

**MINUTES OF LOCAL INNOVATION COMMITTEE MEETING
EL PASO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
March 10, 2021
12:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Cezy Collins, General Counsel
Dr. Tamekia Brown, Chief Academic Officer
Patricia Cortez, Assistant 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
Michael Martinez, City Manager, Sunland Park, NM

OTHERS: Steve Clay, Executive Director of Analytics, Strategy, Assessment, and PEIMS
Laila Ferris, Interim Chief of Languages and Dual Language
Manuel Castruita, Director of Counseling and Advising
Cheryll Felder, Executive Director of Student & Parent Services
Gabriela Gomez, Executive Assistant, General Counsel
Victoria Orozco, Director of Strategy and Evaluation
Dr. Rosie Perez, Coordinator Legal Services and Office of Quality Management

A. Welcome

Ms. Cezy Collins, General Counsel, and Dr. Brown, Chief Academic Officer, welcomed the Committee Members to the fourth Committee meeting. Ms. Collins thanked the committee members for their understanding regarding last week's cancelled meeting due to the evacuation of the District's Central Office.

B. Brief Overview of Prior Meeting and Distribute Minutes

Ms. Collins provided a brief overview of the prior meeting (February 24, 2021). The minutes were distributed previously. The meeting today would provide Committee members the rationale and data for certain exemptions under discussion that committee members had requested more information.

C. Continue Discussion of Exemptions from Other District's Not in EPISD's Plan

A. Credit by Examination (Highland Park)

Ms. Collins referred to the materials that she had sent to the committee members regarding the exemption. Highland Park used the exemption to increase the passing rate for credit by exam from 80% to 90%. Mr. Steve Clay, Executive Director of Analytics, Strategy, Assessment, and PEIMS provided EPISD data regarding Credit by Exam. He shared the number of exams given and the passing and failing rates along with historical data for 5 years. He shared the impact on the budget and that tests are ordered for specific students and are not transferrable to other students. Mr. Clay stated that it would not be prudent to change the passing rate to 90% because the number of students gaining credit would decrease. He stated some students need the credit by exam to graduate when they have taken the class previously and been unsuccessful. Ms. Cheryll Felder, Executive Director of Student & Parent Services, stated it would increase dropout rates. Ms. De La Rosa asked if the testing information for credit by exam impacts the District's federal and state accountability. Steve stated the credit by exam information does factor into the A-F accountability for the District. Mr. Martinez asked why the

percentage is set to 80% instead of 70%. Mr. Clay said it is set by the state. Ms. Collins added that the passing rate of 80% is required by Texas Education Code. Ms. Felder stated that two years ago the passing rate was lowered to 80% from 90%.

B. Kindergarten Start Age (Klein)

Ms. Laila Ferris, Interim Chief of Languages and Dual Language, stated that currently students must be 5 years old on or before September 1st. There are social and emotional factors to consider. The factors will affect the ability of the student to relate to the other students, some who will turn 6 during the school year. Ms. Ferris stated the effects can be seen later such as in 4th grade. They are not on par with their peers as far as maturity. Fine and gross motor skills are not developed equally. The students younger than 5 have a harder time with attention to task. This could cause frustration for the student.

Mr. Martinez mentioned the decrease in enrollment. He stated there are new models that allow for testing or a means to see if students are in fact ready to start school. Ms. Ferris spoke to the assessment needed to assess if a child is developmentally ready for school and explained that it isn't always appropriate to test children at this age. Ms. Felder stated the tests for young students are grueling. Mr. Clay said it is rigorous. Dr. Brown said that there are no students at Kline ISD that have entered before the age of five. Kline ISD has developed PreK programs. They requested the exemption but have not used it.

Dr. Fetzer stated that Texas Education Code Title IV, Chapter 162, does protect military transitioning students and allows them to enter kindergarten and first grade if they were enrolled in a public school in the commensurate grade level. She also suggested that the Interstate Compact has language that could potentially be adopted by the District of Innovation Committee regarding students transitioning from other states that are not the required age for their grade level. Ms. Felder stated if a student has been placed in a public school at a grade level, the District honors that placement. Ms. Felder stated the language is already in the Attendance Accounting Handbook.

Dr. Izquierdo asked how many parents are requesting to enroll their child in Kindergarten earlier. Ms. Felder stated it is about one or two a year that request the placement. Ms. Ferris stated that the parents of younger five year olds request for the child to stay in kindergarten or held back one year. Ms. Felder stated we have had more requests to keep children in kindergarten. Mr. Moore asked about a child born on a date after September 1st. Ms. Felder stated the District does not have a process for enrolling students whose birthday is after September 1st. The State is very specific for registering students in Kindergarten and First Grade. Ms. Collins stated the law states September 1st or we do not receive funding. Next year we can have PreK-4 because the State will fund those students. Ms. Collins asked about whether funding was the same for PreK-4 and kindergarten. Ms. Aguirre stated it is different. PreK-4 receives ADA and Early Education funding. Ms. De La Rosa asked if we made the exemption, how that would affect our teachers and their certifications if the child is 4 in the class. Ms. Ferris stated it depends on the certification the teacher holds. The child would be accepted into a Kindergarten class with a teacher certified to teach the 4 year old student the Kindergarten curriculum. Ms. Ferris restated that the issues arise later when there is for example a 9 year old with 10 and 11 year olds. The socialization is different and could impact the nine year old. Dr. Izquierdo stated that Reading can be an issue for the student because it is cognitive challenging for children and that will affect the whole child. Dr. Izquierdo commented on the push the State has made to fund Early Education.

Mr. Arriaga said he disagreed and shared his own child's experience who is excelling in 1st grade at the age of 5. Dr. Izquierdo stated the exemption would be for the benefit of the student who is ready and would benefit. Ms. Collins stated the District could have the exemption but then the District would need to develop the criteria. She stated voting and consensus would need to occur in the future when drafting a plan.

C. College/Military Visits (Killeen)

Ms. Felder stated there is a number of students who go on military visits and can meet with a recruiter. Funding will be provided as long as we do not go over the two days. Ms. Felder stated that although the District were to file for this exemption, funding would not be provided for more than 2 days. There were no questions on this exemption from committee members.

- D. District Level Planning and Decision Making (Clear Creek)
Campus Level Planning and Decision Making (Clear Creek)
Discussion of these two exemptions were discussed together. Dr. Brown stated that Clear Creek has an extensive strategic planning process and they are moving away from improvement plans as just a compliance process to a continuous improvement process. They connect the strategic planning to district and campus goals. It took them a year to develop the process and have used it for four years. Ms. Collins asked if it would be premature to exempt the District from these processes without having conducted a deliberate, thoughtful, and thorough exercise to determine an alternative process. Dr. Brown stated it would be best to have a steering committee to ensure this process would be useful if we decided to use this exemption. Ms. Aguirre stated there may be financial implications. We would have to explore to see the implications. Mr. Moore stated we should think of cost. He stated he was not sure what the point of the exemption would be since requirements are laid out and they are specific. Ms. Collins stated it may be premature without having an alternative process in mind. In the future, if there was a reason the District would want to implement these exemptions, the District could amend the plan by going through the process to amend. Ms. Collins asked if any campus administrators would like to share their thoughts. There was no further discussion on this exemption.
- E. Limits on Suspending Students Grade 3 and Below (Frisco)
Ms. Felder shared that our District Board does not want students in grades 2nd and below being placed in ISS or OSS. District policy is more restrictive than the State mandates. Ms. Collins stated that starting the 2016-2017 school year, the District decided no student prior to third grade could be expelled or removed except as required by law. There were no questions from the committee.
- F. Exemption from Certification for Teachers of Classes Other Than English (Arlington)
Ms. Cortez stated that certification is important. District has not been in a position to utilize the current exemption. District will begin recruiting nationwide for Bilingual teachers. Mr. Arriaga stated staffing with non-certified personnel is happening for CTE courses like Computer Science at High Schools except at Bowie. Ms. Cortez stated that this particular exemption is for a language other than English. Ms. Cortez stated that perhaps he was referring to the teachers who are working on certification through the Alternative Certification Program. Ms. Hanson stated that certification does not guarantee a deliverable. She is hesitant to bring in non-certified teachers. Dr. Izquierdo stated that there is not a current certification for Dual-language. She stated teachers must hold ESL or Bilingual certification. Mr. Moore stated the non-certified teacher would be alright for CTE, for example in a welding class by a master welder. Ms. De La Rosa stated we are working with Universities so that college students with interest in certain competencies can become certified in those areas. Mr. Childress spoke to better utilizing teachers and keep up with advanced certification.
- G. Counselors Versus Social Workers (Mansfield)
Mr. Castruita spoke with colleagues in east Texas. There is a certified counselor shortage in those regions. In our area, we have many certified counselor candidates. The certifications are different for counselors and social workers. In the District, counselors must have a Master's degree and clinical experience. Social workers can have a bachelor's degree but do have to have licensure. The District has a few social workers with the Focus on Children and Family Program as well as with Special Education. Ms. Hanson was a prior counselor. There are billable social work services but not counseling services that can be reimbursed to the District. They are two different positions and they are not interchangeable. Ms. De La Rosa said that you cannot interchange the roles of the social worker and the counselor. It is good to see teachers grow as professionals and seek counseling credentials. Our students will need the support and will need to be taken care of by our counselors due to this pandemic. Ms. De La Rosa stated perhaps the District may want to look into hiring more social workers. Be innovative in that way, hire more counselors and more social workers.

H. Discuss Other Ideas for Innovation

Time ran out before this item was discussed.

I. Discuss Potential Survey

Ms. Collins stated she will circulate the prior survey for everyone's information. The committee will then decide on drafting a survey to send out to stakeholders.

J. Discuss Drafting of the Proposed Plan

Ms. Collins said the committee will discuss drafting of the plan in the future.

K. Discuss Status Report to the Board of Trustees

Due to time restraints no discussion took place on updating the Board on the status of the committee.

L. Next Meeting on Wednesday, March 24, 2021, 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

M. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

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