The 84th Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 1842 which gives traditional independent school districts most of the flexibilities available to the state’s open enrollment charter schools. HB 1842 provides Panther Creek CISD an opportunity to modify state requirements at the local level to better meet the needs of our student population, in order to prepare them for success and life-long learning. Our district must have an academic performance rating of at least Academically Acceptable and adopt an innovation plan.

Panther Creek CISD took the first step in exploring this opportunity when the PCCISD Board of Trustees approved a resolution initiating the process in January. The Board then held a public hearing to consider whether the district should develop an innovation plan, at which time the Board decided to move forward in the process. A committee was appointed to develop an innovation plan. The committee created a district of innovation plan. The plan then will be posted on-line for at least 30 days. The District Advisory Committee will have a public meeting to approve it before it can go back to the Board.

District of Innovation Team

Rodney Cole, Board of Trustee
Dwin Nanny, Superintendent
Mark Romine, Technology Coordinator
Robin Turner, Secondary Teacher
Maricela Morris, Parent & Community Member

Cameron Norris, Secondary Dean of Students
Lorrie McMahon, Elementary Dean of Students
Seth Jackson, Counselor
Candace Beal, Elementary Teacher
Glynda Bradley, Parent & Community Member

District of Innovation Timeline

January 17, 2017
Board of Trustees approve resolution to hold a public hearing to discuss the possibility of becoming a District of Innovation
Public hearing to explain and discuss possibility of becoming District of Innovation

January 23, 2017
Initial meeting of the District of Innovation Committee

January 26, 2017
Review of plan by the District of Innovation Committee
January 27, 2017
Innovation plan posted on the district website for 30 days (TEC 12A.005(a)(1))
Commissioner notified of Board’s intent to vote on District of Innovation

February 28, 2017
Public Meeting and District of Innovation Committee Meeting

March 20, 2017
Panther Creek CISD Board Meeting

Goals of Panther Creek CISD in our District of Innovation Plan

Goal 1: Panther Creek CISD Board of Trustees and administration will make teacher certification and contract decisions based on district qualifications that meet the needs of our district’s students and community.

Goal 2: Panther Creek CISD Board of Trustees and administration will make governance decisions based on the unique needs of the district’s students and community

Innovations
Panther Creek CISD in conjunction with the District of Innovation Committee proposes the following flexibilities with the Texas Education Code to provide the best educational opportunities for students at Panther Creek CISD.

Teacher Certification

Currently
State law states that a person may not be employed as a teacher by a school district unless the person holds an appropriate certificate or permit issued by the appropriate state agency. 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 request emergency certification from the Texas Education Agency and/or State Board of Educator Certification. (TEC 21.003)

Rationale for Exemption
This current system inhibits the district’s ability to hire teachers to teach hard-to-fill positions as well as elective positions. It does not take into account the unique instructional and/or financial needs of our district. Panther Creek CISD is a rural 1A school district in which teachers must teach multiple courses, but we are still limited on courses and the variety of course offerings. In order to offer additional course offerings and flexible scheduling which would benefit our students and community, the district must establish local qualification requirements. This exemption from the existing teacher certification requirements would allow the district to have the flexibility to hire community instructors or internal
applicants seeking assignments outside of their certifications. In addition, this exemption would allow the district the flexibility to hire professionals in certain trades, vocations, or fields to teach those trades, vocations, or languages (such as welding, fine arts, health science, criminal justice, law, Spanish, etc.) if certified teachers are not available.

Innovation Strategies

- The campus principals may submit to the superintendent a request to allow a certified teacher to teach a subject(s) out of his or her certified field. The principals must provide reasoning for the request and document what credentials the certified teacher possesses which qualify this individual to teach this subject. The superintendent will report this action to the Board of Trustees at the first board meeting following the assignment.
- An individual with experience in a CTE field could be eligible to teach a vocational skill or course through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with all of the individual’s credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if he or she believe that the individual could be an asset to the students. The superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual beginning employment. Local teaching certificates will require an employment agreement rather than a contract.
- An individual with a college degree or certification in a trade could be eligible to teach a course related to his or her expertise or experience through a local teaching certificate. The principal will submit the request to the superintendent with all of the individual’s credentials. The superintendent will then approve the request if he or she believes that the individual could be an asset to the students and district. The superintendent will then report this action to the Board of Trustees prior to the individual beginning employment. Local teaching certificates will require an employment agreement rather than a contract.

Probationary Contracts

Currently
State law states that a probationary contract may not be for a term exceeding one school year. The probationary contract may be renewed for two additional one-year periods, for a maximum permissible probationary contract period of three school years, except that the probationary period may not exceed one year for a person who has been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight years preceding employment by the district. (TEC 21.102)

Rationale for Exemption
This time period is not sufficient to evaluate the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom since teacher contract timelines demand that employment decisions must be made prior to state assessment results and end of year progress testing.

Innovation Strategy
Experienced teachers and counselors new to Panther Creek CISD that have been employed as a teacher in public education for at least five of the eight previous years, a probationary contract may be issued for
up to two years from the last date of district employment. This allows Panther Creek CISD more time to evaluate a staff member’s effectiveness.

**School Start Date**

Currently
State law states a school district may not begin instruction for students for a school year before the fourth Monday in August. (TEC 25.0811a)

Rationale for Exemption
The current process does not allow flexibility for our school district and what is the best fit for our students, school, and community. With this flexibility of an earlier start date it allows the district to determine locally, on an annual basis, what best meets the needs of our district. This would enable our district to increase college and career readiness, personalize learning, balance the amount of instructional time per semester, and extend learning time for December End of Course. This would also allow Panther Creek CISD to start classes as a short week to transition the students during the back to school time.

Innovation Strategy
Panther Creek CISD would have the ability to create a calendar that would not start before the week of the second Monday of August.

**Class-size Ratios**

Currently
State law states a school district may not enroll more than 22 students in a kindergarten, first, second, third, or fourth grade class. (TEC 25.112)
State law states that a campus or district that is granted an exception under Section 25.112 from class size limits shall provide written notice of the exception to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception. (TEC 25.113)

Rationale for Exemption
When any class exceeds this limit, the district must complete and file a waiver with the agency. The school then notifies parents of the waiver or exception to class size limit. While Panther Creek CISD recognizes that small class sizes play a positive role in the classroom, we recognize that it must be balanced with the best staff and the logistics of the timing of adding staff. Many times it is not the number of the students but the makeup and chemistry of the classroom which influence the learning environment. Most importantly, research clearly shows it is the teacher in the classroom that has the greatest impact on student learning, not absolute class size.
Innovation Strategy
When exceeding a 22:1 student-teacher ratio in a K-4th grade classroom, district policy will be to constantly evaluate the possible need to add additional staff. We will follow this guide throughout this process:

23:1 – Inform the Superintendent

24:1 – Inform the Superintendent and Board of Trustees

25:1 – Inform the Superintendent, Board of Trustees, and notify parents

Length of School Day

Currently, House Bill (HB) 2610, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature, amended Texas Education Code TEC §25.081 by striking language requiring 180 days of instruction and replacing this language with language requiring the District to provide at least 75,600 minutes of instruction (including intermissions and recess) each school year. Additionally, TEC §25.082(a) currently requires that a school day be at least seven hours each day, including intermissions and recesses.

Rational for Exemption
Exemption from the 7 hour school day requirement would allow PCCISD the flexibility needed to alter the school day schedule whenever it was locally determined as beneficial to the district and its stakeholders. While there is an existing waiver process available to request exemption from this requirement, the waiver is limited to a 6-day maximum per school year.

Innovation Strategy
While maintaining the 75,600 minute minimum the district will be able to schedule “early release” days into the calendar. This would allow the district the flexibility to schedule non-instructional days into the schedule to allow for teachers to analyze student data and engage in targeted, relevant professional development. PCCISD does not intend to shorten the school day on a regular basis, or without specific purpose. To the greatest extent possible, “early release” days will be planned ahead of time and noted in the district calendar which is approved by the Board of Trustees and published and distributed to stakeholders in advance of the school year and continuously published using school media.
90 Percent Attendance Rule

Currently
Texas Education Code 25.092 requires students to attend class for at least 90 percent of the days the class is offered in order to earn class credit or be given a final grade for the class.

Rational for Exemption
The 90 Percent Rule is an arbitrary standard, which means school districts award credit based on seat time rather than based on content mastery. Abstaining from the requirement means the district will no longer be required to penalize students who miss class due to extra/co-curricular activities, academic activities, or other extenuating circumstances. This exemption will allow the district to promote student engagement, as well as social and emotional development, by encouraging more students to participate in such activities. It will also allow PCCISD administrators to award credit to students because they can show they understand the concepts, rather than because they have attended a certain number of school days. The proposal would allow counselors and administrators to refocus efforts on students who are truly at risk, while simultaneously providing rigor and relevance in the curriculum. Exemption from this requirement will provide educational advantages to students of the district by promoting learning through innovation in the methods, locations, and times instruction may be delivered to students, thereby accommodating students with legitimate scheduling conflicts, reducing dropouts, and increasing the number of qualifying graduates. PCCISD will also explore other innovative ways to demonstrate content mastery, given this exemption. This exemption supports the districts overarching goals and provides the flexibility needed to implement tools, resources, and training that support personalized learning for both students and teachers.

Innovation Strategy
Exempting the District from the 90 Percent Rule does not, in any way, impact or alters existing compulsory attendance requirements or University Interscholastic League ("UIL") rules. Moreover, opting out of Section 25.092 in no way limits or modifies a teacher's right to determine the finality of a grade in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 28.0214, nor does it restrict or alter a teacher's right to assign grades in accordance with a District grading policy adopted pursuant to Texas Education Code Section 28.0216.

Teacher Contract Days

Currently
Texas Education Code § 21.401 currently requires a contract between the District and an educator to be for a minimum 10 months. Additionally, an educator employed under a 10-month contract must provide a minimum of 187 days of service.

Rational for Exemption
To help better align teacher service days and instructional days.
• This proposal will increase the daily rate the district pays teachers.

• This proposal should enhance teacher recruitment, therefore putting the district on a more level playing field with larger districts.

• This proposal will significantly improve teacher morale.

• This proposal will provide teachers more opportunities during the year to seek out beneficial staff development that relates to their field.

Innovation Strategy
Reduce staff contract days from 187 days to 180 days.

Term
The term for this plan is for five years unless amended or terminated earlier by the Board of Trustees in accordance with Texas Law. In the event Panther Creek CISD feels other exemptions would benefit the district, community, and/or students, the Board of Trustees will follow procedures to amend the plan.