

La Pryor Independent School District

Local Innovation Plan 2024-2028



INTRODUCTION

House Bill (HB) 1842, passed during the 84th Legislative Session, permits Texas public school districts to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Flexibility:** Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices that support local needs, including exemptions from certain mandates such as the uniform school start date and required minutes of instruction.
- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a District of Innovation Plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.

The La Pryor Independent School District's Board of Trustees ("Board") renewed the District of Innovation Plan to increase local control over District operations and to support innovation and local initiatives. The renewal of this plan seeks to increase the District's flexibility in order to improve educational outcomes for the benefit of students and the community. A District of Innovation Committee was assembled to convene and discuss the current plan and its continued effectiveness. The Committee met on September 5, 2023 to discuss and make adjustments to the current Innovation Plan ("Plan").

TERM

The term of the Plan is for five years, beginning December 19, 2023 and ending December 19, 2028, unless terminated or amended earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. If, within the term of this Plan, other areas of operations are to be considered for flexibility as part of HB 1842, a new committee will convene to consider and propose additional exemptions in the form of an amendment to the Plan. Any amendment adopted by the Board will not extend the term of this Plan. The District may not implement two separate plans at any one time.

Timeline of Events:

August 30, 2023: District Committee members are offered selection and participation

District of Innovation Committee Members:

<i>Dr. William D. Arevalo</i>	<i>Superintendent</i>
<i>Alba Marrero</i>	<i>District Principal</i>
<i>Rodney Bunsen</i>	<i>Assistant Principal Elementary</i>
<i>Dr. Mayshell Calderon</i>	<i>Assistant Principal Secondary</i>
<i>Natalie Paes</i>	<i>District Instructional Coach</i>
<i>Claudia Garcia</i>	<i>Federal Programs Director</i>
<i>Miriam Del Rio-Castillo</i>	<i>Finance Director, La Pryor ISD</i>
<i>Roque Olascoaga</i>	<i>Director of Technology</i>
<i>Eva Gonzalez</i>	<i>Tax Collector & Accounts receivable - La Pryor ISD/Parent</i>
<i>Clarissa Diaz</i>	<i>District Administrative Assistant – La Pryor/Parent</i>
<i>Diana Guerrero</i>	<i>Secondary Teacher</i>
<i>Alma Rangel</i>	<i>High School Counselor</i>
<i>Josie Castillo</i>	<i>SPED Director</i>
<i>Elisa Lozano</i>	<i>Elementary Administrative Assistant – La Pryor Parent</i>
<i>Julia Ramos</i>	<i>HR Manager/Payroll</i>
<i>Selina Ramos</i>	<i>Parent</i>

September 5, 2023: District of Innovation Committee meets to Review Plan

September 19, 2023: District of Innovation Committee holds public hearing and votes on District of Innovation plan. Plan posted for public view for **30** days and Superintendent notifies Commissioner of intent for board to vote on Plan

October 25, 2023 Board approves the renewal of the La Pryor ISD District of Innovation Plan

November 3, 2023 Plan is posted on district website in accordance with TEC, 12A.0071.

November 10, 2023 No later than 15th day after board of trustee approval district shall provide a link to TEA of the DOI plan for posting on agency website.

AREAS OF INNOVATION

With regard to each area of innovation, the district declares exemption from the listed statutory provisions, as well as any implementing rules or regulations promulgated pursuant to those statutory provisions by any state agency or entity, including but not limited to the Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency, State Board for Educator Certification, and State Board of Education.

1. School Start and End Date

Exemption from: TEC §25.0811; TEC §25.0812

Related Board Policies: EB (LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin student instruction before the 4th Monday of August. TEC §25.0812 states that a school district may not schedule the last day of school before May 15. The current process allows no flexibility in the design of annual calendars to fit the needs of the community or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees who represent community interests in this matter.

Previously, districts had the option of applying to TEA for a waiver to start earlier, even as early as the 2nd Monday in August. Several years ago, the legislature took away all waivers and dictated that districts may not begin until the 4th Monday, with no exceptions.

Innovation Strategies

- a. Increased local control of the instructional calendar will allow the district to be responsive to community needs.
- b. Relief from the statute will allow LPISD to develop a calendar that addresses student instruction and focused professional development in conjunction with the new instructional minute's requirement, rather than days.
- c. Alignment of the District calendar with local universities, local districts with shared services arrangements, etc. will be possible.

2. Kindergarten – Grade 4 Class Size Reporting Requirement

Exemption from: TEC §25.112; TEC §25.113

Related Board Policies: EEB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.112 requires school districts to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for

kindergarten through 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. These waivers are never rejected by TEA. This is a bureaucratic step that serves no purpose.

TEC §25.113 requires school districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this notice.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. LPISD believes in a low student to teacher ratio in all of its classrooms, and will begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a student to teacher ratio of 22:1. In the event that any class size exceeds a 24:1 ratio during the school year for longer than 30 days, the Superintendent will report this information to the Board of Trustee and the campus will send notification to parents of students in that class. Decisions regarding appropriate student to teacher ratios will be made at the local level, taking into consideration the age and grade level of the students, the subject matter of the class, the needs of individual teachers and student groups, and the availability of additional instructional staff members.

- b. A TEA waiver request will not be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

3. Teacher Certification

Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053; TEC §21.057

Relevant Board Policies: DBA (LEGAL)/(LOCAL); DK (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §21.003 states that a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern or trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor 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 for Educator Certification. This system is burdensome and does not take into account the unique financial and/or instructional needs of the district.

TEC §21.053 requires a teacher to present his or her certificate to the district before their employment contract will be binding, and prohibits the district from paying an educator for teaching if the educator does not hold a valid certificate at the time.

TEC §21.057 requires that the district provide written notice to parents if an

inappropriately certified or uncertified teacher is assigned to a classroom for more than 20 consecutive instructional days.

Innovation Strategies

a. The district will maintain its current expectations for employee certification. The district will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification for the position in question; however, where that is not reasonably possible, the district will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

b. The campus principal may submit to the Superintendent a request for local certification that will allow an already certified teacher to teach a course or grade level for which he/she is not certified. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.

c. An individual with experience and appropriate certifications and/or licensure in the content of an elective course could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or elective course through a local teaching certificate. The principal must specify in writing the reason for the request and document what credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject. Examples: an experienced homebuilder teaching a building trades course, a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course, or a retired CPA teaching an entry level accounting course.

d. Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, and may be subject to increased observations and feedback, professional development or instructional resources, or other supports.

e. Teacher certification waiver requests, state permit applications, or other paperwork will not be submitted to the Texas Education Agency. The district will ensure that all individuals assigned to teach have the knowledge and resources necessary to be successful.

f. Superintendent will notify the Board annually of the district's exercise of this flexibility.

4. Probationary Contracts

Exemption from: TEC §21.102(b)

Relevant Board Policies: DCA (LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

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. A one-year probationary period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made prior the teacher having completed a full year of service.

Innovation Strategies

For experienced teachers, counselors, administrators, directors, diagnosticians or nurses new to the district that have possibly been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for up to two years. All other teachers hired in the district may remain on probationary status for three years, and may be issued a fourth year of probation in accordance with TEC §21.102(c).

5. Professional Development / Mentor Teachers

Exemption from: TEC §21.451; TEC §21.458

Relevant Board Policies: DMA (LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §21.451 prescribes staff development requirements for educators. These requirements impede the district's ability to provide timely professional development to employees based on newly emerging issues, data, and student needs.

TEC §21.458 sets eligibility requirements for teacher mentors and mentees. This provision states that the district may only assign a mentor to a teacher with less than two years of teaching experience, despite the fact that a teacher at any level of experience may benefit from a mentor-mentee relationship. The district needs the flexibility to assign mentors to more experienced teachers in need of assistance. The statute also sets eligibility requirements for mentor teachers, which limits the available pool of mentor teachers.

Innovation Strategies

a. The district will exercise local discretion in determining the areas of need, content, duration, and frequency for professional development for its instructional and non-instructional staff.

b. The district will exercise local discretion in assigning teachers to serve as mentors based on a variety of factors, including experience, knowledge, and areas of instruction targeted for improvement or innovation.

6. 90 Percent Attendance Rule

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.092

Relevant Board Policies: FEC (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Texas Education Code §25.092 requires students to attend class for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered in order to earn class credit or be given a final grade for the class. The 90 Percent Rule is an arbitrary standard, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Currently, a student who is in attendance for at least 75 percent but less than 90 percent of the days a class is offered may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the school's principal that provides for the student to meet the instructional requirements of the class.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. The expectation of LPISD is that students will continue to meet the requirement of attending at least 90 percent of the days that class is offered and that any absences that resulted in a student not meeting that standard would be reviewed by the campus attendance committee.
- b. The attendance committee, with the approval of the campus principal, will be able to award credit to students based on mastery of required content if there were extenuating circumstance leading to a student not meeting the 90 percent attendance requirement. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus their efforts to students who are truly at risk, while encouraging students to show mastery of rigorous and relevant curriculum.
- c. Flexibility for this requirement would extend to seeking relief for the 75 percent rule as well. Students with serious illness or other extenuating circumstances who can still display mastery of the class content and if approved by a campus attendance committee and the campus principal could still receive credit.
- d. LPISD would no longer penalize students for participation in extended educational experiences that provide learning opportunities to students with an opportunity for growth outside of the resources available to the campus. Exception for these activities will be considered and approved by the campus principal.
- e. The exemption supports our District's overarching goals and provides the flexibility necessary to implement tools, resources, and training that supports personalized learning for both students and teachers.
- f. Exempting the District from the 90 Percent Rule does not, in any way, impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section §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 Section §28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with a District grading policy adopted pursuant to Texas Education Code Section §28.0216.

7. Teacher Contract Days

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §21.401

Relevant Board Policies: DCB (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Texas Education Code §21.401 currently requires a contract between the district and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. This inhibits the local district's ability to build a calendar that provides the greatest flexibility to meet the LEA's staff development and planning needs.

Innovation Strategies

- a. LPISD teacher contract days will be based on the yearly needs of the student calendar, professional development goals and needs, and learning objectives of LPISD students.
- b. Flexibility provided by this plan will allow teacher contract days to be a range from no less than 182 days and no more than 187 days in any given staff calendar year. This stems from an attempt to provide flexibility to better align teacher service days to instructional days.
- c. The Districtwide Improvement Committee will be provided with calendar options annually that indicate the required number of staff days in order to provide input and feedback.
- d. The Board of Trustees will be notified annually of the number of staff days in the calendar before taking action on the school calendar.
- e. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days less than 187 days.
- f. Teacher salaries will not be affected by the number of staff days, student days, work days, and professional development days if the calendar reflects an expectation of employment for days up to 187, but in a previous year the expectation was for less days. For example, year one of this plan a teacher works 186 days and in year three the calendar changes to 187 days.

8. LOCAL SCHOOL HEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL AND HEALTH EDUCATION INSTRUCTION

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §28.004

Relevant Board Policies: BDF (LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Sec. 28.004 of this code requires The Board of Trustees of each school district shall establish a local School Health Advisory Council to assist the district in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the district's health education instruction. This section requires the establishment of a School Health Advisory Council and outlines the duties of this council.

Innovation Strategies

- a. The district takes exemption from the requirement to establish a School Health Advisory Council and the subsequent duties of that council.
- b. The district will appoint a District Health Coordinator. The District Health Coordinator will collaborative with the district and campus improvement committees to seek feedback regarding health-related curriculum, food service, budget, and other related items as needed.

9. DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §37.008(7)

Relevant Board Policies: DK (LEGAL)/(LOCAL)/DK (EXHIBIT); FOCA (LEGAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §37.008(7) states that a DAEP employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subchapter B, Chapter 21. This statute limits the district's ability to be innovative when providing a DAEP setting when needed.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. The district takes exemption from Sec. §37.008(7). Since there will be a limited number of students assigned to DAEP and all academic responsibilities and resources are provided to the student by his/her teacher of record for each course, an additional certified teacher is not required.
- b. The campus administrator will ensure that DAEP staff have the support necessary to properly supervise the students assigned to the program and will lend assistance of teachers with specific certification as needed.

10. INTER-DISTRICT TRANSFERS

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.036

Relevant Board Policies: FDA (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

TEC §25.036 states that a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who

are not entitled to enroll in the district, but TEC §25.036, has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one school year.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. The district 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. The district is seeking to eliminate the provision of a one-year commitment in accepting transfer applicants. On rare occasions, student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the TEA truancy standard. In these rare cases, and following reasonable corrective measures, La Pryor ISD seeks exemption from the one-year transfer commitment.
- b. Nonresident students who have been accepted as inter-district transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the year if the student is assigned discipline consequences of suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program or expulsion. In addition, students not meeting the State's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of the transfer status.

12. DESIGNATION OF CAMPUS BEHAVIOR COORDINATOR

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §37.0012

Relevant Board Policies: FO(LEGAL); FOCA (LEGAL); FOB(LEGA), FOA(LEGAL); FFB(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Texas Education Code §37.0012 states a person at each campus must be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator. The person designated may be the principal of the campus or any other campus administrator selected by the principal. The campus behavior coordinator is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline. This requirement restricts the district's ability to promote a more collaborative discipline program, including allowing the district to determine how to delegate or distribute disciplinary responsibilities and authority at its schools.

Innovation Strategies:

Partner with and involve our diverse community to support LPISD students and staff.

- a. Flexibility with regard to the designation of campus behavior coordinators

allows for greater collaboration when addressing the social and emotional learning of students. Time and resources can be spent on fostering positive school culture and implementing multi-systemic prevention and intervention programs.

- b. The district will decide which employees and systems to involve in maintaining student discipline instead of a single person designated as a campus behavior coordinator. Disciplinary responsibilities will be included in an employee's job description when applicable. The maintenance of student discipline will be appropriately addressed in the Student Code of Conduct.

13. ABSENCES FOR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY VISITS

Exemption from: Texas Education Code §25.087

Relevant Board Policies: FEA(LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

Texas Education Code §25.087 provides that a district may excuse a student from attending school to visit an institution of higher education accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization during the students junior and senior years of high school for the purpose of determining the students interest in attending the institution of higher education, provided that; 1) the district may not excuse for this purpose more than 2 days during the students junior year and 2 days during the students senior year. The committee recognized that visits to institutions of higher education can be pivotal in a student's decision to apply to school or institution. The committee believes they increasing the number of days a junior or senior are excused from school for the purpose of institutions of higher education visits may increase the college, career, and/or military readiness rate for the district.

Innovation Strategies

- a. LPISD will establish the number of days that a student may receive an excused absence while visiting an institution of higher education. The current limit of two days does not allow time for a student to travel to an out-of-state or some in-state institutions. LPISD high school principals, counselors, and central staff will propose a policy change to the Board for their consideration for approval.
- b. The flexibility of two additional days would provide students additional travel time for long distance/out of state visits
- c. Exemption from this section is sought to allow for the flexibility to allow up to 4 days for institution of higher education visits during a student's junior year and 4 days during a student's senior year with administrative approval.
- d. The committee understands the exemption from this section cannot alter the states funding provisions aligned with this section and that excusing students for additional days will affect funding. The district, however is not seeking exemption from adopting a policy under TEC 25.087 (b-2) (2) (A) to

determine when an absence will be excused for this purpose.