



La Vernia Independent School District

District of Innovation Plan 2022-2027

In 2015, the 84th session of the Texas Legislative Session passed House Bill 1842 which allows traditional independent school districts the ability to access flexibilities previously reserved for Texas' open enrollment charter schools. The bill provides an opportunity for districts to obtain exemption from certain provisions of the Texas Education Code (TEC). To qualify and access allowable exemptions, districts must seek designation as a **District of Innovation**, as set forth in Chapter 12A of the Texas Education Code and Texas Education Agency (TEA) rules.

District of Innovation Committee

Alison Mokry, Primary Teacher

Priscilla Gonzales, HS Teacher

Jennifer Wildenstein, Primary Teacher

Jeffrey Clouse, HS Administrator

Debbie Casey, Primary Administrator

Helen Whisenhunt, CIO

Christy Hinnant, Intermediate Teacher

Dana Grubb, District Administrator

Cheryl Trammell, Intermediate Teacher

Meghan Martinez, District Administrator

Paula Watson, Intermediate Librarian

Hensley Cone, Superintendent

Brandi Hanselka, Intermediate Administrator

Elizabeth Broten, Parent Representative

Ben Donahoe, JHS Teacher

Brian Witherall, Parent Representative

Nick Milanovich, JHS Teacher

Pamela Awbrey, Parent Representative

Rebecca Acosta, JHS Administrator

Isabella Martinez, Community Member

Monica Hunter, HS Teacher

District of Innovation Resubmission Timeline

Date	DOI Resubmission Steps
November 30	District of Innovation Committee Meeting # 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Current LVISD DOI • Discuss possible revisions
December 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cabinet members review DOI Draft plan. - District of Innovation Committee sent draft copy of the updated DOI plan for review.
Dec 6- Jan 10	DOI Committee members will have the opportunity to share the draft plan with LVISD stakeholders to collect feedback.
January 11	District of Innovation Committee Meeting # 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review stakeholder feedback, make potential adjustments.
January 12	Post online for all stakeholders to review – 30 days or more prior to DEEC.
February 7	Present letter of intent to renew to the Board of Trustees at the February meeting.
February 23	Review DOI plan with DEEC- members will vote to accept/reject plan.
March 1	District of Innovation Committee Meeting # 3 (If needed following DEEC)
March 21	District of Innovation Plan presented to the Board of Trustees.
March 22	Notify TEA of adopted DOI.
March 22	Post new DOI plan on district website.

Term of District of Innovation

Once adopted, the La Vernia ISD District of Innovation plan will be in effect for five years (as long as La Vernia ISD meets the required financial and academic accountability standards). This plan is specific to the exemptions as written. La Vernia ISD intends to follow the Texas Education Code in all other areas. If at some point it is decided that amendments, additional exemptions, or termination of the plan should be considered, the District of Innovation Committee will reconvene to explore the request. Amendment, Rescission, or Renewal(s) of the plan requires approval of the DOI committee, a majority vote of the Educational Excellence Council, and a 2/3 majority vote of the Board of Trustees.

District Vision

Uncompromising Excellence, Unlimited Possibilities

District Mission

The mission of La Vernia ISD is to collaboratively educate and inspire all students to be life-long learners with unlimited possibilities as contributing members of society.

District Priorities

La Vernia ISD Board of Trustees has adopted the following district priorities:

- Provide opportunities for all students to become College, Career, and Military Ready Graduates.
- Cultivate a High Performing and Engaged Workforce.
- Ensure Safe, Efficient, and Transparent District and Campus Operations.
- Engage in Transparent and Highly Effective Communication with Students, Staff, Parents and Community Members.

Innovations

In order to achieve the District's Vision and Mission, to align District practices and operations with the strategic objectives, and to meet District goals, La Vernia ISD seeks exemption from the following provisions of the Texas Education Code as allowed in the statute:

- Uniform school start date
- 90% attendance rule
- Teacher certification
- Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator
- Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs
- Teacher Contract Days

Uniform School Start Date

(EB LEGAL & EB LOCAL) (TEC 25.0811a)

Currently:

The District may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday of August.

***Sec. 25.0811 FIRST DAY OF INSTRUCTION.** (a) Except as provided by this section, a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.*

Proposed:

La Vernia ISD will have the flexibility of a start date that allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of the students and local community. This empowers us to personalize learning, based on student and staff needs.

Rationale:

This enables La Vernia ISD to personalize learning, increase college and career readiness, balance the amount of instructional time per semester, and provide more flexible professional development opportunities for staff. In addition, this change will help enable students to enroll in college courses that start in early June, avoiding a hurdle that otherwise might hinder students' college and career opportunities. The current process allows no flexibility in the design and balance of instructional semesters to meet the needs of students or the wishes of the local Board of Trustees, who represent community interests in this matter. A calendar which begins on the fourth Monday in August does not provide the flexibility to incorporate the majority of the federal holidays for students without compromising other community values including professional development days, parent conference days, and the length of breaks for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Spring Break. Removing the uniform start date would also allow La Vernia ISD the opportunity to start classes on a shortened week, easing the transition to school for students entering pre-k/kindergarten, as well as transitioning through the elementary schools, middle school, and high school.

90% Attendance Rule

(FEC LOCAL) (TEC 25.092a)

Currently:

State law currently requires students attend class 90 percent of the school days on a district calendar to earn credit. The law requires districts to award class credit to students based on the time a student is present in a classroom for instruction, rather than mastery of content and subject proficiency.

Sec. 25.092. MINIMUM ATTENDANCE FOR CLASS CREDIT OR FINAL GRADE.

(a) Except as provided by this section, a student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.

Proposed:

La Vernia ISD will have the flexibility to offer course credit to students based on content mastery for students with absences due to school sponsored/related activities, or other extenuating circumstances as approved by administration.

Rationale:

The 90 percent rule, a State established measure, requires school districts to award or deny course credit based solely on seat time without regard to mastery of content. Flexibility in abstaining from the requirement means that the District will not have to penalize students who miss class due to school sponsored/related activities, or other extenuating circumstances as approved by administration. To meet the needs of 21st Century Learners, La Vernia ISD would like to investigate the option to provide students credit for courses based on content mastery, not the amount of time the student spends in the classroom. This 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 and anyplace, apart from the traditional way of delivering instruction. Our students attain valuable and meaningful learning from extra/co-curricular activities and experiences that currently count against the student's 90% attendance availability if a student has to miss part of the traditional school day.

Relief from Section 25.092 does not intend to impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 is not intended to limit or modify a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor restrict or alter a teacher's ability to assign grades in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

Teacher Certification

(DK LEGAL, DK Local, DK Exhibit) (TEC 21.003 & TEC 21.053)

Currently:

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 submit a request to the Texas Education Agency and notification to parents is required. TEA then approves or denies this request.

Sec. 21.003. CERTIFICATION REQUIRED. (a) *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 the appropriate state agency.*

Sec. 21.053. PRESENTATION AND RECORDING OF CERTIFICATES. *A person who desires to teach in a public school shall present the person's certificate for filing with the employing district before the person's contract with the board of trustees of the district is binding.*

Proposed:

La Vernia ISD will have local flexibility 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 except in the areas of Special Education and Bilingual/ESL Education.

Rationale:

The current state teacher certification requirements limit the District's ability to provide certain advanced and specialized courses. In order to best serve the students of La Vernia ISD, the district will have local flexibility to hire individuals who are knowledgeable in the area and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question.

The use of this provision will be based upon review of current certification, college transcripts, industry experience, and will require final approval by the Superintendent. Parents of students enrolled in classes affected by this exemption will receive written notification.

La Vernia ISD will continue to hire highly qualified staff and will make every attempt to hire individuals with the appropriate certifications for the position in question. If the District is unable to find a certified individual:

- The campus principal may submit to the Superintendent a request for a 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. The District will then assist the individual in obtaining their appropriate certification on the timeline provided by the LEA (Local Education Agency-LVISED).
- 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 EMT teaching an EMT course, or a licensed corrections officer teaching a criminal justice course.
- Whenever possible, instructional planning for the uncertified teacher's course will be created in partnership with certified teachers and specialists in the same field. Uncertified teachers will be provided teacher mentoring, and may be subject to increased observations and feedback, professional development, instructional resources, or other supports. Uncertified teachers will be at-will employees.
- 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.
- The Superintendent will notify the Board annually of the District's exercise of this flexibility.

Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator

(FO Legal & Local) (TEC 37.0012a)

Currently:

Senate Bill 107 requires the designation of a Campus Behavior Coordinator on each campus. This designee is responsible for managing student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

***Sec. 37.0012. DESIGNATION OF CAMPUS BEHAVIOR COORDINATOR.** (a) 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.*

Proposed:

La Vernia ISD will have the flexibility to allow the campus principal to collaborate with and/or delegate assistant principals the responsibilities of the Campus Behavior Coordinator.

Rationale:

La Vernia ISD seeks exemption from the statute requiring each school to have one person designated as the Campus Behavior Coordinator. The district believes it can better meet the emotional and social needs of its students by implementing a more personal approach to campus discipline. This collaborative approach enables administrators to spend sufficient time with students to develop a rapport that can hold students accountable while teaching them how to more effectively monitor their own behavior in the future.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs

(FO Legal & Local) (TEC 37.008(a)(7))

Currently:

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 instruction in a DAEP setting.

*Sec. 37.008(7). **DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS.** (a) Each school district shall provide a disciplinary alternative education program that employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subchapter B, Chapter 21.*

Proposed:

La Vernia ISD will have the flexibility to hire a DAEP teacher who holds a Texas educator's certificate in the area that best suits the needs of the students enrolled in the program as determined by the LEA.

Rationale:

La Vernia ISD seeks exemption from the statute requiring our Disciplinary Alternative Education Program to employ teachers who meet all certification requirements established in Subchapter B, Chapter 21. With the limited number of students assigned to DAEP and the ability of the district to provide the teacher of record with a TEKS aligned, SBOE approved curriculum, students have the opportunity to continue their studies without the need of additional certified teachers. The DAEP campus administrator will ensure that DAEP staff have the support necessary to properly supervise and educate the students assigned to the program and will elicit the assistance of teachers with specific certifications as needed.

Teacher Contract Days (DCB Legal, ECB Local, TEC 21.401)

Currently:

Education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a 10-month contract equivalent to 187 days.

***Sec. 21.401. MINIMUM SERVICE REQUIRED.** (a) A contract between a school district and an educator must be for a minimum of 10 months' service. (b) Except as provided by Subsection (c-1), an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service. (c) The commissioner, as provided by Section 25.081(b), may reduce the number of days of service required by this section. A reduction by the commissioner does not reduce an educator's salary.*

Proposed:

La Vernia ISD will have the ability to reduce teacher contract days from 187 to a decreased length with no effect on teacher salaries. This would better align the teacher days to 75, 600 minutes required of students.

Rationale:

This innovation allows La Vernia ISD to change the number of teacher days annually to best fit district and student needs. With the ability to change the number of teacher contract days, La Vernia ISD intends to:

- Enhance teacher recruitment.
- Enhance teacher retention.
- Enhance staff morale,
- Increase student achievement.