

**MINUTES OF LOCAL INNOVATION COMMITTEE COMMUNITY MEETING  
EL PASO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**April 7, 2021  
5:00 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  
Michael Martinez, City Manager, Sunland Park, NM  
Norma De La Rosa, President of El Paso Teachers Association  
Ross Moore, President of El Paso American Federation of Teachers  
Martha Aguirre, Executive Director of Budget & External Financial Management  
Nancy Hanson, Principal, Logan Elementary School  
Jessica Silva, Librarian, El Paso High School  
Dr. Elena Izquierdo, UTEP Professor  
Mica Short, Vice President of Development, Paso Del Norte Community Foundation  
Dr. Deborah Fetzer, Youth Education Support Services Director, Fort Bliss Liaison  
Gustavo Arriaga, Lead Program Manager, Southwest Region, Microsoft Philanthropies TEALS Program

**OTHER:** Melissa Martinez, Chief Communications Officer  
Gustavo Reveles, Director Community Engagement  
Gabriela Gomez, Executive Assistant General Counsel  
Cheryll Felder, Executive Director Student & Parent Services  
Dr. Rosie Perez, Coordinator Legal Services and Office of Quality Management  
Approximately 40 community members

**A. Welcome**

Ms. Cezy Collins, General Counsel, and Dr. Brown, Chief Academic Officer, welcomed the community members and Committee members and thanked them for attending the virtual meeting.

**B. Overview of District of Innovation Process and Exemptions from Chapter 12A of the Texas Education Code**

Dr. Brown and Ms. Collins provided an overview of the District Innovation Process. Dr. Brown stated that the District wants every student to have a great seat in every single classroom in every single building. She discussed the current Strategic Plan as it was displayed for the participants. Dr. Brown stated that the District is nearing the end of the current Strategic Plan and is planning how to move forward with an updated Plan that will take the district through the 2023-2024 school year. Ms. Collins explained the benefits of the ability to be a District of Innovation. She explained the eligibility requirements to receive the designation as a district of innovation. Ms. Collins reviewed the steps required in the process to become a District of Innovation. Ms. Collins stated that the Board adopts a resolution to develop a Local Innovation Plan. Next the Board approves the Local Innovation Committee members. The Committee develops the Local Innovation Plan. The District notifies the Texas Education Agency of its intention to vote on the proposed Plan. The Final Plan is posted on the District website for 30 days. The District Improvement Team (aka DEIC) holds a public meeting and votes on the Plan (majority required for approval). The final step requires that the Board vote on the Plan (2/3 of membership required).

**C. Discussion of Current Plan and Amendment thereto**

Ms. Collins reviewed the list of the current six exemptions included in the District of Innovation Plan. She discussed the exemptions from the Texas Education Code for minimum attendance for class credit or final grade (90% rule), First Day of Instruction, limited exemption for Teacher Certification for Dual Credit and Career and Technical Education Instructors, Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator, limited exemption for Teacher and Administrator Appraisals, and Preclusion from providing alternative Uniform Group Coverage (By Amendment).

**D. Discussion of Board Resolution and Parameters**

Ms. Collins reviewed the District Resolution for the meeting participants. She explained that the Board of Trustees did not desire that the District be exempted from any existing laws relating to teacher contracts or teacher benefits, except to the extent that the Texas Education Code 22.004 (i) precludes the District from providing alternative group health coverage available to its employees under this

section. Ms. Collins reviewed the list of prohibited exemptions while displaying them for the meeting participants.

**E. Composition, Role and Work of the Local Innovation Committee**

Dr. Brown asked Committee members to turn their camera on and wave to be recognized. She stated the names of the committee members and their appointers to the Committee. She shared the list of dates the Committee met. Dr. Brown explained the topics the Local Innovation Plan Committee discussed.

**F. Discussion of Proposed Plan and its Exemptions from the Texas Education Code**

Ms. Collins reviewed the exemption from Minimum Attendance for Class Credit or Final Grade. It allows District to promote student engagement as well as social and emotional development. It does not impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements.

Mr. Moore stated that the finality of teachers' grades is not affected. Ms. De La Rosa stated the Committee wanted to ensure that students involved in extracurricular activities were not penalized due to school related absences. The Committee wanted to protect the students in respect to their grades and attendance. Dr. Izquierdo and Mr. Martinez added that they agreed with the comments as well.

Ms. Collins reviewed the exemption from the First Day of Instruction. Dr. Izquierdo stated the Committee agreed that this exemption was needed to promote a healthy start for the District's students. Mr. Martinez reiterated the flexibility of scheduling with the exemption. Mr. Moore stated that for courses that are one semester long, the prior school calendar short changed the course taught in the fall. Ms. De La Rosa stated that as a teacher it helped to balance the semesters and not feel rushed. It helps to have the same number of academic days in each semester.

Ms. Collins reviewed the exemption from Teacher Certification for Dual Credit and Career and Technical Education. Ms. Cortez stated that the District benefited from the exemption in case it was needed. It is not the District's first option for filling teaching positions. Ms. De La Rosa stated that it was not just used to hire non-certified people. Mr. Moore stated that this exemption has not been abused by the District nor have teachers been hired under this exemption. He provided an example of master welders having the skills and experience to benefit students. Dr. Izquierdo stated it motivates the university to prepare more college students. Mr. Martinez stated it was a learning experience for him to review the exemption during Committee meetings. The exemption is limited to dual credit and career and technical instructors. He stated the District is providing education at a higher level.

Ms. Collins reviewed the exemption from Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator. Mr. Martinez and Dr. Izquierdo spoke favorably on the exemption.

Ms. Collins reviewed the exemption from Teacher and Administrator Appraisals. She stated that the rationale is to promote individual growth. Mr. Moore stated that teachers are evaluated on teaching and preparing of lessons as opposed to state assessments. Ms. De La Rosa stated that students know content and might not test well, so the exemption allows a teacher to focus on growth and not just focus on the state assessments. Dr. Izquierdo stated that she echoed what Mr. Moore and Ms. De La Rosa stated. Mr. Martinez stated the exemption allows teachers to share the progress of the students.

Ms. Collins reviewed the exemption from Alternative Group Health Coverage. She stated it allowed the District to provide an option to enroll in a self-funded plan. Mr. Martinez stated this is a win-win for teachers and taxpayers. Ms. De La Rosa stated it allows for local control. She stated the rates for premiums would increase every year and that Districts had no say in what the TRS governing board decided. There were hourly employees who could not afford the TRS health plan. Mr. Moore stated teachers were affected without the exemption.

Ms. Collins stated the exemptions discussed previously are currently in the Plan. She stated the Committee was interested in adding the exemption for visits to accredited institutions of higher education. The Committee recognized that the visits could be pivotal to a student deciding to attend college. The additional day would allow for travel time. Dr. Izquierdo stated that it is important for students to have the opportunity to visit campuses. She recalled how Mr. Moore had stated that some universities are farther and required more time for travel. Mr. Martinez stated it is difficult to travel to some areas when driving while only having two days. Ms. De La Rosa stated it would allow students to decide where they would like to visit and allow them time to speak to students and professors on campus. Ms. Felder stated that there is a final exam exemption a student can receive for less than 3

absences and grade point average of an A. The exemption will not penalize students who have absences due to college visits.

Ms. Collins explained the timeline. She provided the dates and activities required of the Local Innovation Committee.

Dr. Brown thanked the Committee members for their support.

## **G. Questions**

Dr. Brown asked participants for any questions. Mr. Miranda, participant, asked what the previous initiatives that have been successful are? What specific qualifications are required for the Campus behavior coordinator? What is being done in regards to state and federal funding? Will the current board vote or will new board members vote on the Innovation Plan?

Ms. Collins provided an answer to the first question. She stated that District was not constrained by the 90% rule. Students did not have to be held to 90% of seat time in order to receive credit for the course. The exemption freed the District from having to comply with the onerous process that was in place. In 2015, the Board at that time wanted to opt of the attendance 90% rule requirement. The exemption of the first day of instruction having to be after the fourth Monday in August, was not utilized the first year of the Plan. Feedback was received from parents. The parents weren't ready to adjust the start time due to planned vacations so the change to the start of school year was gradual. Ms. Collins stated that Ms. Cortez spoke about the importance of having the dual credit and career and technology educators' certification exemption. Ms. Collins stated that Dr. Izquierdo, Mr. Moore and Ms. De La Rosa stated that they saw the exemption as a benefit and that it didn't take away from teachers. Ms. Collins spoke about the exemption from Appraisals of teachers and administrators tied to student state assessment data. The District has removed the standardized state assessment scores as one of the measures from the teacher and administrator evaluations. Ms. Collins referenced the self-funded plan of insurance as another benefit arising from the District of Innovation distinction.

Ms. Collins addressed the second question. She stated that as for the exemption from the Campus Behavior Coordinator requirement, it provided for there to be more than just one person in charge of discipline concerns. She stated that the qualifications of the assistant principal serve for the role of disciplinarian. Ms. Collins stated that Ms. Felder would address the question as well.

Ms. Collins addressed the third question regarding what the District is doing in regards to state and federal funding. She stated that District of Innovation process only allows District to opt out of certain provisions of the Texas Education Code. The District of Innovation Plan cannot alter anything related to state and federal funding.

Ms. Collins addressed the fourth question. She stated the Board of Trustees will vote May 11, 2021. The Board of Trustees received the timeline at the onset of the District of Innovation renewal process.

Dr. Brown stated the District of Innovation process provides charter-like flexibility but in no way is the Committee creating a pathway to Charter. The Committee sought exemptions that would allow District schools to excel. Dr. Brown stated the committee did a good job of thinking through why all of the selected exemptions will benefit the students, teachers and families of EPISD.

Ms. Felder stated that an administrator can be selected as the campus behavior coordinator. All administrators hold Masters Degrees. Only principals and assistant principals can issue discipline consequences. Every year campus administrators develop a campus plan of discipline. The plan is created by reviewing the previous year's infractions and the plan includes counseling options, inviting guest speakers to talk to the students about bullying and student behavior to address those infractions. The District SEL program is interactive with the student discipline. Texas has a list of mandatory requirements for severe offenses with due process and allowance for a parent to appeal. Ms. Felder explained that the hearing officer makes a decision on whether to continue with the consequences or reduce the number of days in the case of removals. Administrators contact parents of student when writing a referral. Any student below 3<sup>rd</sup> grade cannot be suspended or placed in in-school suspension.

Mr. Moore stated he and Ms. De La Rosa are in agreement with the District of Innovation Plan. He stated they would not be supporting the Plan if there was even the thinnest path to a charter school under it. He stated things have improved for his members such as with health care, control of their gradebooks, and not being evaluated on test scores. Mr. Martinez stated that during the Committee meetings, Ms. Collins and Dr. Brown shared the graduation rates and other deliverables.

Ms. Collins thanked everyone for attending and thanked the Committee members for their time. Dr. Brown thanked everyone for attending.

**H. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:31 p.m.

DRAFT