

**MINUTES OF LOCAL INNOVATION COMMITTEE MEETING
EL PASO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
FEBRUARY 24, 2021
12:00 P.M.**

- PRESENT:** Cezy Collins, General Counsel
Dr. Tamekia Brown, Chief Academic Officer
Patricia Cortez, Superintendent of Human Resources
Nancy Tovar, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools
Norma De La Rosa, President of El Paso Teachers Association
Ross Moore, President of El Paso American Federation of Teachers
Laura Strelzin Bagley, Teacher, Franklin High School
Martha Aguirre, Executive Director of Budget & External Financial Management
Dr. Sarah Chavez-Gibson, Principal, Stanton Elementary School
Nancy Hanson, Principal, Logan Elementary School
Ray Aduino, El Paso Builders Association
Dow Farley, Retired Teacher
Jessica Silva, Librarian, El Paso High School
Richard Gutierrez, UTEP Professor
Mari Vanpelt, Community Member
Jonathan Childress, Community Engagement Manager, Microsoft TechSpark Program
Mica Short, Vice President of Development, Paso Del Norte Community Foundation
Dr. Deborah Fetzer, Youth Education Support Services Director, Fort Bliss Liaison
Dr. Elena Izquierdo, UTEP Professor
Gustavo Arriaga, Lead Program Manager, Southwest Region, Microsoft Philanthropies TEALS Program
- OTHERS:** Cheryll Felder, Executive Director Student & Parent Services
Eric Winkelman, Director Career & Technical Education
- ABSENT:** Michael Martinez, City Manager, Sunland Park, NM

1. Welcome

Ms. Cezy Collins, General Counsel, and Dr. Brown, Chief Academic Officer, welcomed the Committee members to the third Committee meeting. Ms. Collins explained the members would review the District's current exemptions in breakout groups. Groups will discuss the exemptions and report back whether they recommend proceeding with the exemptions. Ms. Collins requested candid feedback from everyone and encouraged the committee to share their opinions.

2. Brief Overview of Prior Meeting and Distribute Minutes

Ms. Collins mentioned the minutes were distributed to the committee via email. In addition, she explained that the Committee would revisit the exemptions from other districts discussed last week. A brief outline of those exemptions were sent via email for convenience.

3. Current Local Innovation Plan Successes and Impacts of Exemptions

Dr. Brown explained District leaders would explain each current exemption, the rationale for them, and their application to and impact on the District.

A. 90% Rule

Ms. Felder explained rationale for this exemption. Students passing their classes, were being penalized when participating in school activities requiring an absence. Pre-COVID19, the number of students retained was affected by the 90% rule. Schools can focus on students who need additional support and strategies. The exemption has impacted the dropout rate as retention percentages have decreased causing less students to drop out.

B. Uniform School Start Date

This provision of the code prohibits the District from beginning school before the 4th Monday in August. Dr. Brown explained that the start date was adjusted to balance the amount of instructional time in the fall and spring semesters. Except for the 2017-2018 school year, the school semesters have been balanced. School has historically started before the fourth Monday of August. This allowed students in 6th and 9th grades to have time to transition to their new settings, which benefited their social and emotional competence. This year, 2020-2021, the calendar was balanced, but due to the pandemic, the calendar had to be adjusted.

C. Teacher Certification for Dual Credit Instructors (limited)

Ms. Cortez explained that this exemption was utilized to ensure that the District had the flexibility to apply it when there was a need in the event there was a shortage or a challenge to fill certain teaching areas. There has not been a shortage due to the trend of decreasing enrollment. In the instances applicants have been hired not having a certification, they have completed the alternative certification program. Alternative certification is not the go to option, however. Additionally, the exemption provides for the opportunity to have a credentialed community college instructor or university professor teach specific content areas. Our intent as a District is that we look for certified teachers. Mr. Winkleman shared that uncertified teachers cannot teach advanced courses for Science of Math credit. Also, for Career and Technical courses, he stated it is necessary to have a certified teacher with the work experience because this allows the students to be able to complete the fourth course for completion of technical certifications. Another point he made was the problem with not having leverage to make the uncertified teachers get certified once they are with the District. He stated he would prefer to keep the exemption off the table for career and technical education teachers.

D. Campus Behavior Coordinators

Ms. Felder explained the state legislature required that each campus have a Campus Behavior Coordinator. In our District, that falls to our Assistant Principals for discipline. This exemption allows the District to encourage social and emotional development of students. It also allows the campus the flexibility in approaching student behavior and discipline outcomes allowing for a collaborative approach.

E. Teacher Appraisals (limited)

Ms. Tovar explained the District uses T-TESS for teacher appraisals. This model includes educator professional development, goal setting and tracking, and formative student assessments. Elimination of the use of standards-based assessment for student growth measure allows for collaboration between teachers and appraisers as they monitor student progress via the Student Learning Objectives (SLO). All teachers create SLOs regardless of T-TESS waiver status. SLO requires formal, data collection of various assessment pieces to inform a teacher of the progress of students towards mastery of grade level expectations whereas the standards-based assessment is a one-time snapshot of a student's knowledge which could be affected by the type of day the student is having.

F. Preclusion from Providing Alternative Uniform Group Coverage

Ms. Aguirre explained that the District opted to step away from the TRS Active Care and host the self-funded health care plan with CIGNA starting in the 2019-2020 school year. This allows for increased local control of the group health benefits plan which benefits employee and community needs. The number of employees who participated with the EPISD Plan CIGNA increased from 5,537 employees in 2019-2020 to 5,803 employees in 2020-2021. The number of employees who participated with TRS Active Care Plan decreased from 1,388 employees in 2019-2020 to 862 employees in 2020-2021. Employees opting for the EPISD Plan CIGNA are able to save a considerable amount of their take home pay. Ms. Aguirre stated it was a good option and recommended that the District move forward with this exemption. Mr. Moore added that the number of member complaints has decreased with the addition of the District healthcare plan. Ms. Hanson stated she transferred to the District healthcare plan and has access to the same doctors and better care. Additionally, CIGNA rewards members for keeping up with wellness checkups.

The Committee then divided into breakout groups to discuss the current exemptions. After discussion the Committee reconvened.

Dr. Brown shared that her group talked through the current exemptions and the implications. They recommended that the current rationales reflect our reality now and how the District benefited and why we should continue with them.

Dr. Izquierdo stated that they were in agreement with the exemptions as a group. They encountered technical difficulties but were able to still hold a discussion without the video feed. In general, they agreed with maintaining the exemptions so that it will allow for the flexibility needed to focus on the innovations. She stated that was the feeling of the group unanimously.

Ms. Cortez spoke for group 1. They were not able to get through all the exemptions but did focus on the teacher certification exemption. Although the District will have the exemption it will not be the go to option. Since the group was unable to discuss the other exemptions, Ms. Collins asked if the group had any objections to the exemptions that were not discussed by the breakout group. Ms. Hanson said no one jumped out with any objections to the exemptions. She also reiterated what Mr. Winkleman stated to the whole group at the start of the presentation, which was to keep certain things in mind as cautionary for future consideration in the application of the exemption.

Ms. De La Rosa reported as spokesperson for group 4. She stated they were only able to address the 90% rule exemption. The group agreed to keep the exemption because it will help students not get penalized for participating in school activities. They had a questions whether this exemption would apply to non-district activities. Ms. Felder stated that non-sponsored school events will negatively affect a student's attendance record. Ms. Collins asked if there were any objections to the other exemptions from the group. Ms. De la Rosa stated they didn't get that far. Ms. De la Rosa stated the group agreed to continue with the 90% rule exemption.

Mr. Moore spoke for Group 5. He stated they spoke at length about the benefit of CTE and the ability for students to graduate with skills they can use for employment. Ms. Collins asked him if his group was in agreement with the current exemptions. He said yes to roll them over.

4. Revisit Exemptions from Other Districts not in EPISD's Current Plan

There were 11 exemptions that are different from EPISD's discussed last week. Ms. Collins asked for feedback from the groups that discussed the specific exemptions.

Group 5 had the discussion about the Mentor teacher exemption. Ms. Aguirre mentioned that the exemption was for a fast growth district. EPISD does not have that issue due to the declining enrollment. Discussion was held regarding the three or more years' experience required of a Mentor teacher. Ms. Collins cited the applicable Texas Education Code. Mr. Moore would not recommend the exemption. Ms. De la Rosa would like to see the years of experience required to be a Mentor teacher to be increased. Dr. Izquierdo agreed with Ms. De la Rosa that three years is not enough time and that it requires training to be a mentor teacher. Mr. Arriaga asked about the time a teacher stays at a campus. Mr. Moore stated there are other factors that affect teacher turn over. Ms. De la Rosa added that there are times it is difficult for new teachers to feel comfortable but it isn't true for every campus. There are many factors for why a new teacher would stay at a campus. Ms. Hanson added that the adoption of T-TESS provides for administrators to mentor teachers.

The Committee next discussed the credit by examination exemption of Highland Park ISD that called for the score to increase from 80% to 90%. Mr. Childress stated it might be a disservice to move students along with the broader mastery with the lower percentage score. Mr. Arriaga asked what the data looks like for students who have tested and how they are doing in subsequent classes. Mr. Moore was curious to know how much of the student population it applies to. Ms. Tovar agreed with Mr. Moore. Ms. Felder suggested to look at the data from analytics. The score of 80% has helped out our students. Ms. Hanson would advocate on behalf of the student and allow for the 80%.

The Committee next discussed the exemption from the Kindergarten starting age. Ms. Felder spoke about the funding implications if the District were to follow the recommendation. She stated TEA would not fund the students. The District would lose funding. Ms. Collins stated she reached out to Texas Association of School Boards and with TEA and they both stated we would not receive full funding for the students. Ms. Aguirre stated that we lost 5,000 students this year while the projection was to lose 2,000 students. For fiscal year 22 we are projected to lose 2,000 students, which is the equivalent of about 15 million dollars in revenue loss. Dr. Izquierdo asked what levels we are losing students from. Ms. Aguirre stated the loss is seen in elementary levels.

The Committee next discussed Killeen ISD's exemption from the number of days students are allowed for college/military visits. Ms. Felder added that TEA has allowed for some military students to start if they had started public school elsewhere. Ms. Felder stated they use parent request so they will still be able to go. She recommended we not use the exemption because TEA would not provide funding. Mr. Farley stated that he feels the State should understand that extra days are needed. He stated that if it is a funding issue, we should not use the exemption. Mr. Childress agreed with him. He did expand on it adding it would be best to promote college and career readiness for parents. Mr. Arriaga asked about the anticipated budget impact and if it could be covered in other ways. Ms. Felder stated she could ask for a report from Bruce. The committee could consider adding college/military visits to the legislative priorities.

Time expired before all exemptions could be discussed. Ms. Collins stated the Committee will continue with discussion of the exemptions that came from other districts at the next meeting. Data that was requested will also be provided at the next meeting for consideration by the Committee.

5. Next Meeting on Wednesday, March 3, 2021, 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

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