District of Innovation Proposed Innovations

1. **Teacher Certification**  
(TEC 21.044, 21.003) (DK LEGAL, DK LOCAL, DK EXHIBIT)

**Currently:**
In the event that the District cannot locate a certified teacher for a position, or a teacher is assigned to a subject outside of his/her certification, the District must submit a request to the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Approval or denial of this request must then be issued by TEA.

**Innovation Statement:**
To best serve Lancaster ISD students, decisions regarding certification will be handled locally. The District’s goal is to hire certified teachers; however, we need flexibility in hiring for areas that are difficult to fill. We will collaborate with businesses and community leaders connecting industry with instructional initiatives to create opportunities for students. Lancaster ISD will also offer incentives to recruit, retain and recognize highly qualified teachers.

1. Lancaster ISD proposes to submit a request for approval to fill a teaching position to the superintendent or designee:
   - For a certified teacher to teach one subject out of his/her certified field; or
   - To allow an individual who holds a four-year degree to teach in a “hard to fill” classroom as identified by the District, if he/she is willing to pursue a bilingual certification and is eligible to take the exam, and/or be enrolled in an appropriate Alternative Certification program.

2. The written request would outline the reason for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which would qualify this individual to teach the subject and must be submitted by the principal to the superintendent or designee for approval.

**Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:**
From Strategy 2A: Collaborate with businesses and community leaders connecting industry with instructional initiatives to create opportunities for students.

**Benefit to District:**
The request will afford the District the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades and vocations to teach the crafts of those trades and vocations, such as health sciences, agriculture, business technology, engineering, culinary arts, cosmetology logistics and cyber security.
Exemption from TEC 21.044 and 21.003 would enrich applicant pools in specific content areas and enable more students to obtain the educational benefit of career and technical course offerings.

**Benefit to Student Achievement:**
1. The District gains flexibility to meet district/campus needs
2. Allows the District to address “high needs” areas to match teacher skill sets with district needs
3. Increases the opportunity to hire industry-certified personal
4. Increases the opportunity to offer courses where students may obtain industry certifications

**Example in Practice:**
We currently have students working in our pharmacy technician program assigned to CVS. With this option, we could create advanced pharmacy classes that will allow students to move from pharmacy technicians to becoming pharmacists. We could also provide internships where students would receive high school or college credit.
2. Teacher Appraisal
(TEC 21.352) (DNA LEGAL, DNA LOCAL)

Currently:
In appraising teachers, each school uses the appraisal process developed by the
District. The appraisal process, timeline and performance criteria developed by the
District Committee are based on the Texas Commissioner of Education’s required
criteria.

Innovation Statement:
To best serve the needs of Lancaster ISD staff, we propose to allow a district committee
of administrators and teachers the option to develop alternate appraisals for specific
groups of teachers since the adopted teacher evaluation may not be the most
appropriate evaluation. Such groups of teachers could include Life Skills, PASS, SLC,
Elementary Specials, and CTE classes among others. Lancaster ISD will motivate
highly-qualified teachers to remain in the district by providing opportunities for multiple
career paths or advancement. We will also utilize 21st Century practices to design a
recruitment, retention and development system for personnel that capitalizes on an
employee’s strengths and talents.

We propose to allow a district committee of administrators and teachers the option to
develop a local teacher evaluation system that can be used in the place of the
commissioner’s recommended instrument (T-TESS).

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From Strategy 3A: Refine the HR process by incorporating 21st Century practices,
ensuring all applicants are highly qualified for the position and adaptable to flexible
environments and diverse cultures.

Benefit to District:
This innovation affords Lancaster ISD the opportunity to redefine the focus of evaluation
from summative appraisal to continuous improvement through multiple opportunities for
feedback and support for professional development and capacity-building.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
A district-developed assessment instrument provides the District with the opportunity to
utilize an assessment tool that is customized to focus on growth for the educator and
the student. Such benefits as:
   1. Multiple visits by well-trained observers who evaluate teacher practices based
      on a clear set of performance standards connected to student expected
      outcomes.
   2. Measures of teacher impact on student learning such as multiple years worth of
      value-added data.
Example in Practice:
Use a district-developed instrument that provides a focus on instructional delivery, student engagement, the learning environment, and design & planning instruction, growing and developing teachers as well as a pay for performance model (TAP).

This type of instrument would allow the district to continue our tiered approach to capacity building that focuses on development over time rather than a checklist of indicators.
3. Probationary Contracts
(TEC 21.102)(DCA LEGAL, DCA Local)

Currently:
A person, who previously was employed as a teacher by the District, and after at least a two-year lapse in District employment returns to the District, may be employed under a probationary contract.

The District may employ a person as a principal or classroom teacher under a term contract if the person has experience as a public school principal or classroom teacher, respectively, regardless of whether the District is employing the person for the first time or whether a probationary contract would otherwise be required under Education Code Section 21.102.

Innovation Statement:
The District would like to have the flexibility to extend the continuation of probationary contract status at the discretion of administration beyond what is mandated when it is in the best interest of our learners.

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From Strategy 3: We will utilize 21st Century practices to design a recruitment, retention and development system for personnel that capitalizes on strengths and talents.

Benefit to District:
Relief from Texas Education Code 21.102 will permit the District the option to issue a probationary contract for a period of up to two years for experienced teachers, counselors or nurses newly hired in Lancaster ISD.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
Research suggests that teacher turnover can be harmful to student achievement, school climate and culture. This innovation will benefit student achievement by retaining teachers who have classroom and content experiences that separate them from the “none-experienced” teacher. Retaining this staff prevents the district from “starting over” with building teacher capacity—which has a direct impact to student performance.

Example in Practice:
The current practice is that a teacher is extended a probationary contract for two years. After two years, a teacher must be issued a term contract or recommended for termination. By adopting this innovation, a teacher who has been provided support throughout the last two years and shows great promise as a valuable asset to the District, may be extended a probationary contract beyond the two years. While this educator may not receive an extended term contract, the probationary contract allows the District to retain the time and resources extended thus far while still evaluating and supporting. The probationary contract also allows the district to continue developing educators who may be hired in a certification area that is hard to fill (ex: bilingual, CTE, Math).
4. School Start Date
(TEC 25.0811) (EB LEGAL, EB LOCAL)

Currently:
The Texas Education Code provides that students may not begin school before the fourth Monday of August.

Innovation Statement:
To best serve the students of Lancaster ISD, we propose a school calendar that serves the needs of our local community and moves the mandatory start date back one week so that students will begin school no earlier than the third week of August. Lancaster ISD will create trainings that enhance the connections among instructional initiatives in the district for all stakeholders. We will also expand professional development offerings to included data-driven analysis techniques.

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From Strategy 2B: Create trainings that enhance the connections between instructional initiatives in the District for all stakeholders.

From Strategy 7E: Expand professional development offerings to include data driven analysis techniques

Benefit to District:
The number of days in the fall and spring semesters will be more balanced than they are currently. Additionally, Lancaster ISD classes can begin prior to the start of Cedar Valley College classes. The balanced semesters will align with college semesters, allowing more opportunities for summer school, internships and industrial certification opportunities. Lancaster ISD will also utilize strategically planned dates to empower, educate and encourage families to embrace involvement in education through conference and workshop opportunities.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
1. Increase professional development days for all teachers during the calendar year
2. Increase the number of content specific days for educators from 10 to 24
3. Increase student achievement as measured by advanced courses

Example in Practice:
The student start date would move back one week allowing us to develop a more responsive professional development plan that will afford us the opportunity to embed more professional learning opportunities during the school year. In addition, we will build time into the calendar for activities such as data disaggregation, teacher collaboration, student engagement and community service for students and teachers.

Our current calendar options and draft plans will increase professional development days over the course of the year from 10 to 24 days for targeted groups of teachers. Flexibility with the calendar allows for the creative use of time to meet emerging needs.
5. **Minimum Minutes of Instruction/90% rule**

TEC 25.092 (TEC 25.081) (EC LEGAL & EB LEGAL)

**Currently:**
House Bill 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amends the Texas Education Code (TEC) §25.081, by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing with language requiring districts and charter schools to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess). The bill also allows school districts and charter schools to add minutes as necessary to compensate for minutes of instruction lost due to school closures caused by disasters, flood, extreme weather conditions, fuel curtailment or other reasons.

**Innovation Statement:**
To best serve the Lancaster ISD community, the exemption from TEC 25.081 would allow the superintendent or designee to determine whether to amend the District calendar to make up or extend instructional time. In reference to the 90% rule, the District may award class credit based on content mastery rather than penalize students based on seat time. Lancaster ISD believes that purposeful planning to meet student needs leads to intentional outcomes for student success. The modifications would connect to that belief.

**Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:**
From the Belief Statements: We will provide customized learning environments to ensure that all learners reach self-sustaining learning potential.

**Benefit to District:**
The proposed exemption from TEC 25.081 will allow Lancaster ISD to avoid submitting waiver requests to TEA in cases of unforeseen changes to the school calendar, and will further allow Lancaster ISD to adjust school day schedules to meet the instructional needs of students.

**Benefit to Student Achievement:**
1. Increase the number of credits via online platforms for middle and high school students
2. Increase enrollment in advanced courses
3. Maintain or increase the current graduation rate

**Example in Practice:**
In an effort to increase the number of students who take advanced courses, we have to make space within their current schedules. We would offer competency-based courses online at different points in the school year and during the summer. Course credit is awarded and based on mastery and not seat time.
6. Kindergarten – Grade 4 Class Size
(TEC 25.111-13) (EEB LEGAL)

Currently:
According to state law, Kindergarten – 4th grade classes are to maintain a 22 to 1 student-teacher ratio. When a class exceeds this limit, the District must complete a waiver with TEA.

Along with the waiver, a letter must be sent home to each parent in each class/section exceeding the 22:1 ratio informing parents that a waiver has been submitted. In many instances, soon after the waiver process is complete, the class size drops below the maximum 22:1 ratio due to students withdrawing from the District and/or school.

Innovation Statement:
To best serve the needs of Lancaster ISD students and staff, the District will attempt to maintain the 22:1 ratio in all Kindergarten – 4th grade core classrooms. However, if the class size exceeds this ratio, the superintendent, or designee, will report the circumstance to the District Board of Trustees and parents.

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From Strategy 7: We will provide customized learning environments to ensure that all learners reach self-sustaining learning potential.

Benefit to District:
While the District believes small class size plays a positive role in student learning, this must be balanced with the logistics and timing of adding staff. We do not believe that there is a negative impact to student achievement when one or two additional students are added to a class. Most importantly, research demonstrates that it is the teacher—and not absolute class size—which has the greatest impact on student learning.
A TEA waiver request will not be necessary when a Kindergarten – 4th grade classroom exceeds the 22:1 ratio. To best serve Lancaster ISD students, decisions regarding class size ratios will be addressed locally.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
This innovation allows the District to be more efficient with personnel allocations without negatively impacting student achievement.

Example in Practice:
The District recognizes the importance of the 22:1 ratio in primary grade levels. There are instances when one or two additional students will arrive to a class and it is in the best interest academically and/or socially to minimize changes to a students' learning environment. In this instance, we would place students with a highly competent teacher. We believe the campus principal or counselor, in collaboration with the classroom teacher, should execute this decision.
7. Designation of Campus Behavior Coordinator
(TEC 37.0012) (FO LEGAL)

Currently:
Senate Bill 107 requires the designation of a Campus Behavior Coordinator on each campus. This person is responsible for maintaining student discipline and the implementation of Chapter 37, Subchapter A.

Innovation Statement:
To best serve the needs of students and staff in Lancaster ISD, we propose the District abstain from designating only one person as the Campus Behavior Coordinator.

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From the Belief Statements: Educators, parents and students share the responsibility to develop well-rounded individuals.

Benefit to District:
Lancaster ISD’s elementary campuses currently have at least two administrators—one principal and one assistant principal—who, by job description, currently serve in this capacity. Our secondary schools each have one principal and multiple assistant principals who work together to ensure compliance with Chapter 37, Subchapter A. We believe in a collaborative approach to discipline, with multiple people providing emotional and social support to students, rather than just one person. Exemption from this requirement will allow the option of increasing collaboration regarding student discipline, as outlined in the District’s Student Code of Conduct.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
Suspension and expulsion can disrupt students’ learning and erode their connection to school. Recent research shows that exclusionary discipline also harms the “academic achievement of non-suspended students.” Removing students from the learning environment when they are struggling to behave can appear successful because the student is not there. However, restorative discipline research points to the long-term negative effects of this approach, particularly on students who need strong connections to school and who often face multiple challenges with school success factors.

Example in Practice:
The District embraces a restorative justice approach to school discipline. With this relational approach that fosters inclusion, social engagement and meaningful accountability, a committee of educators will address student behavioral concerns instead of one individual.
8. Exemptions from Future Texas Education Code Mandates

Currently:
Districts are required to implement all TEC mandates without regard to financial impacts.

Innovation Statement:
To best serve our community, staff and students, Lancaster ISD includes a provision in our Local Innovation Plan for the District to maintain control over any future, eligible Texas Education Code mandates, which may be exempted by a 2/3 majority vote of the Lancaster ISD Board of Trustees.

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From Strategy 6: We will collaborate with businesses and community leaders to invest in the vision and mission of Lancaster ISD.

From Strategy 7: We will provide customized learning environments to ensure that all learners reach self-sustaining learning potential.

Benefit to District:
Allows for flexibility and the opportunity to evaluate any future mandates.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
This innovation provides the District with the opportunity to remove barriers that may divert money to unfunded requirements that were intended for instructional purposes to enhance student achievement.

Example in Practice:
The District would review all TEC mandates and consider exemptions from allowable areas that could negatively affect student achievement.
9. Pre-Kindergarten 4-year old & Kindergarten Start Age
(TEC §29.151)(FD LEGAL)

Currently:
Texas Education Code Section 29.151 prohibits a student from entering kindergarten who is not 5 years old by September 1 of the current school year.

Innovation Statement:
To best serve the needs of the students of Lancaster ISD, we propose the District be given flexibility to extend the enrollment deadline to October 1 for the Pre-kindergarten 4 program to students who will be 4 years old by October 1 of the enrolling (current) year and 5 years old of the enrolling (current) year for Kindergarten.

Connection to Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:
From Strategy 7: We will provide customized learning environments to ensure that all learners reach self-sustaining learning potential.

Benefit to District:
Children mature and demonstrate readiness for school at varying rates and their social/emotional development can be affected by a wide range of factors. The September 1 deadline for entering public kindergarten does not provide the flexibility needed by the District to serve students who are ready for school earlier than the established date.

Parents of students who are ready for kindergarten curriculum and learning environments are enrolling their children in private kindergarten programs and then requesting to skip ahead to first grade once they return to public schools the following year.

Benefit to Student Achievement:
This innovation provides students who are equipped academically and socially to begin instruction in pre-kindergarten 4 and kindergarten programs without penalizing them because of age.

Example in Practice:
A student who may be 4 years old by October 1 may enter pre-kindergarten of the enrolling year. In addition, a student who is 5 by October 1 may enter kindergarten of the enrolling year.
Implementation

The Local Innovation Plan is designed to create parameters within which the District will operate, in order to provide additional student opportunities. Specific plans, tasks and timelines will be developed for implementation.

Revisions to Board Policy and regulations will also be developed and adopted where appropriate.