

Blue Ridge ISD

District of Innovation Plan



BRISD School Board Approved: April 25, 2022

Amendment Approved: August 22, 2022

Amendment Approved: September 18, 2023

Effective beginning with the 2022-23 school year and continuing through the end of the 2026-27 school year.

Introduction

House Bill 1842, passed by the 84th Legislature, allows districts to seek designation as a District of Innovation in order to pursue flexibilities available to Texas' open-enrollment charter schools.

Potential benefits of becoming a District of Innovation include:

- **Local control:** Districts decide which flexibilities best suit their local needs.
- **Customization:** Districts can create an innovation plan for a level of school, grade level, or a single campus.
- **Autonomy:** Districts must submit a district of innovation plan to the Commissioner of Education, but approval is not required.
- **Flexibility:** Districts will have flexibility to implement practices similar to charter schools, including exemptions from certain mandates.

On Tuesday, January 17, 2016, the Blue Ridge ISD Board of Trustees initiated the process by adopting a resolution to pursue a "District of Innovation" designation.

The district's original innovation plan was unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees on April 17, 2017.

Process

The District of Innovation Committee, which is composed of members of the District Improvement Team and Curriculum Council, provided input with regard to district, campus and community needs for the local district of innovation plan renewal during a meeting held on February 10, 2022. The committee subsequently approved the plan on February 17, 2022. The plan was posted to the district website for public input on February 17, 2022, where it remained until **the Board of Trustees approved the plan on April 25, 2022.**

Term of Plan

The plan will begin August 1, 2022 and conclude May 31, 2027, unless terminated or amended by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the law. The committee will continually monitor the effectiveness of the plan and recommend to the Board of Trustees any modifications.

District of Innovation Renewal Timeline

April 17, 2017

The original District of Innovation Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees

February 10, 2022

District of Innovation Committee meeting to review the plan for renewal recommendations.

February 17, 2022

District of Innovation Committee public meeting for feedback/approval.
District of Innovation Plan posted to the district website.

March 30, 2022

Commissioner of Education notified of the Board of Trustees intention to vote on adoption of the proposed plan on April 25, 2022.

District of Innovation Plan Committee Members

Matt Kimball,
Superintendent

Trent Hamilton,
High School Principal

Anna Miller,
ESL Coordinator

Jennifer Stroup,
High School Teacher

Matthew Todd,
Assistant Superintendent

Phillip Lentz,
Middle School Principal

Missy Douglas,
Elementary Counselor
At-Risk Coordinator

Kristen Lentz,
Middle School Teacher

Amanda Ray,
Chief Financial Officer

Shelley Reeves,
Elementary Principal

Stephanie Bermudez,
Secondary Math
Instructional Coach

Michele Mackey,
Middle School Teacher

Melissa Stiney,
Director of Instructional
Technology

Angel Perez,
Secondary Assistant
Principal

Amy Brown,
Elementary Reading
Instructional Specialist

Roma Morgan,
Middle School Teacher

Joanna Verde,
Parent/Little Cubs
Daycare Director

Cristen Allen,
Elementary Assistant
Principal

Chantel Stewart,
High School Teacher

Sonja Stephens,
Elementary Teacher

Sylvia Gaulden,
Community
Member/Parent

Terra Mathers,
Coordinator of Special
Education and
Intervention Services

Dena Hamilton,
High School Teacher
District Librarian

Blue Ridge ISD Mission and Goals

Mission Statement:

The Blue Ridge Independent School District exists to inspire all students to grow and excel academically and to become independent citizens of character with global awareness and an enthusiasm for learning.

- Goal 1: Blue Ridge ISD will base all decisions on students' academic achievement, physical growth, and emotional development.
- Goal 2: Blue Ridge ISD will provide a safe physical and emotional environment for student and staff learning.
- Goal 3: Blue Ridge ISD will employ teachers and staff who are innovative, dedicated, and life-long learners.
- Goal 4: Blue Ridge ISD will develop partnerships with staff, students, and community with a focus of shared responsibility for student success.
- Goal 5: Blue Ridge ISD will be prudent financial stewards who, through equitable allocation of district resources, focus on students success and community trust.

Innovations

First Day of Instruction

Board Policy EB Legal & TEC 25.0811

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 25.0811 prohibits school districts from beginning instruction for students for the school year before the fourth Monday in August.

Innovation Strategy:

BRISD will utilize a flexible start date to be determined locally, on an annual basis, that best meets the needs of the students and community. Consideration of an earlier start date will allow for balanced instructional time between semesters, support semester course curriculum, provide flexible professional learning opportunities for staff members, and better align semesters with a college schedule for high school dual-credit students.

Teacher Certification

Board Policy DK Legal, Local, Exhibit & TEC 21.003

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 21.003 requires that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside their certification, the district must request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification.

Innovation Strategy:

The district will maintain its current expectations for employee certification and will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certifications 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 and equipped to effectively perform the duties of the position in question. Blue Ridge ISD would like the ability to locally certify teachers in areas of high demand, to better meet the educational needs of our students. These areas would include, but are not limited to CTE, bilingual education, and languages other than English. Teachers with industry certifications and native speakers with qualified experience could be eligible to teach a course through a local teaching certification. Additionally, Blue Ridge ISD will notify parents if a locally certified teacher is employed for their child's class. This process will allow more flexibility in our scheduling, and provide more options for our students in class offerings leading to industry recognized certifications.

To support teachers credentialed through the local certification process, lesson plans for the uncertified teacher will be created in partnership with certified teachers in the same field, whenever possible.

Teacher Contracts

Board Policy DCA Legal & TEC 21.102

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 21.102 requires that experienced teachers new to a district cannot have a probationary contract period that exceeds one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the previous eight years.

Innovation Strategy:

A probationary contract may be issued up to two years from the first day of employment with the district for experienced teachers, counselors, librarians, instructional coaches, and therapists who are new to the district, and that have been employed under a teacher contract in public education for at least five of the previous eight years.

Teacher Contract Days

Board Policy DCB Legal, Local & TEC 21.401

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 21.401 defines a teacher contract as a 10 month contract equivalent to 187 days.

Innovation Strategy:

The district has the option to annually decrease teacher contract days from 187 to a length better aligned to the academic calendar with no effect on a teacher's annual salary. This option would be utilized to better align teacher contractual days to the 75,600 minutes required of students, enhance teacher recruitment, and improve teacher morale.

District administration will annually recommend specific modifications regarding teacher contract days to the Board of Trustees as a component of the district's compensation and benefit program.

Absences for College, University, Career Tech/Trade Schools or Military Visits

TEC 25.087

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 25.087 excuses student absences for a maximum of two days for college or university visits.

Innovation Strategy:

The district will allow students four documented college/university/career tech/trade schools visits, including military testing and recruiting, both their junior year and senior year.

Class Size Waiver Submission

Board Policy EEB Legal, TEC 25.111, TEC 25.112 & TEC 25.113

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 25.111 requires school districts to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers to maintain an average ratio of not less than one teacher for every twenty students in average daily attendance. Texas Education Code Section 25.112 generally prohibits a district from enrolling more than twenty-two students in a Kindergarten through Fourth Grade class unless the district claims an exemption through the TEA waiver process. Texas Education Code Section 25.113 requires a campus or district that is granted a class size waiver to provide parental notice.

Innovation Strategy:

The district will attempt to keep all Kindergarten through Fourth Grade core classrooms within the 22:1 ratio. In the event the class size exceeds this ratio, the following will occur:

- The Superintendent will make the Board of Trustees aware of the specific classroom that has exceeded the 22:1 ratio.
- The campus will notify the parents of students in any Kindergarten through Fourth Grade classroom that reaches a ratio of 25:1.
- The district will not request an exemption through the TEA waiver process when a Kindergarten through Fourth Grade classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio.

Transfer Students

Board Policy FDA Local & TEC 25.036

Current Requirement:

Texas Education Code Section 25.036 allows students to transfer annually from the student's school district of residence to another in the state if both the receiving district and applicant parent or guardian jointly approve. FDA Local specifies the process for transferring into the district, the factors to be considered when approving transfers, and designates the length of the transfer as one regular school year.

Innovation Strategy:

Transfer status may be revoked by the Superintendent at any time during the school year if the student is assigned disciplinary consequences such as suspension (in school or out of school), placement at the DAEP, or expulsion. In addition, transfer students not meeting the state's 90% attendance standard may also be subject to immediate revocation of transfer status. This allows the district to better utilize school resources for the benefit of the district.

Mandatory Disciplinary Alternative Education Program for E-Cigarettes

TEC 37.006, TEC 37.009(a), and TEC 37.008

Current Requirement:

Under HB114 in the 88th Legislature, the Texas Education Code 37.006 was amended to specify the following: a) Subject to the requirements of Section 37.009(a), a [A] student shall be removed from class and placed in a disciplinary alternative education program as provided by Section 37.008 if the student...C-2) possesses, uses, sells, gives, or delivers to another person an e-cigarette, as defined by Section 161.081, Health and Safety Code.

Innovation Strategy:

This has the effect of requiring districts to place a student at DAEP for possessing or using any part of a vaping device, with or without the presence of any prohibited substances. Our DAEP partner campuses already experience periods throughout the school year where capacity is reached, and this change has the potential to add numerous placements each school year based on district data. Additionally, the district believes that a less punitive consequence, paired with a vaping prevention program for a first offense will better support early intervention efforts, maintain academic consistency, and keep students engaged in school activities and experiences. The first offenses of e-cigarettes, including any parts and accessories as well as any nicotine cartridges, the campus administration will assign 5 days in school suspension or a comparable setting, and require completion of a vaping prevention program, instead of placement at DAEP as required by the Texas Education Code.

This exemption will only apply to e-cigarette offenses that did not involve THC or other controlled substances or illegal drugs. Those offenses will continue to be subject to mandatory DAEP or JJAEP as per the Texas Education Code and BRISD Student Code of Conduct. Additionally, subsequent e-cigarette offenses in the same school year will not be subject to this exemption and will continue to be subject to mandatory DAEP or JJAEP as per the Texas Education Code and BRISD Student Code of Conduct. Additionally, since the district's current counseling alternative is not available to students under grade 3, a vaping prevention program will be developed on a case-by-case basis to support individual students in the lower grades if needed.

This District of Innovation Plan is valid for five years beginning in August 2022.