



# **Lake Travis ISD Plan of Innovation**

**Effective May 19, 2021 through  
May 19, 2026**

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is a District of Innovation?

The District of Innovation concept was passed by the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session in House Bill 1842 and has been codified in the [Texas Education Code Chapter 12a](#). A District of Innovation designation gives traditional school districts most of the flexibility currently available to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools. It gives a district more local control and increases a district's ability to decide what best suits the district's needs. Under HB 1842, districts may identify certain requirements imposed by the Texas Education Code "that inhibit the goals of the plan and from which the district should exempt on adoption of the plan."

## What are the benefits to Lake Travis ISD becoming a District of Innovation?

A District of Innovation will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools and exercise local control over certain decisions about education and governance that are more appropriate for the individual needs of the District. A District of Innovation is given empowerment to innovate and think differently based on the unique needs of the school, students, and staff. Becoming a District of Innovation allows a district to customize appropriate plans district-wide, a grade level, or a single campus.

## What are the proposed areas of innovation for Lake Travis ISD?

- First day of instruction
- Class size in grades K-4
- Teacher Appraisal System
- Teacher Certifications
- Probationary Teacher Contracts
- School Day Interruptions - Announcements
- School Day Interruptions - Tutoring/Test Prep Time
- Teacher Mentor Program
- Ejection of Individuals from Facilities
- Suspension of Students in Grades PreK through Second
- Location of DAEP Services

## What areas is Lake Travis ISD prohibited from seeking exemption?

A District of Innovation cannot seek exemption from state or federal requirements applicable to an open enrollment charter school; state requirements for curriculum or graduation; and academic and financial accountability. Additionally, a District of Innovation cannot be exempt from statutes, including but not limited to, election of board of trustees; powers and duties of school boards, superintendents, and principals; criminal history record checks and educator misconduct reporting; bilingual education; special education; prekindergarten; academic accountability including student assessment; open meetings, open records; financial accountability and related reporting; nepotism; and transportation.

## Has the District done this before?

Yes. The Lake Travis ISD Board of Trustees approved its first District of Innovation Plan in December 2016. That plan was set to expire on December 13, 2021. A District may renew a District of Innovation Plan by following the process outlined in 19 Texas Administrative Code section 102.1307 for adoption.

## What is the process for developing and approving LTISD's Innovation Plan?

On January 20, 2021, the Lake Travis ISD's Board of Trustees passed a resolution to initiate the process of renewing the designation of LTISD as a District of Innovation. The Board of Trustees appointed an innovation plan committee to explore and develop a local innovation plan. The innovation plan committee is composed of key district stakeholders including, senior leadership, administration, staff, parents, board members, and community members. The innovation plan committee met in January, February, March and April to draft, review, and prepare a final proposed Innovation Plan. The final proposed Innovation Plan will be posted on the [District of Innovation](#) webpage for at least 30 days. The District of Innovation committee, which includes the members of the District's Advisory Committee for Education (ACE), established pursuant to Texas Education Code §11.251, will hold a public meeting on May 19, 2021 to consider and vote on the final version of the proposed plan. If the final proposed innovation plan is approved by a majority of the committee, the Board of Trustees will vote on whether to adopt the final proposed plan during the May 19, 2021 board meeting. If two-thirds of the membership of the board vote to adopt the plan, the District will once again be designated as a District of Innovation under Chapter 12a of the Texas Education Code and will begin operation in accordance with the plan.

## How long is the District of Innovation Plan effective?

The renewed plan will be in effect for another term of five years from the date of adoption (May 19, 2021 - May 19, 2026).

# Timeline of Events

Action	Responsibility	Date
Consideration of a renewal of designation by adoption of a resolution	Board	1/20/2021
Hold a public hearing	Board	1/20/2021
Appoint a committee to develop a local innovation plan	Board	9/20/16
Innovation Plan Committee meeting	Committee	1/26/2021
Innovation Plan Committee meeting	Committee	2/24/2021
Innovation Plan Committee meeting	Committee	3/22/2021
Innovation Plan Committee meeting	Committee	4/13/2021
Post proposed local innovation plan on website	District	4/16/2021
Send notification to TEA Commissioner of intention to vote on local innovation plan	Board	4/16/2021
First reading for local innovation plan	Board	4/21/2021
DOI public meeting to consider final version of the proposed plan; DOI committee to vote on final plan	Committee	5/19/2021
Board to vote on approval of final plan	Board	5/19/2021
Notification to TEA Commissioner of approval of plan	District	5/21/2021

# Innovation Plan Committee

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>
Margaret Green	Parent*
Wendy Smith	Community Member*
Jim Schwendinger	Community Member*
Michael Cowan	Business Representative*
Stefani Allen	Senior Executive Director for C&I*
Mak El-Hassan	Assistant Principal - LPE*
Amy Sharp	Assistant Principal - LWE*
Carl McLendon	Director, C&I (Secondary)*
Suzi Menfi	Teacher - BCE*
Cristina Costas	Teacher - LPE*
Courtney Christian	Teacher - LTE*
Ashley Kreps	Teacher - LWE*
Emily Barbato	Teacher - SHE*
Hannah Embry	Teacher - WCHE*
Claudia Carpenter	Teacher - RHE*
Kayla Austin	Teacher - BCMS*
Alline Ayala	Teacher - BCMS*
Ryan O'Donoghue	Teacher - HBMS*
Julianne Cappadonna	Teacher - HBMS*
Brittany Bishop	Teacher - LTMS*
Danielle Black	Teacher - LTMS*
Ruby Johnson	Teacher - LTHS*
Elizabeth Stark	Teacher - LTHS*
Holly Morris-Kuentz	Deputy Superintendent

Amber King	General Counsel
Marco Alvarado	Director of Communications
Pam Sanchez	Assistant Superintendent
Evalene Murphy	Assistant Superintendent of Human Resource Services
Chris Woehl	Executive Director of Technology & Information Services
Jodie Villemaire	Director, C&I (Elementary)
Kathy Burbank	Director, Accountability & Assessment
Charles Aguillon	Director of Fine Arts & Academic Enrichment
Laura Abbott	Director of Special Services
Keegan Luedecke	Principal - SHE
Sam Hicks	Principal - LWE
Kelly Freed	Principal - LPE
Lester Wolff	Principal - LTMS
Joe Green	Assistant Principal - LTHS
Lauren White	Board Member Ex-Officio
Jessica Putonti	Board Member Ex-Officio

\*Denotes individuals who serve on the District's Advisory Committee on Education (ACE).

# Innovation Plan

As a District of Innovation, Lake Travis ISD seeks to maximize local control over educational and governance decisions for students and staff. To carry forward that mission, LTISD seeks exemption from the following provisions of the Texas Education Code. The District intends to continue to follow the Texas Education Code in all other areas. If amendments to this plan are considered at some point in the future, the District will reconvene the innovation plan committee to initiate the appropriate process, as outlined in Chapter 12a of the Texas Education Code.

## FIRST DAY OF INSTRUCTION

(Texas Education Code § 25.0811) (EB LEGAL, EB LOCAL)

### Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan

The Texas Education Code requires that students may not begin school before the fourth Monday of August. For many years this was the rule; however, districts had the option of applying for a waiver to begin school earlier. The waiver process eventually was eliminated, mandating that all schools begin school no earlier than the fourth Monday of August, with no exceptions. This requirement inhibits the District's flexibility to develop a calendar that best meets students', staff's, board of trustees', and community members' needs and desires. It also inhibits the District from creating a calendar that better balances the instructional semesters.

### Category of innovation

Modifications to the school year

### Innovation strategies

1. To allow for a calendar that fits the local needs of our community, the District will determine on an annual basis the local starting date for the first semester of each school year.
2. Students will begin no earlier than the second Monday in August of any given year.

These strategies provide the District the benefits of additional time for staff to plan and students to learn; additional time for staff to prepare for summer school; equitable allocation of the days in the two semesters; additional professional learning community time for staff; flexibility to end the school year earlier, which in turn, allows staff and students starting college the ability to access the first summer semester of college courses.

## CLASS SIZE IN GRADES K-4

(Texas Education Code §§ 25.112, 25.113) (BF LEGAL, EEB LEGAL)

### Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan

The Texas Education Code currently requires the District to maintain a class size of 22 students or less in each kindergarten through fourth grade class. When a class exceeds this limit, the district must complete a waiver with the Texas Education Agency (TEA). These waivers are rarely rejected by TEA, making the process of applying for a waiver no more than an administrative step of putting TEA on

notice. Along with the waiver, the District is required to notify parents of the waiver or exception to the class size limit. Many times soon after the waiver is submitted, students move out of the district and the class returns to a size at or below 22 students, thus negating the need for the waiver or notification to parents.

### **Category of innovation**

Campus governance

### **Innovation strategies**

The average class size in kindergarten through fourth grade in LTISD is 19.33. However, numerous circumstances each year necessitate applying for class-size waivers. While LTISD certainly believes that small class size plays a positive role in the classroom, research does not support a negative effect when only one or two more students are added. Class size must be balanced with the logistics of funding, availability of resources and space, parental requests or desires, and adding staff. LTISD's purpose is not to disregard the intent of class size ratios, but rather to allow the District more flexibility and control in determining appropriate class sizes based on the unique facts and circumstances.

1. LTISD will establish local ratios for all Kinder through 5th grade classes and will attempt to keep all classes sufficiently staffed, but will allow local consideration in placing students.
2. A TEA waiver will no longer be filed when a K-4 classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.
3. The board of trustees will be notified of all class sizes that exceed the locally established ratios.

## **TEACHER APPRAISAL SYSTEM**

(Texas Education Code § 21.352(c)) (DNA LEGAL, DNA LOCAL, DNA REGULATION)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The state currently requires use of a teacher appraisal system called the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). LTISD is currently using T-TESS as its teacher appraisal system. While this system is designed to meet the needs of the entire state, LTISD seeks to customize certain aspects of the system to better meet the needs of its teachers and campus administrators.

### **Category of innovation**

Accountability and assessment measures that exceed the state and federal law

### **Innovation strategies**

The District seeks to allow teachers who have demonstrated high-quality performance the opportunity to be exempt from a full appraisal under certain circumstances that are locally established. A non-probationary teacher may be exempt if he/she meets the local criteria. These innovation strategies offer local benefits including increased opportunities for more unannounced walk-throughs, which are more reflective of what is happening in a teacher's classroom than a scheduled observation. This flexibility will increase an administrator's ability to focus on struggling or new teachers, and will continue to allow administrators to have meaningful professional interactions with all campus staff.

## **TEACHER CERTIFICATION**

(Texas Education Code §§ 21.003(a), 21.057; 21.0031; 21.053) (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT, DBA LEGAL, DBA LOCAL, DF LEGAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code requires a public school employee to have the appropriate certification for his or her current assignment unless the appropriate permit has been issued. The credentials appropriate to each assignment are set forth in the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) rules at 19 Administrative Code Chapter 231. In the event an appropriately certified teacher cannot be found, the District must request an emergency certification from TEA and SBEC. These rules are burdensome and do not take into account the unique needs and circumstances of the district. Certain subject areas, in particular, are often very difficult to find properly-certified teachers.

### **Category of innovation**

Other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees

### **Innovation strategies**

In order to best serve LTISD students, certain decisions on certification will be handled locally. Campus administrators will have the ability to consider out-of-state or out-of-country educator certifications and professional qualifications or credentials of candidates, as well as to review the strengths and qualifications of campus staff to make local recommendations for teaching outside of certain certification areas in hard to fill positions, as allowed by locally established policy. The Superintendent or designee will approve all local certifications and will report to the board of trustees.

## **PROBATIONARY TEACHER CONTRACTS**

(Texas Education Code 21.102(b)) (DCA LEGAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code requires that teachers newly-hired by the District who have five years of experience in public education in Texas within the last eight years can only be placed on a one-year probationary contract, and after the first year, must be placed on a term contract. In contrast, newly-hired teachers without the 5 of 8 years of experience can be hired by the District on a one-year probationary contract for a total of three years. This law limits the District's ability to sufficiently assess and determine whether a newly-hired teacher is a good fit for the District. The one-year probationary period is insufficient to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom because the teacher contract renewal timelines demand that employment decisions be made before the end of the school year.

### **Category of innovation**

Other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees

## **Innovation strategies**

To create equity in new hires, to give LTISD the opportunity to serve students better, to allow administrators time to evaluate performance, and to provide opportunities for improvement, growth and professional development, the District will issue all new teachers hired in Lake Travis ISD a one-year probationary contract for a total of three years.

## **SCHOOL DAY INTERRUPTIONS - ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(Texas Education Code § 25.083(a)) (EC LEGAL, EC LOCAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code limits announcements, other than emergency announcements, made by a campus administrator over the public address system to only once during the school day. Many legitimate reasons other than emergencies can arise throughout a school day which necessitate the use of the public address system in order to inform or notify students and/or staff of information in an efficient and effective manner. This law limits campus administration's ability to use the PA system when determined appropriate or necessary.

### **Category of innovation**

Campus governance

### **Innovation strategies**

LTISD will eliminate the restriction and allow campus administrators to exercise their professional judgment in the use of public address systems in order to notify or inform students and/or staff of relevant school-related information at any time deemed necessary and appropriate.

## **SCHOOL DAY INTERRUPTIONS - TUTORING/TEST PREP TIME**

(Texas Education Code § 25.083(b)) (EC LEGAL, EC LOCAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code limits the ability to remove a student from a regularly scheduled class for remedial tutoring or test preparation if, as a result of the removal, the student would miss more than 10 percent of the school days on which the class is offered, unless a parent otherwise provides written consent. While the District recognizes the importance of keeping students in regularly-scheduled classes, this restriction imposes limitations on otherwise critical support and teaching necessary for students who may be struggling or in need of more individualized support and assistance.

### **Category of innovation**

Campus governance and instructional methods

### **Innovation strategies**

LTISD will allow for a waiver of the ten percent cap when a student's RTI/MTSS committee, 504 committee, ARD committee, language proficiency assessment committee (LPAC), Student Success

Initiative (SSI)/grade placement committee, or attendance committee determines such intervention outside of the regular classroom is necessary and appropriate. Parents must receive notification of the type of support or intervention the student will be receiving.

## **TEACHER MENTOR PROGRAM**

(Texas Education Code §21.458; 19 Texas Administrative Code § 153.1011) (DEAA LEGAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code, in conjunction with rules found in the Texas Administrative Code, implement a significant number of requirements related to the qualifications to serve as a teacher mentor, how long a mentor must be assigned, mentor training requirements, how many mentor sessions are required, etc. These are state-wide requirements without any consideration of local needs or the specific needs of a mentor program at LTISD and may limit the number of teachers who can serve or who are willing to serve in a mentor role.

### **Category of innovation**

Other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees

### **Innovation strategies**

The development of a robust mentoring program is an identified need; however, LTISD will create a locally-designed mentor program that more appropriately meets the needs and interests of its administrators and teachers. Over the course of the 2021-2022 school year, district administrators will work with campus administrators and teaching staff to develop requirements and processes for a mentor program with the goal of implementing a new program in the 2022-2023 school year. For the 2021-2022 school year, current mentoring practices will remain in place.

## **SUSPENSION OF STUDENTS IN GRADES BELOW 3RD**

(Texas Education Code §37.005) (FOB LEGAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code restricts a campus administrator's ability to place a student in a grade below third in out-of-school suspension, unless while on school property or while attending a school-sponsored or school-related activity on or off school property the student engages in certain dangerous conduct (weapons, violent offenses, or drugs). This limitation prohibits campus administrators from taking the sometimes necessary action of removing a student from the campus, regardless of age, for the safety of the student, other students, and/or the staff.

### **Category of innovation**

Campus governance

### **Innovation strategies**

To best serve the students of LTISD and provide a high quality learning environment for all students, LTISD will allow campus administrators to exercise their own professional judgment when assigning

discipline to students and place students of any grade in out-of-school suspension when the administrator determines that such action is necessary for safety and/or in order to maintain an orderly learning environment for all students. This flexibility will allow for school-based decision making and allow administrators to more effectively ensure the safety and security of all students and staff. The Superintendent or designee will report to the Board after the end of each school year the number of students in grades PreK through second placed in out-of-school suspension.

## **LOCATION OF DAEP SERVICES**

(Texas Education Code §37.008(a)(1) and 37.0082) (FOCA LEGAL)

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code requires that a disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) shall be provided in a setting other than the student's regular classroom. Consequently, in accordance with the existing law, a student who is placed in DAEP may not attend any classes in the regular classroom setting and must complete all coursework in an alternative location. This restriction, however, can result in students losing their ability to earn the necessary credit for graduation and/or a technical certification.

### **Category of innovation**

Campus governance

### **Innovation strategies**

LTISD will implement an exemption to the location requirement in order to allow for a student placed in DAEP to attend courses in the regular classroom environment when the student's physical presence and attendance in that setting is required in order for the student to get credit for the course (e.g., certain CTE courses; dual credit courses). This change will allow for a student to stay on course to graduate or continue to work toward obtaining a technical certification, for which he/she otherwise would be in jeopardy of not being able to complete because of the inability to be present. Criteria will be developed to identify certain offenses for which a student would not be eligible for this exemption.

## **EJECTION OF INDIVIDUALS FROM FACILITIES**

(Texas Education Code §37.105 and 19 Texas Administrative Code §103.1207) (GKA LEGAL, GKA LOCAL, GF LOCAL, FNG LOCAL )

### **Manner in which the statute inhibits the plan**

The Texas Education Code allows a school administrator, school resource officer, or school district peace officer to refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from district property if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request and either the person poses a substantial risk of harm to any person or the person behaves in a manner that is inappropriate for a school setting and persists in the behavior despite being given a verbal warning. Under current law, the administrator, resource officer, or peace office must maintain a record of each verbal warning of potential removal from a school facility that is issued, including the name of the person to whom the warning was issued and the date of issuance. At the time a person is refused entry to or ejected from a school district's property, the district shall provide to the person written information explaining the appeal process. And, under the commissioner's rules adopted under the authority granted in the Education Code, the

person refused entry or ejected from the facility must be given the opportunity to appeal the decision to the board of trustees within 90 calendar days. These additional, administratively burdensome requirements are impractical and potentially impossible to fulfill when an individual is dealing with an unruly individual. It is reasonable to believe that requesting such information could also escalate a situation that is already proving to be disruptive. Further, it is impractical to provide written notice of an appeal process at many events, like athletic events or public meetings, when the removal is only for the immediate event and there is not ready access to forms or a computer or printer. Furthermore, the district already has a process for taking grievances to the board of trustees and there is no justified need for a unique process or timeline.

### **Category of innovation**

Other innovations prescribed by the Board of Trustees

### **Innovation strategies**

LTISD administrators, school resource officers, or school peace officers will retain their authority to refuse to allow a person to enter on or may eject a person from district property if the person refuses to leave peaceably on request and either (1) the person poses a substantial risk of harm to any person or (2) the person behaves in a manner that is inappropriate for a school setting and persists in the behavior despite being given a verbal warning. However, the following requirements will no longer be applicable: maintaining a written log of verbal warnings; providing written notice of the appeal process at the time of ejection; internet posting of the requirements and appeal process; and the ability to appeal the decision to the board of trustees within 90 calendar days.

Exemption from these requirements will allow the district to exercise appropriate authority and processes related to unruly individuals on campuses and at other facilities in an effective and efficient manner, but do so without conducting the unnecessary and administratively burdensome requirements and avoiding potential escalation of already difficult situations. If an individual is banned from returning to LTISD property for an extended period of time, the individual will receive written notification.