

# District of Innovation Plan

*Draft*



**Strategic Plan Strategy 1: We will ensure rigorous curriculum and meaningful experiences through innovative learning environments that meet the individual needs of each student.**

## Class Size and Student/Teacher Ratio

### **Statutes:**

§TEC 25.112 – Class Size

§TEC 25.113 – Notification of Waiver

### **Currently:**

§25.112 addresses the number of students that may be in a single kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class and limits that number to 22. The intent of this statute was to ensure that classrooms maintained a small teacher/student ratio under the belief that smaller classes led to improved achievement for students who benefited from more individualized teacher attention. While a state waiver may address the maximum number of students in K-4 classrooms, these waivers have never been rejected by TEA; therefore, it represents an unnecessary bureaucratic step. In addition, a letter is required to inform parents of the waiver. In many cases, the class has returned to a smaller student to teacher ratio before the waiver is even approved negating the need for this correspondence. Moreover, hiring staff mid-year disrupts the rapport and relationships built, makes it difficult to find highly qualified teachers, and changes the dynamics of the learners. The statute does not take into consideration the impact of transferring students to new classrooms in the middle of the school year.

### **Proposed:**

It is the philosophy of Pasadena ISD that lower class sizes have a positive impact on Kindergarten -4th grade students; therefore, the district will stay true to the intent of the 22:1 ratio. We believe, however, that appropriate class sizes can be monitored and maintained at the local level without the necessity of waivers from the Texas Education Agency.

- Staffing decisions and teacher needs will be based on projected 22:1 ratios in K-4<sup>th</sup> grade. Pasadena ISD will continue to begin each school year with enough teachers to establish a homeroom student to teacher ratio of 22:1 per Kindergarten-4<sup>th</sup> grade class.
- In the event that two or more core classrooms in a K-4<sup>th</sup> grade reaches 24:1 during the first grading period of the year, the District will actively seek an additional teacher.

By seeking an exception from §25.112 the District would have flexibility for all campuses and classrooms for the duration of the District of Innovation Designation and would not be required to seek waivers annually.

## School Start Date

### **Statute:**

§TEC 25.0811 – First Day of Instruction

### **Currently:**

A district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August unless the district operates a year-round system. A district may not receive a waiver of this requirement. Using this year's calendar with August 1, 2017 being a Tuesday, the start date would not occur for students until August 28. Teachers would be able to start August 21.

### **Proposed:**

Implementation of this statute as is will result in the loss of 5 of instruction in the first semester. Starting one week earlier in August allows for more instructional time prior to semester exams and more instructional time overall prior to state exams. With the approval of this District of Innovation process we request approval to start sooner than the fourth Monday in August.

## High School Diploma and Certificate/Course Sequence

### **Statute:**

§TEC 28.025 (b-2) – Course Sequence

### **Currently:**

The statute, as written, is a problematic requirement that adversely affects students seeking to recover credit and graduate in a timely manner or those students seeking to accelerate their high school program to graduate early.

### **Proposed:**

Students will be able to enroll in courses that meet their needs, selected graduation plans and endorsements. Students and their parents will annually review their course selections and, with campus guidance, determine which courses and sequences best meet the needs of each student. Annual guidance will be provided to students/parents regarding course selection and timing of courses based on graduation plans and endorsements, without the limitations of unnecessary prerequisite course requirements.

## Minimum Attendance for Credit or Final Grade (90% rule)

### **Statutes:**

§TEC 25.092 – Minimum Attendance for Credit or Final Grade, TASB EI – Academic Achievement, TASB FEC—Attendance for Credit

Pasadena ISD believes that students demonstrate their learning by mastering content objectives. To the extent possible, individual paths to mastery are provided. While good attendance correlates with academic success, the focus in Pasadena ISD is on mastery of content over seat time. After losing credit for poor attendance it makes little sense to require students to serve additional seat time once they made up missed assignments, demonstrate mastery of course content, and earn a passing grade. Time and resources spent by staff members and students fulfilling seat time requirements are better used in intervention and enrichment efforts.

**Currently:**

Per TEC 25.092, a student in any grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 may not be given credit or a final grade for a class unless the student is in attendance for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered.

- A student who is in attendance for at least 75 percent but less than 90 percent of the days a class is offered may be given credit or a final grade for the class if the student completed a plan approved by the school's principal that provides for the student to meet the instructional requirements of the class.
- The board of trustees of each school district shall appoint one or more attendance committees to hear petitions by students who do not complete the plan showing the student met the instructional requirements of the class. Classroom teachers shall comprise a majority of the membership of the committee. A committee may give class credit or a final grade to a student because of extenuating circumstances. Each board of trustees shall establish guidelines to determine what constitutes extenuating circumstances and shall adopt policies establishing alternative ways for students to make up work or regain credit or a final grade lost because of absences.

Presently, the Pasadena ISD plan for a student who is in attendance for at least 75 percent but less than 90 percent of the days a class is offered is for him/her to (1) do sufficient work to earn a passing grade, and (2) serve make up time assigned based on the number of absences. Students who earn a passing grade but who do not complete their assigned make up time may submit a petition explaining specific extenuating circumstances and ask that class credit be restored anyway. Campus administrative teams assign, track, and monitor make up time throughout each semester. Campus attendance committee meets each semester to review attendance and make up time data and determine which credits are to be restored based on petitions.

**Proposed:**

Students who complete assigned course work and demonstrate mastery of course content will earn credit or a passing final grade for a class in accordance with local policy and regulations designed to encourage scholarly behaviors and good attendance. This will eliminate the need to calculate, impose, track, and monitor additional amounts of seat time. This proposal allows campus staff to refocus efforts on student learning and intervene with students who are truly at risk.

Relief from this rule does not in any way impact or alter existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League (UIL) rules. Additionally, opting out of this rule does not limit or modify a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with TEC 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with TEC 28.0216.

**Strategic Plan Strategy 3: We will actively recruit, develop, and retain a highly qualified staff.**

**Certification Required****Statutes:**

§TEC 21.003, DK Local, DK Legal, DK Exhibit

**Currently:**

In the event a district cannot locate a certified teacher for a position or a teacher is teaching a subject outside of their certification, the district must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency. TEA then approves or denies this request.

**Proposed:**

The district will continue to will make every attempt to hire individuals with appropriate certification; however, the district may locally grant exceptions to certification requirements in order to best meet the needs of PISD students. For example, but not limited to, an individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach an industry recognized skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with all the individual's credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if they feel the individual could be an asset to students.

**Teacher Employment Contracts****Statute:**

§21.002 Teacher Employment Contracts

**Currently:**

Experienced teachers new to the district have a probationary period that may not exceed one year if the person has been employed as a teacher in public education in Texas for at least five of the previous eight years. This time period is not sufficient to evaluate an employee's effectiveness.

**Proposed:**

All contract employees new to PISD that have been employed in public education in Texas for at least five of the eight previous years, may be issued a probationary contract for up to two full school years from the date of district employment. This will allow the district more time to evaluate a staff member's effectiveness prior to offering a term contract.

**Local Role (Appraisal Process)****Statute:**

§TEC 21.352

**Currently:**

Each school district shall use the appraisal process developed by the commissioner of education (T-TESS) or an appraisal process and performance criteria developed by the district and approved by the commissioner.

**Proposed:**

The performance of certain certified positions are difficult to fairly evaluate using the current evaluation system (T-TESS). Therefore, a district committee of teachers and administrators will develop alternate appraisals for teachers/certified personnel in Pasadena ISD where the adopted teacher evaluation instrument might not appropriately gauge the effectiveness of the employee.

The appraisal instrument used for evaluation of certified personnel will not include a growth measure.

**Strategic Plan Strategy 5: We will promote a safe school environment, teach citizenship, and support the social, emotional and physical well-being of all students and staff.**

### **Campus Behavior Coordinator**

#### **Statute:**

§TEC 37.0012 – Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator

#### **Currently:**

Senate Bill 107 requires the designation of a campus behavior coordinator on each campus.

- (a). A person at each campus must be designated to serve as the campus behavior coordinator. The person designated may be the principal of the campus or any other campus administrator selected by the principal.
- (b). The campus behavior coordinator is primarily responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of this subchapter.

#### **Proposed:**

The proposal for PISD is to seek exemption from the statute requiring each school to have a designated campus behavior coordinator. The relationships that are established between the campus administrator, student and parent are the foundation for promoting and maintaining positive behavior. Utilizing a local process allows the administrator who currently has a relationship with the parent and student to be the person to make parental contact. The administrator notifies the parent of discipline or behavioral concerns, rather than having contact made by a designated behavior coordinator, who may or may not know all the students, providing a more individual and personalized approach.