

Lorenzo Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan

2019–2020

Through

2023-2024



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District of Innovation Plan

The 84th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1842 in the spring of 2015, providing public school districts the opportunity to become Districts of Innovation and to obtain exemptions from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code and allow public schools to have some of the same flexibility that public charter schools have always been allowed.

In an effort to better serve and accommodate the diverse needs of all Lorenzo ISD stakeholders, including students, staff, parents and community members; Lorenzo ISD seeks to become a District of Innovation for a term beginning in the school year 2019-2020 through 2023-2024. The plan will be approved by the Board of Trustees.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- Take greater local control as the decision makers over the educational and instructional model for students;
- Increase freedom and flexibility, with accountability, relative to state mandates that govern educational programming; and,
- Increase empowerment and encourage innovative thinking.

Lorenzo ISD District of Innovation Timeline

Thursday, March 21, 2019

5/21/2019 LISD Board Approved

5/18/2020 LISD Board Approved Amendment

6:30 p.m. - Special Board of Trustees meeting for the Board of Trustees to approve a resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of using HB 1842 to become District of Innovation. Voted unanimously to approve resolution.

6:45 p.m. – Public Hearing: Public hearing held to explain and discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation and the benefits for LISD.

7:00 p.m. – Regular Board of Trustees meeting take action on the development of a local District of Innovation plan. The Board of Trustees approved the members of the District of Innovation Committee.

Monday, March 25, 2019 – First meeting of the DoI Committee – options for exemptions were discussed.

Tuesday, April 9, 2019 – Meeting of the District-Level committee to approve the plan as drafted – vote to pass by majority vote.

Wednesday, April 10, 2019 – 1) Post the District of Innovation Plan on the District website for 30 days and notify the Texas Commissioner of Education of the intent to vote on adoption of the proposed plan. 2) Plan sent to Commissioner of Education

Monday, May 20, 2019 – 6:45p.m. – Public Meeting to consider the final version of the approved proposed plan by committee majority vote

Immediately following – Regular Board of Trustees meeting – action on the proposed District of Innovation Plan to adopt by at least 2/3 majority.

Tuesday, May 21, 2019

1) Notify the Commissioner of approval of the plan with the list of exemptions and provide a copy to the Commissioner, 2) post a copy of the plan on the website in a prominent place, 3) update policies with TASB with legal advice.

Monday, May 18, 2020 - presented an Amendment for TEC 22.004(i) and TEC 22.004(b) to the Board, after approval from the Site-Based Committee.

Teacher Certification: TEC §21.003 DB (Legal & Local); DK(Legal & local)

Current state law TEC §21.003 states that “a person may not be employed as a teacher, teacher intern, or teacher trainee, librarian, educational aide, administrator, educational diagnostician, or school counselor by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued as provided by Subchapter B (Certification of Educators).” In the event that Lorenzo ISD cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or where an experienced, certified teacher will teach a subject(s) outside of his/her field

of certification, the district must submit a request for an Emergency Permit to the Texas Education Agency/State Board of Education.

Proposal and benefit for exemption:

The current state teacher certification requirements inhibit the District's ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill, high demand, as well as career and technical courses and foreign languages or those singleton classes such as speech and/or health. In order to best serve Lorenzo ISD students, decisions on certification will be handled locally. Based on local need, this exemption from teacher certification requirements will enable greater flexibility in staffing and will enrich applicant hiring pool in specific areas of need. This exemption would allow for the following:

- Provide more flexibility in scheduling
- Provide more options for students in class offerings
- Allow experienced, certified teachers to teach a course in an area they have qualified knowledge but do not have that particular certification.
- Allow industry certified and/or trade professionals to teach specialized certification courses which would expand opportunities for students

Local Guidelines:

- The District will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate state-mandated certification for the position in question; however, when that is not reasonably possible, the District will have the flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area of study and are equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position.
- The principal will submit, in writing, a request to the Superintendent to allow certified teachers to teach subjects out of their certified area. The request must state the reason and document the credentials or life experience the teacher possesses that would qualify this individual to teach the proposed subject.
- An individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching permit. The principal would submit the request to the Superintendent with all the documents/credentials that the person holds that would qualify them to teach the course.
- The Superintendent will approve or deny requests for local certification and report the action to the Board of Trustees.

First Day of Instruction: TEC §25.0811; EB (Legal & Local)

Current law TEC §25.0811 states that a school district may not begin instruction before the fourth Monday in August.

Proposal and Benefit for Exemption:

The flexibility of a locally approved start date allows the district to determine, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and community. This would also offer the following benefits, as well:

- The instructional days of the fall semester could be increased making the number of days in each semester closer to an equal number. This allows for a more balanced approach to the scope and sequence of all classes but greatly benefits single semester courses.
- Allows for more balanced grading periods.
- Allows for MORE instructional days prior to state assessments.
- Allows for more flexibility in scheduling professional development during the school year rather than front loading them all in August.
- Removing the uniform start date could also let the school district start classes as a short week, easing the transition for students entering elementary and secondary schools.

Local Guidelines:

- The start date for each school year will be determined, on an annual basis, by administration with input from staff members.

Teacher Contract Days: TEC §21.401; DC (Legal & Local)

Current education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a ten month contract equivalent to 187 days

Proposal and Benefits for exemption:

Lorenzo ISD can reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. Flexibility in the contractual days for certified personnel will:

- Enhance teacher recruitment
- Significantly improve teacher morale
- Increase the daily rate the district pays teachers
- Flexibility in aligning Teacher professional development with school calendar of 75,600 minutes

Local Guidelines: To allow flexibility in the contractual days for certified personnel, Lorenzo ISD will:

- Evaluate the number of contract days needed for certified staff in that school year and shall set the number of calendar work days, with the objective of reducing the days from 187. The administrative staff will also, annually, determine the number of professional development days required to meet the needs of all students and when they will be fulfilled during the academic year.
- Maintain, at minimum, the current salary schedule for all certified employees.

Probationary Contracts: TEC §21.102, DCA (Legal & Local)

Requires teachers who have been employed in Texas school districts for 5 of the previous 8 years to be placed on a probationary contract not to exceed one year.

Proposal and Benefits for Exemption:

The one year period of time may not be sufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand the employment decisions must be made prior to the availability of end-of-year classroom and student data. Relief from TEC §21.102 will permit Lorenzo ISD the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to three years for experienced teachers and counselors newly hired in Lorenzo ISD.

- Principal will inform the Superintendent with the recommendation of extending a probationary contract.
- Board will be informed when reviewing all contracts of professional personnel.

Class Size Ratio Requirement in K through 4: TEC §25.112; TEC §25.113; EEB (Legal & Local)

TEC 25.112 requires districts to maintain a class size no larger than 22 students for Kindergarten through 4th grade. TEC 25.113 requires districts to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits. Districts are required by state law to maintain a 22:1 student to teacher ratio for Kinder – 4th grade classes.

Proposal and Benefits for exemption:

Lorenzo ISD recognizes and believes that smaller class sizes are beneficial and will continue to use the 22:1 student/teacher ratio for K – 4th grade in projecting the number of staff needed for future school years. We also recognize that this fact must be balanced with the logistics of the timing of adding staff and continuing to employ the best qualified teachers. Often it is not the number of students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influences the learning environment. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size. A TEA waiver will not be necessary when a K-4th classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

Local Guidelines:

- Lorenzo ISD will attempt to keep all K-4th core classes to a 22:1 ratio.
- If the class size exceeds this ratio, the Superintendent will notify the Board of Trustees.
- If the class size exceeds a 24:1 ratio for more than 10 consecutive school days, the campus will notify the parents of the students in that class.

Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator: TEC §37.0012; FO (Legal & Local)

This statute 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 and allows duties imposed on a campus principal or other campus administrator to be performed by the campus behavior coordinator (CBC).

Proposal and Benefits from exemptions: Lorenzo ISD will abstain from the state requirement that each campus has a designated campus behavior coordinator. LISD's approach to discipline is more collaborative with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person (CBC). Exemption from the requirement will allow the LISD administrative team to create a more personal and effective approach to student discipline and better communication with parents. The CBC duties will be shared by all administrators.

Local Guidelines:

- LISD will not designate a CBC on each campus but will collaboratively work together as an administrative team to provide a disciplined environment at LISD but provide our students emotional and social support when needed.

School Health Advisory Council & Site-Based Decision Making Committee:

TEC §28.004; TEC §11.251; BDF (Legal); BQA (Legal & Local), BQB (Legal & Local)

These TEC §28.004 requires school districts to establish a School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) to assist a district in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the district's health education instruction and **must** meet 4 times a year. TEC §11.251 requires school districts to establish a district/campus-level committees to advise the Board in establishing and reviewing the District's educational goals, educational programs and approve staff development. This committee must meet at least 2 times per year.

Proposal and benefits from exemption: Lorenzo ISD seeks exemption from the site-based decision-making process and the convening of the SHAC and the many accompanying requirements falling under the governance of those two bodies. The statutory requirements set forth in the TEC in Chapter 11 are burdensome, time consuming, and ultimately cause a misdirection of resources from the primary focus of our school: the education of students. Stakeholders will continue to be involved in the process, but one that meets the needs of the District, school, and community as opposed to the broad brush of statutory requirements leveled down from a one size fits all approach as detailed in the code. In place of the SBDM and SHAC, a **Superintendent's Advisory Council (SAC)** will be established, meet, review, analyze, and respond to both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the district's success and most importantly, student's success. This council will convene two times per year and generate the general direction of the district's resources and efforts. Also, as a very small 1A school district there are not very many folks to be on so many different committees and combining these two committees will be an effective and efficient use of staff members' and community members' time.

Local Guidelines:

This will consolidate the number of meetings and the number of committees required by law and will better serve this school and community. This consolidation will yield greater opportunity for one council to address a multitude of needs and create solutions/plans as opposed to having 6 separate meetings with a different focus.

Inter-district Transfer of Students: TEC §25.036; FDA(Legal & Local)

TEC §25.036 states that a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district, and this code has been interpreted to require a transfer to be for a period of one year.

Proposal and Benefit of the exemption: Lorenzo ISD seeks exemption from the one-year commitment. LISD will be allowed to revoke a transfer if the student's behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in DAEP (hearing shall be held first), or expulsion. In addition, student attendance may fall below the state's 90% attendance standard. In these rare cases, after other corrective measures have been attempted, a student's transfer status may be revoked by the superintendent at any time during the school year. LISD will follow the inter-district transfer policies as stated in FDA(local).

- Discipline and character expectations can be better enforced and upheld while providing all students the opportunity to join and attend LISD.
- Attendance guidelines and classroom participation can be enforced without using additional resources and keeping personnel from other duties and responsibilities.
- Nonresident transfer students may have such transfer status revoked by the superintendent at any time during the year if:
 - 1) The student is assigned a discipline action resulting in suspension, placement in a discipline alternative program or expulsion.
 - 2) The student is truant.
 - 3) The student's attendance does not meet the State's 90% attendance standard for earning class credit.

School District Depository Contracts: TEC§45.205, §45.206; BDAE (Legal & Local)

Description of the Current Provision: The depository for the District shall serve for a term of two years and until its successor is selected and has qualified. A district and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for two additional two-year terms. Per S.B. 754, passed by the 85th Texas Legislature, effective September 1, 2017, TEC §45.205 will allow the District to extend a depository contract for three additional two-year terms. The contract term and any extension must coincide with the district's fiscal year. An extension is not subject to the requirements of TEC 45.206, 45.205 and 45.204.

Proposal and Benefits for Exemption: In a small district and a small town, the District's choices for its depository bank are limited. Lorenzo ISD uses services provided by the bank on a daily basis. LISD will continue to use the local depository for the District without rebidding. At the end of each two-year term, the District and its depository bank may agree to extend the contract for multiple additional two-year periods. The District must review the contract to ensure the best value and support for the District and obtain Board approval for each of the two-year periods. Nothing in this process would hinder the District's ability to undertake bidding at the District Depository Bank at the end of any of the two-year periods. The District believes it can operate most optimally if it is not limited to two or even three additional two-year extensions of its depository contract and allow the Superintendent and Board of Trustees more time for planning for student progress, instructional strategies, and innovative options for the District's educational goals.

May 18, 2020 Amendment

Preclusion from providing alternative Uniform Group Coverage Program once the program of coverages under Chapter 1579, Insurance Code is implemented. *TEC 22.004(i) and TEC 22.004(b) (New Amendment)*

Texas Education Code 22.004(i) states that a school district may not make group health available to its employees pursuant to TEC 22.004(b) after the date a District implements the program of coverages provided under Chapter 1579 of the Texas Insurance Code.

Proposal and Benefits of Exemption: The current process allows no flexibility in the design of group health insurance benefits to fit the needs of all District employees. This provision also prohibits the District from procuring group health insurance benefits that may provide better coverages for its employees and at a lower cost. This provision does not give the District the flexibility needed to acquire benefits packages that would potentially more attractive to prospective employees.

Proposed in order to have the option to offer additional benefits options to employees, the District proposes that the District of Innovation Plan be amended to exempt the District from the health insurance requirements in Texas Education Code 22.004(i). The benefit of this allows Lorenzo ISD to give our employees a better opportunity to secure a health insurance package at a reasonable rate.

