

**BURLINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT RE-6J
REQUEST FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT OF INNOVATION STATUS AND
SUPPORTING PLAN FOR INNOVATION SCHOOL ZONE**

August 15, 2016

A. STATEMENT OF INTENT

By this application, the Board of Education (the "Board") of Burlington School District RE-6J (the "School District" or "District") hereby requests that the State Board of Education (the "State Board") designate it as a school district of innovation as of the 2016-2017 school year pursuant to Colorado Revised Statute §§ 22-32.5-101 et seq. (2010) (hereafter the "Innovation School Act of 2008"). Toward this end, the School District submits for the State Board's review and consideration the following plan for an innovation school zone which will include all the public schools in the School District (the "Innovation Plan").

B. SCHOOL DISTRICT INFORMATION AND MISSION STATEMENT

Burlington School District is 170 miles east of Denver along the I-70 Interstate, found in the county of Kit Carson and city of Burlington. By the standards created through the Colorado Department of Education ("CDE") we are considered to be a Small Rural School District. The district is composed of three schools; Burlington Elementary School (PreK – 4th), Burlington Middle School (5th – 8th), and Burlington High School (9th – 12th). All three schools will take part in the district of innovation zone. There are 802 students PK – 12. Of our student population; 61.18% are considered free/reduced lunch, 45% are minority students, 14% are students with disabilities, and 22% are English Language Learners. The District employs approximately 102 employees, 4 administrators (one superintendent, one elementary principal, one middle school principal and one high school principal), 51 certified teaching staff, and 38 support staff. On average the District loses 20%-30% of its certified staff each year through retirement and staff leaving for the Front Range. The District also hosts the east end of East Central BOCES's "Center Based Program" which educates the students of Burlington and surrounding school districts that require a high needs program.

The School District's mission statement is: *Burlington School District RE-6J shall strive to provide a safe environment for students and staff, meaningful opportunities and innovative educational programs for all students, so they reach their learning potential including meeting or exceeding state and district content standards through partnerships between home, school and community.*

C. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED INNOVATIONS RATIONALE SUPPORTING WAIVERS AND REPLACEMENT PLANS

RATIONALE OF SUPPORTING WAIVERS

Competent teachers are critical for providing a safe environment, meaningful opportunities and innovative educational programs for all students. The School District and its three schools are at a distinct disadvantage in attracting and retaining competent teachers due to its remote location and its inability to offer salaries and benefits comparable to school districts in metropolitan areas. Though the School District has been creative and resourceful in serving the

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unique needs of its students, many of the barriers to achievement are not local policy, but instead state and federal mandated policy requirements.

Innovative school district zone status will enable the District and all of its three schools to achieve their mission by allowing us to attract new teachers and retain existing ones through increased flexibility in teacher qualification requirements, employment terms and conditions, evaluation procedures and school readiness assessment. The Board feels strongly that, in addition to the Board and the District administration, the members of the School District community are the best judges of the Board's hiring choices. Local accountability is high in Burlington and the wisdom of hiring a non-traditional teacher will be determined by state and local assessments plus evaluation scores from the District's evaluation instrument.

As a small-rural district we know our students and do not need a comprehensive, time-consuming school readiness assessment to determine whether our kindergarten students have the knowledge and physical, social, emotional and other skills necessary to succeed in school. Most (78%) of our kindergarten students come from the one preschool in our District – Burlington Elementary School Pre-school. The remaining attend the local private pre-school which is located within one block of the Burlington Elementary School. The Burlington Elementary Pre-school currently administers the TS Gold assessment and this data is shared with our kindergarten teachers before the students arrive. The District's kindergarten teachers spend time getting to know incoming students during the "Welcome to Kindergarten" days. Also, the first two days of the District's calendar are used by the elementary school to meet and assess incoming students (all students k-4th) in a one-on-one environment. The District believes it can best meet the purposes underlying the school readiness assessment requirement by replacing the time consumed by mandated state assessments with meaningful classroom instruction based on local data and collaborative conferencing. If the District was to implement the school readiness assessment as it is currently written it would place an undue burden on the district's budget as paraprofessionals will have to be hired to work with the classroom teachers in managing the new state school readiness assessment. It will also impact the students' learning in each classroom as time will be taken away from actual instruction with the students and be redirected to the readiness assessment.

The proposed innovations sought will allow our district and its schools to focus on meaningful opportunities and innovative educational programs which in turn support the District's mission statement. By not reassessing our students in kindergarten with the state's school readiness assessment the innovations will allow our teaching staff to focus on students and their learning, which in turn again supports the District's mission of helping all students reach their learning potential.

The School District and its three schools proposes innovations in the following areas:

1. Teacher Qualifications, Training, and Professional Development

STATUTES TO BE WAIVED

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- a. §22-63-201, C.R.S., (Employment-license required-exception)
- b. §22-63-402, C.R.S., (Services-disbursements)

REPLACEMENT PLAN

The Board proposes to hire both licensed and non-licensed professionals to instruct, direct, and supervise the instructional programs in the School District's schools. In the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the extensive federal mandates and "highly qualified" requirements have been replaced with language that allows each state to determine its own qualifications. Specifically, the new language requires school districts to hire teachers in core content areas who: "...meet the applicable State certification and licensure requirements, including any requirements for certification obtained through alternative routes to certification, or, with regard to special education teachers, the qualifications described in section 612(a)(14)(C) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)(C)." Because the new ESSA only requires teachers to meet the "applicable" requirements, and it does not dictate what must be applicable from a federal level, then it provides states with flexibility to determine which requirements apply to its teachers. Therefore, if the State Board provides a waiver from its certification requirements then those requirements are no longer "applicable" and the use of non-certified teachers will satisfy the federal law, except that the district will still require Special Education teachers to meet the appropriate certification requirements.

To ensure that non-licensed teachers are providing appropriate instruction, the School District will create a professional growth plan for each non-licensed teacher which will provide for (1) the attainment of college credit in specified content areas, (2) experience working with diverse learners, and (3) improvement of pedagogical methods. Each non-licensed teacher will have input on the substantive content of his or her professional growth plan, but each professional growth plan is subject to final approval by the applicable building administrator. Disputes regarding an individual growth plan may be appealed to the superintendent and then the Board, whose decision on the matter will be final.

The School District also will contract with the East Central Board of Cooperative Educational Services to provide non-licensed teachers professional development to include mandatory training in data usage, instructional techniques, and content-specific training. Finally, non-licensed teachers will be required to participate in Colorado Growth Model and Colorado Academic Standards training courses.

The purpose and design is to ensure that the best individuals are hired as instructors in Burlington's schools, while also ensuring that a certain level of training is in place. The proposed program differs from alternative certification programs in that it will not require prospective teachers to complete 255 hours of training in an approved program prior to being hired.

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The School District will reserve the right to require a non-licensed teacher to obtain a valid teaching license from the Colorado Department of Education if the applicable building administrator, in consultation with the School District superintendent, determines that students' achievement will be enhanced by the attainment of such license.

2. Teacher Employment and Dismissal

STATUTES TO BE WAIVED

- a. § 22-63-202, C.R.S., (Teacher Employment, Compensation, Dismissal Act "TECDA"- Contracts in writing, damage provision)
- b. § CRS 22-63-203, C.R.S., (TECDA- Requirements for probationary teachers, renewal and non-renewal)
- c. § 22-63-206, C.R.S., (TECDA- Transfer of teachers and compensation requirements)
- d. § 22-63-301, C.R.S., (TECDA- Grounds for dismissal)
- e. § 22-63-302, C.R.S., (TECDA- Procedures for dismissal)
- f. § 22-63-401, C.R.S., (TECDA- Teacher pay subject to salary schedule)
- g. § 22-63-403, C.R.S., (TECDA- Payment of salaries requirement upon termination of teacher's employment)

REPLACEMENT PLAN

The School District proposes two types of teacher employment status: (1) probationary status and (2) professional-teacher status. Probationary teachers will be offered one-year, renewable contracts that may be non-renewed for any reason deemed sufficient by the Board. The Board's nonrenewal of probationary contract will not be grievable. During the term of a probationary teacher contract, the Board of Education may terminate the contract before the end of its term for just cause. A probationary teacher will be eligible for, but not guaranteed, professional teacher status after completing at least three years of successful teaching experience in the School District or elsewhere.

In contrast, professional teachers may be offered multiple-year, renewable contracts. At the end of a professional teacher's contract term, the Board of Education will have the authority to (1) renew the contract for another multi-year term(3 year, 5 year or 10 year); (2) renew the contract one time as a one-year probationary teacher contract; or (3) non-renew the contract for any reason deemed sufficient. The Board's action at the end of a professional teacher contract, the Board of Education may only terminate the contract before the end of its term for just cause.

A teacher's employment status in the School District will be subject to the Board's discretion and will be a function of the individual teacher's work experience as a whole, and not just his or her work experience in the School District. As such, the Board will have the authority to offer a teacher with more than three years of successful teaching performance who is new to the School District a multiple-year, professional teacher

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contract. For example, a teacher having fifteen years of successful teaching performance in another Colorado school district may be offered a professional teacher contract with a multiple-year term. This innovation is to provide teachers with greater long-term job stability and better employment benefits. Therefore, subject to the Board's discretion, incoming teachers with applicable levels of experience will be eligible for biennial or quinquennial evaluations schedules under Subsection 3 below, except that each teacher shall be evaluated during his or her first year of employment in the District.

Teacher contracts will not be automatically renewable; rather, Board action will be required to renew probationary and professional teacher contracts.

3. Teacher Evaluation

STATUTES TO BE WAIVED

- a. § 22-9-106, C.R.S., (Local board duties concerning performance evaluations)
- b. § 22-2-112(1)(q)(l), C.R.S., (Commissioner Duties reporting evaluation ratings)
- c. § 22-9-107, C.R.S., (School district personnel performance evaluation councils – duties)

REPLACEMENT PLAN

The School District proposes to conduct annual evaluations for probationary teachers each year. Professional teachers will be evaluated the last year of their multi-year contract. Professional teachers who receive a negative evaluation may be issued a one year probationary contract and evaluated again during the probationary contract year.

The District's evaluation tool will encompass the Colorado Teachers' Evaluation Rubric:

- i. Quality Standard 1 - "Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach" – 10%
- ii. Quality Standard 2 - "Teachers establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment for a diverse population of students" – 10%
- iii. Quality Standard 3 - "Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction and create an environment that facilitates learning for their students" – 10%
- iv. Quality Standard 4 - "Teachers reflect on their practice" – 10%
- v. Quality Standard 5 - "Teachers demonstrate leadership" – 10%
- vi. Quality Standard 6 - "Teachers take responsibility for student academic growth" – 50%

Professional Development will be provided to educators that aligns to the deficiencies identified in their evaluation on an ongoing basis. This professional development will be provided in-house, by the East-Central Board of Cooperative Education Services, and by other providers with whom the district might engage with as needed.

4. School Readiness Assessment

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STATUTES TO BE WAIVED

- a. § 22-7-1014 (Preschool individualized readiness plans – school readiness – assessments)

REPLACEMENT PLAN

The District proposes to assess students in pre-school with the state approved assessment. The District will not re-administer TS Gold or any other state approved assessment to students who are tested in pre-school unless the student's parent and/or teacher determines such additional testing is necessary. The results of the TS Gold assessment or state approved assessment will provide the basis for each student's school readiness plan, which will be housed in our on-line data warehouse. The State has identified the following school readiness indicators; physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language and comprehension development, and cognition and general knowledge.

The District will continue to measure each kindergarten student's progress on the school readiness indicators as follows:

a. Physical well-being and motor development

- i. Students participate daily in PE classes that meet or exceed State standards. Students are assessed on motor skills and development throughout the year.
- ii. Students participate daily in Music classes that meet or exceed State standards. Students are assessed on motor skills and development throughout the year.
- iii. Students are assessed the first two days of the District's calendar in;
 - 1. Fine motor/midline (write name, mimic line angles, pencil grasp, letter formation, zipping, snapping, buttoning, etc..)
- iv. Any concerns are referred to the appropriate professional and/or RTI team and are documented in the student's readiness plan which is housed on our on-line data warehouse.

b. Social and emotional development

- i. Students are assessed the first two days of the District's calendar in;
 - 1. Social/emotional interaction (separation anxiety, verbal communications and articulation)
- ii. Students participate in character education classes throughout the year and receive direct instruction on developmentally appropriate behaviors in and out of the classroom.
- iii. Student's progress and any needs in these areas are assessed through observation by the classroom teacher in close collaboration with parents and other professionals.

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- iv. Any social emotional concerns and necessary interventions are referred to the school counselor and/or the RTI team and documented in the student's school readiness plan.

c. Language and comprehension development

- i. Students are assessed the first two days of the District's calendar in;
 - 1. DIBELS Next
 - 2. Uppercase/lowercase letter recognition and sounds
 - 3. Writing samples
 - 4. Rhyming, phonemic awareness and phonics
- ii. DIBELS Next is administered to all students at the beginning of the school year and throughout the school year.
- iii. Our lower reading students receive targeted instruction in one or more of the five components of reading from their classroom teacher, intervention teacher and the District's Title I program.
- iv. To further support our students' reading skills, the District will implement Imagine Learning, a technology based, elementary-wide intervention program. The program adapts to the specific level of the student, provides for continuous assessment of each student's reading level and has proven to be highly successful with all students.
- v. All student assessment data and necessary interventions as identified through the above-described interventions, are recorded in each student's school readiness plan.

d. Cognition and general knowledge

- i. Students receive daily instruction in broad content areas, including math, history and science, and participate daily in activities, which require a demonstration of their cognitive abilities and general knowledge.
- ii. Students are assessed on cognition and general knowledge acquisition through the year through both formative and summative assessments, including standardized assessments.
- iii. Students requiring additional interventions will be referred to the RTI team and such needs and related interventions will be documented in their school readiness plans.

D. AFFECTED SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS

- 1. The proposed innovations will require revisions to the following School District policies:
 - a. Applicable District policies regarding professional staff, including District Policy GC – PROFESSIONAL STAFF, GCB - PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONTRACTS AND COMPENSATION, GCB-E1 - BURLINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT RE-6J