delivered through a combination of time in class and time spent learning online.
2. Flexible Learning Opportunities – The District will not penalize students who miss class due to legitimate school activities and/or family issues that may prevent students from meeting the 90% class attendance rule, as long as mastery of content can be documented. This will address the social and emotional issues that the District encounters due to unforeseen transitions and facilitate opportunities for students to engage with the community and social agencies.



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ii. **Local Guidelines**

1. The District will investigate the abundant opportunities for active learning outside the classroom in order to receive credit for content mastery, when not present for 90% of the days a class is offered. The Local Innovation Committee encourages the District to explore other avenues by which a student can achieve mastery, without being penalized academically. The exemption would allow the District to provide innovative options to promote student engagement in course material in flexible ways, ultimately allowing learning to happen anytime, anywhere, even apart from the traditional brick and mortar classroom.

2. **Enrolled Students:** A campus committee comprised of teachers and staff with knowledge of the student will review the academic record of a student who has not met the 90% attendance statute. The student will demonstrate evidence of mastery such as a portfolio, assessment and/or other documentation deemed appropriate by the assigned committee and the assigned subject matter teacher of record. The subject area teacher of record will determine the final course grade for the student with committee input as appropriate. Credit grades received in this manner are not subject to receive weighted grading.

3. **Transitioning Students:** A campus committee comprised of teachers and staff with knowledge of the student will review the academic record of a student requesting to complete a course in a less than 90% attendance timeframe. The subject area teacher of record will establish course completion objectives that demonstrate evidence of mastery such as a portfolio, assessment and/or other documentation deemed appropriate with input from the assigned committee. With the support of a committee, a timeline for course completion will be developed to include interim progress checks. The subject area teacher of record will determine the final course grade for the student with committee input as appropriate. Credit grades received in this manner are not subject to receive weighted grading.

- i. **§ 21.3541. Appraisal and Professional Development System for Principals,** (a) The commissioner by rule shall establish and shall administer a comprehensive appraisal and professional development system for principals. **§ 21.354. Appraisal of Certain Administrators,** (a) The commissioner shall adopt a recommended appraisal process and criteria on which to appraise the performance of various classifications of school administrators. The criteria must be based on job-related performance, **§21.351. RECOMMENDED APPRAISAL PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE CRITERIA.** (a) The commissioner shall adopt a recommended appraisal process and criteria on which to appraise the performance of teachers. The criteria must be based on observable,



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job-related behavior, including: (1) teachers' implementation of discipline management procedures; and (2) the performance of teachers' students., and § 21.352. **Local Role.** (a) In appraising teachers, each school district shall use:(1) the appraisal process and performance criteria developed by the commissioner; or (2) an appraisal process and performance criteria: (A) developed by the district- and campus-level committees established under Section 11.251; (B) containing the items described by Sections 21.351(a)(1) and (2); and (C) adopted by the board of trustees.

**Innovation Strategy:**

A committee of teachers, staff and administrators will develop an Appraisal and Development System that incorporates the requirements of the state but also incorporates the uniqueness and additional expectations of the district.

**Local Guidelines:**

All teachers and administrators will be properly trained. The expectations for the teachers will be aligned with the expectations of administrators. The criteria will include both instructional practice criteria and professional expectations in addition to guidelines suggested by the state. A high priority will be placed on student growth.