

**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").

After the 2025 legislative session, the District Education Improvement Committee reviewed the District of Innovation plan and made recommendations for revisions based on legislative changes. The DEIC committee met on November 13, 2025, January 8, 2026, and February 3, 2026. Final recommendations were made to the LPISD Board of Trustees on February 25, 2026.

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:

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

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.

2025-2026 District of Innovation Committee Members:

Dr. Cody Miller, Superintendent
Jennifer Brady, Special Education Teacher
Dr. Jesse Salazar, Elementary Principal
Kallie Moffett, Teacher
Regina Coleman, Teacher
Nairobi Martinez, Teacher
Irma Gonzalez, Community Member
Eloy Vera Jr., Business Representative
Esteban Ramos Jr., Parent
Sonia McHazlett, Business Representative
Jorge Maldonado, Parent
Claudia Flores, Community Member
Raquel Nevarez, Teacher

November 13, 2025: Committee meets to review plan and recent legislative changes. The committee recommends revisions.

January 8, 2026: Committee reviews possible changes allowable and recommends moving forward with additions and removals.

February 3, 2026: Committee reviews final recommendations and draft plan for recommendation to the school board.

February 25, 2026: La Pryor ISD Board of Trustees conducts public hearing and adopts changes to the DOI plan.

April 8, 2026: Committee reviews updates based on feedback from TEA.

April 22, 2026: Updates presented to La Pryor ISD Board of Trustees, including public hearing. Vote to approve updates.

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. Pre-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 pre-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 PK-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

3. Teacher Certification

Exemption from: TEC §21.003; TEC §21.053

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan

The current statutory requirements for teacher certification, specifically for non-core and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, create significant barriers to hiring industry experts and experienced professionals. The process of obtaining emergency permits or waivers from the TEA is often burdensome and slow, preventing the district from filling critical vacancies with qualified, knowledgeable individuals who may lack traditional state certification.

Innovation Strategies

- a. **Priority for Certified Personnel** The district will continue to make every effort to recruit and hire individuals with appropriate state certifications. However, when a certified candidate is not available, the district will utilize local flexibility to hire individuals based on their content knowledge, professional experience, and ability to effectively perform the duties of the position.
- b. **Career and Technical Education (CTE) & Electives** The district may issue a local teaching certificate to individuals with significant industry experience or professional licensure in vocational or elective fields (e.g., a licensed nurse teaching Health Science or a retired welder teaching Ag Mechanics). The campus principal will submit a request to the Superintendent documenting the candidate's qualifications and why the hire is in the best interest of the students.
- c. **Foundation Curriculum Restrictions (HB 2 Compliance)** In accordance with TEC §21.0032, the district will not use DOI exemptions to hire uncertified teachers for foundation curriculum courses (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies), except as follows:
 - **K-5 Reading and Math:** All teachers must be certified starting in the 2026-2027 school year.
 - **Secondary/Other Foundation:** The district will follow the state's phase-out timeline, ensuring all foundation teachers are certified or enrolled in an approved Educator Preparation Program (EPP) by the statutory deadlines.
- d. **Parental Notification (SB 12 Compliance)** The district will comply with TEC §21.057. If an uncertified teacher or a teacher under a local certificate is assigned to a classroom for more than 30 consecutive instructional days, the district will provide written notice to the parents or guardians of the affected students. This ensures transparency and maintains the partnership between the school and families.
- e. **Support for Locally Certified Staff** Any individual hired under a local certificate will be provided with a campus mentor, participate in the district's teacher induction program, and receive increased instructional support and feedback. The district will encourage and support these individuals in pursuing standard state certification when applicable.
- f. **Board Oversight** The Superintendent will notify the Board of Trustees of all local certifications issued under this plan. All locally certified teachers will be employed on an "at-will" basis unless the Board determines a term contract is appropriate.

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 to 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: DEAA (LEGAL), 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. 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.

7: INSTRUCTIONAL PLANS AND COURSE SYLLABI

Exemption from: TEC § 26.0062

Related Board Policies: EG (LEGAL), EE (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan: State law requires the school board to adopt a policy to make instructional plans and course syllabi available on the district's website and for teachers to provide copies of instructional plans or course syllabi to district administration and every parent before each semester. In a digital environment where parents have real-time access to grades and curriculum via portals, this requirement creates an unnecessary administrative burden and duplicates existing communication efforts.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. LPISD will utilize existing electronic platforms to share course objectives and progress with parents rather than requiring a separate formal syllabus document for every class.
- b. The district will maintain local flexibility in how teachers document and communicate their instructional plans to campus leadership to focus more on instructional quality than administrative paperwork.

8: GRIEVANCE POLICY PROCEDURES AND TIMELINES

Exemption from: TEC § 26A.001, TEC § 26A.002, TEC § 26.011

Related Board Policies: DGBA (LOCAL), FNG (LOCAL), GF (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan: Recent legislative changes mandate rigid, extended timelines for grievance responses (up to 90 days) and require extensive annual reporting to the TEA. These state-level mandates inhibit the district's goal of resolving concerns quickly at the local campus level and place unnecessary reporting burdens on small district administrative staff.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. LPISD will maintain its own local grievance timelines (e.g., 10 business days for filings and responses) to ensure issues are addressed promptly and locally.

- b. The district will be exempt from the state-mandated requirement to submit annual grievance reports to the TEA, keeping the focus on local resolution.

9: SCHOOL LIBRARY MANAGEMENT (SELECTION & CHALLENGES)

Exemption from: TEC § 33.025, TEC § 33.026, TEC § 33.027

Related Board Policies: EFB (LEGAL), EFB (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan: Mandated advisory councils and state-prescribed acquisition rules for library materials can override local community standards and the professional judgment of district staff. These rigid state requirements for book challenges and acquisition can slow down the updating of library collections.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. The district will develop local procedures for the procurement, review, and reconsideration of library materials that reflect the specific values and standards of the La Pryor community.

- b. LPISD will determine the need for a School Library Advisory Council (SLAC) based on local community interest and need rather than meeting state-mandated petition triggers.

10: SCHOOL COUNSELOR 80/20 RULE AND TRACKING

Exemption from: TEC § 33.006(d)-(h)

Related Board Policies: DP (LEGAL), DP (LOCAL)

Manner in which statute inhibits the goals of the plan: State law requires counselors to spend 80% of their time on specific counseling program components and track their time using a standardized tool. In a small district like LPISD, counselors must be flexible to support various student needs, including scheduling, 504 coordination, and testing administration, which are often classified as "non-counseling" duties under state law.

Innovation Strategies:

- a. LPISD will allow all school counselors to be utilized in roles that best support the holistic needs of students and district operations without being constrained by the rigid 80/20 time allocation.

- b. All school counselors will be exempt from state-mandated daily time-tracking and annual compliance reporting to the TEA, allowing them to focus on direct student support.