

Introduction

The District of Innovation concept, passed by the 84th Legislative Session in House Bill 1842, gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- Local Control: Districts determine which flexibilities, after careful consideration and discussion, best suits their local needs.
- Customization: Districts can create an innovation plan that best meets the needs of their students, parents, campuses and districts.
- Autonomy: Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the commissioner of education, but approval is not required.
- Flexibility: Districts will have the flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from mandates such as:
 - Contract Days
 - First Day of Instruction
 - Probationary Contracts
 - Teacher Certifications
 - Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator
 - Exemption from Future TEC mandates
 - Discipline Management and Behavior Coordinator Requirements

The Electra Independent School District has determined that this level of local control would add flexibility and engage our district to think and act in a manner that provides our students, parents, and staff avenues to enrich the learning and teaching environment.

Term

Electra I.S.D. 's Innovation Plan will begin with the start of the second semester of the 2022-2023 school year and conclude at the end of the 2027-2028 school year unless the plan is terminated or amended by the Electra I.S.D. School Board in accordance with HB 1842.

District of Innovation Committee Members:

Don Hasley - Electra Junior High and High School Principal

Amanda Williams - Electra Elementary School Principal

Jennifer Steinbacher - Electra ISD Special Education Director

Rogers Lankford - Electra ISD School Board Trustee

Lindsay Lemon - Electra Secondary Academic Advisor/Parent

Meredith Utley - Electra ISD Counselor

Michelle Carrizalles - Electra ISD Parent

Blake Hernandez - Electra High School Teacher

Jennifer Mroczkowski - Electra Junior High Teacher

Lydia Arnold - Electra Elementary Teacher

Laurann Whisnand - Electra Elementary Teacher

Emily Shoopman - Electra Elementary Teacher

DATES	DOI PLANNING POINT
08/22/2022	Board of Trustees passed a Resolution to initiate District of Innovation Plan
09/22/2022	Public Meeting was held and DOI information was shared with attendees.
09/26/2022	Board of Trustees approved a motion to pursue a local “District of Innovation” plan and appointed the District of Innovation Planning Committee to draft a plan.
10/17/2022	DOI Planning Committee has first meeting and creates a general outline for DOI Plan
11/03/2022	DOI Planning Committee has a second meeting and finalizes the DOI plan. Committee votes to accept the plan for posting to the EISD website for 30 Days.

Innovations

First Day of Instruction - *TEC §25.0811 (EB Legal): A school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August.*

Innovation Strategies:

- Electra I.S.D., would like to locally determine the school start date. This flexibility would allow the district to determine, on an annual basis, what start date best meets the needs of the students.
- Starting earlier will help to balance the number of days in each semester.
- The balanced semesters will align with college semesters, allowing more opportunities for dual credit and summer school.

Kindergarten-Grade 4 Class Size - *(TEC §25.112a-g)(TEC §25.113a-b) (EEB Legal)*
Currently, districts are required to maintain a class size of 22 students or less for Kindergarten - 4th Grade classes. When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the Texas Education Agency. The district is also required to notify parents of waivers or exceptions to class size limits; these letters have to be developed in a specific format and sent at any point the 22:1 threshold is breached.

Innovation Strategies:

The goal of Electra I.S.D. will be to limit class size to the extent possible, meeting the required limits prior to the beginning of the school year. In the event that any class size exceeds this ratio during the school year, the superintendent and campus administration will determine whether to add another teacher. The proposal would look to keep class sizes below or at 22:1 (student:staff) but would streamline processes for when a specific class went over 22 by no more than 3 students. It is the position of the district that oftentimes it is in the students' best interest to stay with the teacher of record rather than be placed with another teacher who may be of lesser quality. It is also the position of the district that oftentimes the ratio is only breached for a short period of time before falling below the threshold.

Transfer Students - *Currently Under Texas Education Code §25.001, a district may choose to accept, as transfers, students who are not entitled to enroll in the district. Under TEC §25.036, a transfer is interpreted to be for a period of one school year.*

Innovation Strategies:

Electra I.S.D. 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 and the 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 (TEC §25.036) in accepting transfer applications for the following circumstances:

- Student behavior warrants suspension (in or out of school), placement in a disciplinary alternative program, or expulsion; unacceptable academic performance; student attendance falls below the TEA truancy standard.

Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator - *TEC §37.0012 requires the designation of a Campus Behavior Coordinator on each campus. This person is responsible for maintaining student discipline and implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.*

Innovation Strategies:

Electra .I.S.D. would like to abstain from the state requirement that each school have a designated campus behavior coordinator. This will free the district from this particular legislative requirement that was put into place as a solution to a non-existent problem at Electra I.S.D. Our approach to discipline is more collaborative, with multiple administrators providing emotional and social support to students. By having a single campus behavior coordinator, our school is prevented from allowing multiple administrators to deal with discipline. Exemption from this requirement increases the opportunity for campus collaboration in regards to student discipline, as outlined in the EISD Student Code of Conduct and campus discipline plans.

Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade - (TEC §25.092) *State law mandates a student 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. In addition, if a student is in attendance greater than 75 percent and less than 90 percent may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completes a plan approved by the campus administrator and meets the instructional requirements for the class.*

Innovation Strategies:

The 90% rule is an arbitrary percentage. Districts should have the option to set their own requirements. Local districts need the flexibility to set attendance requirements which reflect their specific situations and expectations. Abstaining from the requirement means the district will not have to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This new flexibility will allow for the local board to set higher expectations for attendance while promoting student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in extracurricular/co-curricular activities, academic activities or opportunities for service. It must be noted, Relief from TEC 25.092 does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League Rules. Opting out of TEC 25.092 does not limit or modify the teacher's right to determine the final grade in accordance with TEC 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with TEC 28.0216.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs and Campus Suspension Exemption

(TEC §37.008) - Currently each school district shall provide a disciplinary alternative education program that:

- 1. Is provided in a setting other than a student's regular classroom;*
- 2. Is located on or off of a regular school campus;*
- 3. Provides for the students who are assigned to the disciplinary alternative education program to be separated from students who are not assigned to the program;*
- 4. Focuses on English language arts, mathematics, science, history, and self-discipline;*
- 5. Provides for students' educational and behavioral needs;*
- 6. Provides supervision and counseling;*
- 7. Employs only teachers who meet all certification requirements established under Subchapter B, Chapter 21; and*
- 8. Provides not less than the minimum amount of instructional time per day required by Section 25.082(a). §37.005, §37.006, This does not include §37.006 (I).*

Innovation Strategies:

Students placed in DAEP can be housed and educated in the same area as students placed in In-School Suspension (ISS) on grade levels K-12. Allow Electra ISD to take a common sense approach and better utilize staff to effectively run the DAEP program. This exemption would allow us to utilize non-certified staff in ISS and DAEP part of the day and certified staff during a portion of the day.

School Health Advisory Council Statutory Citation: - *(TEC 28.004, BDF Legal)*

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. The local school health advisory council shall meet at least four times each year.

Innovation:

Electra ISD will be exempt from the requirement to hold a minimum of four meetings per year. The EISD SHAC committee shall meet at least once per year. The district's size and the stability of the membership of the SHAC committee ensures that committee members are aware of the needs of the district's students and are often able to review, advise, and revise plans in fewer than four meetings. The EISD Board of Trustees and the members of the SHAC committee should determine how often the committee should Meet.

Absences for College Visits - (TEC § 25.087)(FEA(Local)) - A school district may excuse a student from attending school to visit an institution of higher education accredited by a generally recognized accrediting organization during the student's junior and senior years of high school for the purpose of determining the student's interest in attending the institution of higher education, provided that:

- 1) The district may not excuse for this purpose more than two days during the student's junior year and two days during the student's senior year; and
- 2) The district adopts:
 - a) a policy to determine when an absence will be excused for this purpose; and
 - b) a procedure to verify the student's visit at the institution of higher education.

Innovation Strategy:

Currently students are only allowed to have two excused school days to visit institutions of higher education, also referred to as College Days. In some cases, where students are visiting colleges out-of-state, students need more than the two days that are currently allowed to safely visit an institution they are interested in attending or doing comparative visits to multiple colleges. EISD will be exempt from the two-day excused absence limit for students visiting institutions of higher education. Students would be allowed more than the current two-day excused absence limit. Prior to such a trip a parent meeting with campus administration will be conducted, parents will detail the student's needs and the documentation will be determined upon students' return to campus. Each situation would be evaluated by the High School Principal and the campus attendance committee.

Probationary Contracts - (§21.102) (DCA Legal) 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 a sufficient amount of time to evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Currently, contracts for employees occur in March or April which demands that employment decisions be made with very little time for evaluating teacher effectiveness as well as prior to state assessment results.

Innovation Strategies:

Experienced teachers, counselors, administrators, or nurses new to the district that have 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 from the first day of employment.

Teacher Contract Days (DCB Legal, DCB Local)(TEC§21.401) TEC Code Requiring Exemption: current education law in Chapter 21 defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract equivalent to 187 days.

Innovation Strategies:

Reduce the teacher contract days from 187 days to a decreased length as determined appropriate by the school in an attempt to better align the teacher days to the 75,600 minutes required of students. This will also enhance teacher recruitment and improve teacher morale.

Teacher Certification TEC 21.003 (DK Legal & Local) requires that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a district unless the person holds an appropriate certification or permit issued by the appropriate state agency.

Innovation Strategies:

Recruit teachers from the field, including individuals from certain trades and/or vocations with industry knowledge and real world experience.

- Allow consideration of part time professionals to teach courses - specifically trade related professionals with the ability to teach related courses.
- The superintendent will determine whether it is in the best interest of the district to certify the individual. The superintendent will notify the school board.
- All Classes with a state test will require a teacher with a Texas Teaching Certification.
- Allow experienced teachers to pick up an elective in an area they are qualified to teach. The principal may submit a request to the superintendent for local certification that will allow a certified teacher to teach one subject in a related field for which he/she is not certified.
- Electra ISD will exhaust all means to hire a certified teacher first.

Teacher Instructional Assignment Statutory Citation - (TEC §21.003,) Electra ISD will be exempt from the requirements which limit the district's ability to assign staff to meet local needs. Current requirements sometimes limit the ability of EISD to staff hard-to-fill positions. While EISD will continue to seek and employ fully certified teachers, exemptions from these requirements will allow the district to meet its staffing needs.

Innovation Strategies:

These innovation strategies are subject to but not limited.

- Allow an elementary certified teacher with expertise in early grades (ie. 1st/2nd grade) to teach kindergarten.
- Allow a teacher certified to teach through 6th grade to teach courses in grades seven and/or eight.
- Allow a teacher certified to teach elementary reading to be the reading teacher of record for middle and/or high school students.
- Allow a teacher certified in middle school and/or high school mathematics to teach elementary grades such as fourth and/or fifth.
- Allow a teacher to teach one or two classes out of their certified field in an area or areas that the teacher has college coursework and/or expertise.
- Allow for greater flexibility in determining appropriate CTE experience in order to teach a CTE course.

These exemptions will allow the District to be innovative as educators and offer courses and class sizes previously impossible to have contemplated. This kind of flexibility will allow the District to move our personnel to places where their greatest talents and passions may be, regardless of where their certification might be limiting them, and in turn, they may take our students to greater and higher achievements.