



Innovation Districts: an opportunity or a curse? Your SBDM committee can shape the answer

In 2015, the Legislature passed a law that allows a local school board to adopt a “District of Innovation” designation for its district. This title requires a two-thirds vote of the board, and exempts the district from most education code provisions. Although some districts are exploring the Innovation District concept, none have initiated the formal adoption process or filed plans with the education commissioner.

To adopt an Innovation District plan, school districts must meet several criteria:

- The district must have a minimum accountability rating of acceptable.
- The board must vote to develop an Innovation District plan and make the plan public for 30 days before holding a public meeting to consider adoption.
- The board cannot adopt an Innovation District plan until a majority of the district wide site based decision making (SBDM) committee has voted for the plan.

The curse?

The Innovation District designation can exempt the district from state standards for class size limits, educator contracts and employee rights in chapters 21 and 22, parental rights under Chapter 26, and the rights in disciplinary cases set out in Chapter 37. These standards protect the interests of students, teachers, and parents. Most observers feel the worst-case scenario is unlikely, but TSTA locals must be vigilant in opposing such actions.

The opportunity?

Educators with a voice in an SBDM committee can shape the discussion to promote proven and sustainable innovative models, such as community schools, and work with parents and community members within the SBDM committee to advocate for district adoption.

Options for local action

- On offense: educators must seek election to SBDM committees and work with parents and community members to develop policy positions that maintain the rights and protections of the existing education code.
- Locals should call for both formal and informal involvement in the planning process before the SBDM committee votes. If a school board refuses to seek educator involvement in the process, the local should take appropriate action against the board’s decision.
- On defense: educators should enumerate standards that merit protection and present their list to their superintendent, SBDM committee, and school board.
- Before an Innovation District plan goes to the school board, where a 2/3rds vote is required for approval, members should incorporate local, political, and community issues into local organizing efforts.

For statutory language on Innovation Districts go to:

<http://tsta.org/sites/default/files/InnovationDistrictStatutoryRequirements.pdf>