



2015-2016 ENROLLMENT: **2,430**
PERCENT LOW INCOME: **82%**

Innovative Practices

- Redirect the instructional focus away from seat-time toward student-centered learning through PIISD's blended learning initiative
- Use master teachers as expert instructional coaches for multiple classrooms, paid for in savings from increased class sizes

Overview

Point Isabel ISD is a property-wealthy school district serving largely low-income students located on and around Padre Island in South Texas. The district is working to improve educational outcomes applying a blended learning model engaging students through a more personalized approach to instruction. Dr. Lisa Garcia, the district superintendent, saw Districts of Innovation as a way to exempt the district from some specific rules that were inhibiting the district's improvement process. Dr. Garcia also wanted to engage a number of community members to draw new ideas into the district and help community leaders gain a deeper understanding of the district.

The district recruited school board members, pioneer teachers in the blended learning pilot program, and community and business leaders to serve on the innovation plan committee. The committee includes representatives from all of the district's campuses. According to Dr. Garcia, the district plans to continue revising the plan to further district improvement and to apply lessons learned from other Districts of Innovation. Below is a summary of the exemptions Point Isabel accessed and the district rationale for them.

Focus on blended learning and extend learning beyond the classroom walls

Flexibility Needed: 90% Attendance Requirement

Point Isabel is moving toward a blended learning instructional model in its high schools to extend learning beyond the classroom using technology, internships, and apprenticeships. To allow students personalized schedules, the district requires flexibility in where and how learning takes place, and rules requiring attendance for course credit may inhibit district progress. As the competency-based blended model evolves, students can dig deeper into content, move through curriculum at their own pace, and progress more quickly to advanced standards. The rule requiring students be in class 90 percent of instructional days to receive credit would inhibit the district's ability to implement the blended learning model with fidelity.

Provide instructional coaches with expertise in blended learning

Flexibility Needed: Class Size

Point Isabel identified blended learning instructional coaches as critical to their blended model's success. The district's first blended learning coach has 18 years of experience as a classroom teacher, a master's degree in technology integration, and a deep understanding of blended learning. The instructional coach rotates into pilot classrooms and regularly provides feedback on blended implementation. The district's ability to leverage this level of expertise across all blended pilot classrooms will elevate and scale the quality and impact of teaching and learning.

The district intends to identify the resources to hire three more coaches as they expand the blended model to more classrooms. To free up resources to hire instructional coaches, Point Isabel claimed a class size exemption waiver for classes exceeding 22 students. Moving from 22 to 25 students per classroom at the elementary school level freed sufficient resources for the district to invest in one and a half full-time equivalent staff to serve as instructional coaches. Dr. Garcia indicated that, absent the class size exemption, the result likely would have been larger secondary school class sizes, which she did not believe was in students' best interest.

For more information about Districts of Innovation, visit RaiseYourHandTexas.org/DOI