

**MINUTES OF MEETING LOCAL INNOVATION COMMITTEE
EL PASO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
FEBRUARY 11, 2016
11:30 A.M.**

PRESENT: Dr. Royce Avery, Area II Superintendent;
Jaime Barcelau, Social Worker;
Karen Blaine, Executive Director Advanced Academics & Innovation;
Dr. Tamekia Brown, Executive Director Academics;
Cezy Collins, General Counsel;
Norma De La Rosa, Teacher and President, El Paso Teacher Association/TSTA/NEA;
Dr. David DeMatthews, UTEP;
Michael DeVine, Retired Teacher;
Ivonne Durant, Deputy Superintendent Academics and School Leadership;
Laila Ferris, Principal Mesita;
Lynn Gill, Principal Andress H.S.;
Scott Gray, Asst. Principal, Irvin H.S.;
Nancy Hanson, Principal, Schuster E.S.;
Dr. Elena Izquierdo, UTEP;
Ross Moore, President, El Paso AFT;
Melanie Mullings, Parent and member of DEIC;
Amy O'Rourke, Parent
Leila Sarmecanic, Rogers Morris & Grover;
Debbie Trexler, Youth Education Support Services Director, Ft. Bliss Liaison, and member of DEIC;
Dr. Mike Warmack, Principal, Bowie H.S.;

ABSENT: Ingrid Brown, Parent;
Dana Hamilton, Parent;
Elizabeth O'Hara, Diocese of El Paso

1. Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 11:30. The Committee was asked if the meeting time from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. was convenient, and the Committee felt that it was so no change to the proposed meeting times will be made.

2. Brief Overview of Prior Meeting and Distribute Minutes

Ms. Sarmecanic distributed the draft minutes from the February 2, 2016 meeting for review and comment. Ms. Collins commented that all agendas and minutes of meetings will be posted on a special page on the District's website.

3. Break-Out Groups to Discuss Specific Short-Term Ideas for Innovation

The Committee broke into 4 groups to discuss specific short term ideas for innovation identified and discussed at the last meeting: The 90% rule; School Start Date; Pre-K; and Classroom Size Waivers

4. Reconvene Entire Committee to Discuss Short-Term Ideas for Innovation

The Committee reconvened as a group to summarize their discussion, which included:

90% Rule (Exemption desired and is achievable for 2016-2017):

The minimum attendance for credit law ties the hands of schools that wish to provide a rich learning environment to students instead of giving consideration to education of the whole child. The rule is not important to universities and it infuriates parents. Overall, it is seen as a waste of resources on credit recovery and does not necessarily focus on students that are really absent. If the District were exempt from this requirement, the District could be afforded flexibility to manage students' learning, which would take the burden off teachers to prove a student has content mastery in order to focus instead on delivering high quality instruction and providing support to students and families with true attendance issues. Ross Moore indicated that exemption from the 90% rule would give teachers an extra 30-90 minutes per day to focus on more important tasks than the paperwork required by the 90% rule.

School Start Date (Exemption desired and is achievable for 2016-2017):

Ideas included starting earlier in the year in order to balance Fall & Spring semesters. An exemption from the uniform student start date would allow for more professional development for teachers. Ross Moore indicated that 85% of his membership were in favor of starting the school year earlier and finishing earlier. It was also noted that data supports that students benefits from starting school earlier than their peers in the transition years from Pre-K to K, 5th grade – 6th grade, and 8th grade – 9th grade in order to allow extra time to prepare students for the transition to a new school environment.

Pre-K (Additional work and discussion required)

There was discussion about potentially waiving the requirement that students must reach the age of 4 by September 1 in order to be eligible to participate in Pre-K. Instead, it was suggested that, based on developmental ability, some students who would otherwise miss out on a year of Pre-K because of their biological age could be allowed to participate if the District put an assessment in place to identify if the students are ready to attend Pre-K. There were questions about whether funding would be available for these students such a change were made. The importance of full-day Pre-K (Universal Pre-K) was discussed. There was discussion of whether the District could give Head Start classroom space for early childhood development labs at the District so students could get full-day Pre-K at the District without having to take a bus. There was discussion of the Texas School Ready Curriculum for early childhood development and the need to investigate the courses currently being offered and how the curriculum could be augmented to add incorporate dual language.

Classroom Size Waiver (Additional work and discussion required)

The group discussed for grades Pre-K through 4, whether the District should consider opting out of the mandatory 22:1 teacher to student ratio. There was a consensus that smaller class sizes are better for students in these grades and that 22:1 is an important class size ratio to maintain. However, it was noted that a reason to want to opt of this rule is that the pool of teachers available to hire after the ratios are reported to TEA and when waivers are needed is not necessarily when the best teachers are seeking employment, which leads to poorer instruction. There was discussion that a needs assessment process is necessary to determine how this rule is actually impacting staffing and students. When student enrollment increases unexpectedly, strict adherence to the 22:1 rule often requires the District to hire teachers late in the school year, when the higher quality teachers are not available, or students are required to be taken out of their classrooms where they were being taught by high quality teachers and put in new classrooms with long-term substitute teachers. Concerns were expressed about the need for procedures and the possible negative perception that opting out of this requirement would have, including potential loss of funding due to declining enrollment if parents were to enroll their students elsewhere. Since staffing accounts for 86% of the District’s budget, there was discussion of using innovations such as an average class size over time or compensating teachers (monetarily or through an extra planning period) if their classes were to go a small number above the 22:1 ratio. Caution was advised as some principals might not implement innovation and flexibility from the 22:1 rule uniformly or without bias.

5. Break-Out Groups to Discuss Long-Term Ideas for Innovation

The Committee broke into 4 groups to discuss specific long term ideas for innovation identified and discussed at the last meeting: Length of School Day; Teacher Certification; Teacher Appraisals; and Student Discipline.

6. Reconvene Entire Committee to Discuss Long-Term Ideas for Innovation

The Committee reconvened as a group to summarize their discussion, which included:

Length of School Day (Additional work and discussion required)

There was discussion of the need for additional professional development for teachers and potentially shortening the school day for students to allow for that. Concern was raised about the financial and educational impact of reducing the required minutes of instruction for students. Funding is provided to the District based upon a seven-hour school day. In order to prevent the loss of funding and not to reduce instructional time for students, there was discussion of both providing professional development for teachers and other forms of instruction for students so as not to negatively impact instruction. For example, students could be offered fine arts or other enrichment programs while professional development is provided to teachers. There was also discussion of reorganizing the 8-hour school day to provide professional development while still maintaining 75,600 minutes of instruction in order to promote innovation.

Teacher Certification: (Exemption desired and is achievable for 2016-2017):

The discussion centered on an issue related to dual credit courses where a community college professor is credentialed through the community college, but may not have a Texas teaching certification. This

can cause a lost opportunity for students to be offered dual credit classes due to lack of teachers. In order to allow students greater opportunities to take dual credit classes, there is a desire to waive the certification requirement only for high-need, hard-to-fill subject areas where credentialed community college instructors could begin teaching dual credit courses at the high school while being provided professional development to assist them with pedagogical issues specific to teaching secondary students.

Teacher Appraisals: (Exemption desired and is achievable for 2016-2017):

The group discussed the desire to maintain T-TESS but to eliminate the requirement that 10% of teacher appraisals be tied to student assessments because tying teacher appraisals to student test scores causes teachers to leave, promotes cheating, and stifles creativity.

Student Discipline – (Exemption desired and is achievable for 2016-2017):

The group discussed the need to reduce discretionary suspensions and removals and the desire to address the inconsistency in the law regarding “mandatory” offenses. The group would like to see additional gravitation to PBIS, restorative justice, the community school model, and in-school disciplinary options. Current focus on the social and emotional learning of the student is helping. The group also discussed the desire to opt out of the requirement that there be a single campus discipline coordinator at each campus. The group understood opting out of certain provisions of Chapter 37 of the Education Code would still require the District to have a Student Code of Conduct approved annually by the Board of Trustees. There was discussion of revising the Student Code of Conduct in order to focus less on mandatory punishment and more on positive behavioral interventions and supports.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.