

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #84 (2005-2006)

October 24, 2005

TO: SCHOOL BOARD
FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
SUBJECT: 2006 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

ASD Goal: Ensure public accountability through effective consultation with community to ensure wise use of financial resources and responsible construction and maintenance of facilities, and effective communication with students, staff, parents, community and government at all levels.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve the 2006 Anchorage School District Legislative Priorities. (Attachment A).

PERTINENT FACTS:

The goal of the School Board is to work with local, state, and federal government to obtain the necessary resources, laws, and regulations for the District to provide the educational programs and support services necessary to fulfill its educational mission.

For the upcoming legislative session, which begins in January 2006, the Anchorage School Board will focus the majority of its advocacy efforts on obtaining appropriate funding sufficient to meet the educational needs of our students.

With increased expenditures for programs and services to meet state and federal mandates such as the Alaska Performance Standards and the No Child Left Behind Act, past commitments for full funding of debt reimbursement, and cost increases related to employee contracts and inflation and rate increases, and a \$13 million increase to the District contribution to the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) for FY 06 - 07, the funding priority focuses on six critical areas: foundation formula funding; debt reimbursement; pupil transportation; intensive-needs students; TRS/PERS

employer rate increases; and, improving student achievement through a student data system that supports effective decision making.

In addition, the School Board will urge the Alaska Legislature to: 1) Allow a school district to recover, with appropriate judicial protection, the full amount of damages to school property from an unemancipated minor and from either parent, both parents, or the legal guardian of a minor who destroys real or personal property belonging to a school district; and 2) Support the establishment of a statewide taskforce to do a plan for improving workforce development opportunities and training statewide, as well as adequate and equitable funding for career development opportunities for students at all grade levels.

Upon approval of the priorities by the School Board, the Legislative subcommittee will work with the Administration to develop additional rationale and supportive materials for each of the funding areas.

CC/LW

Attachment

Prepared by: Larry Wiget, Director, Government Relations

Approved by: Carol Comeau, Superintendent

Anchorage School District 2006 Legislative Priorities

Funding

Alaska's public schools are being squeezed financially by under-funded mandates, a lack of competitive employment packages, increased operating costs and other challenges, despite the education funding increases of the past few years. Funding has failed to keep pace with increasing requirements, and long-term inflation continues to erode resources available for instruction.

The success of the Anchorage School District and school districts across the state in meeting Alaska's performance standards and the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires funding sufficient to meet the educational needs of all our students. Only state policy makers have both the responsibility and the resources to meet these needs.

The Anchorage School Board requests state funding for public education that meets the needs of Alaska's youth. To achieve this goal, the Board requests significantly increased state support in six critical areas:

Foundation Formula

The Anchorage School Board, its administration, and staff accept responsibility for raising student achievement for all students, and for the efficient and effective use of resources to fulfill our mission to educate all students for success in life. We are committed to accountability and doing our part to ensure student success. Meeting the needs of the Alaska Performance Standards, NCLB and IDEA requires us to protect and grow our investment in people, programs, and facilities.

Even after recent funding increases, with today's student achievement challenges, state and federal mandates and increasing achievement goals, escalating costs continue to outpace state funding. To do no more than "fully fund" the current education funding formula will require reductions in current education services.

The Anchorage School Board calls upon the Legislature to increase the education funding formula to allow all districts to maintain a rigorous and effective instructional program that continues to increase student academic proficiency.

Debt Reimbursement

Safe, efficient, and technologically up-to-date facilities are an essential ingredient in achieving academic success. ASD has addressed this need largely through a successful partnership between the Legislature and local taxpayers.

The Anchorage School Board and Anchorage taxpayers are counting on the Legislature and the Governor's Office to continue this partnership by fully honoring past commitments for bonded indebtedness reimbursement.

The Anchorage School Board also requests the Legislature and the Governor's Office extend the school debt reimbursement program to help meet current and future school construction and major maintenance needs.

Pupil Transportation

Pupil transportation is an important part of overall school funding and a major responsibility of the Anchorage School District. The new transportation funding mechanism adopted in July 2003 caps the per-student allocation at the FY 03 level with inflationary adjustments established at one-half the Anchorage CPI in FY 04 and FY 05. There is currently no adjustment for inflation in FY 06 and beyond. We have achieved substantial efficiencies, but have exhausted the opportunity for further savings. The existing formula is falling further and further behind general inflation, and rapidly rising fuel and other operating costs that are increasing at an unprecedented rate.

Getting students safely to and from school is a vital part of public education. The Anchorage School District needs adequate transportation funds to provide safe access to our schools and to ensure that we are not forced to use instructional funding to meet the cost of transportation obligations.

The Anchorage School Board requests that the State of Alaska fully fund pupil transportation by providing adjustments to the transportation grant program reflective of increased transportation mandates and operating expenses.

Funding for Intensive-Needs Preschool and Other Intensive-Needs Students

The cost to provide federally mandated services to a single intensive-needs child often are several times greater than for a non-special needs child, and greater than the amount currently provided by federal and state sources. Districts cannot be expected simply to absorb the costs of services for such children within budgets that already provide inadequate funding to satisfy this federal requirement.

Intensive Services funding within the block grant program of the Alaska School Foundation Program provides an inadequate level of support and has not reflected actual excess costs in comparison to other special education programs.

Preschool students with intensive-needs disabilities whose third birthday falls after the October count date are entitled to services under federal law, and at a level far above costs to the district typical of other students enrolling after the count date. Currently, districts receive no funding for these costly services. Other intensive-need students who move into a district after the October count date pose a similar financial challenge.

The Anchorage School Board urges the Legislature to adequately fund intensive-needs student services separate from the existing block grant program.

The Anchorage School Board also requests that the Legislature both increase the multiplier used to allocate funding to intensive-needs students, and provide funding for all special education preschool and K-12 intensive-needs students who enter a district past the single count date.

Full Funding of PERS/TRS Employer Rate Increases

Last year's passage of SB 141 does not resolve the current extraordinary budget requests for PERS and TRS. In FY 07, employer costs for PERS and TRS will increase for the third consecutive year at roughly the same rate as in FY 05 and FY 06. The state-mandated employer contribution increase to PERS and TRS for the Anchorage School District next year is approximately \$13 million.

These dramatically increasing mandatory employer contributions to PERS and TRS have been absorbing nearly half of recent increases to K-12 education funding. In addition, questions have been raised as to the actual amount of the PERS/TERS funding shortfall, and the rate at which it must be made up.

The Anchorage School Board requests that a sound determination be made quickly as to the actual shortfall in PERS/TRS funding.

The Anchorage School Board also supports a substantial lump sum investment directly into those funds to both eliminate the shortfall and to take advantage of compounded growth of the new investment.

Improving Student Achievement through a Useful Decision Support System

In this era of increased accountability, which the Anchorage School Board embraces, we must have access to information so that we can direct appropriate resources and tailor interventions to the individual needs of our students.

A Student Information System is the fundamental repository for all student data, which is necessary for effective program evaluation and subsequent school improvement efforts. Investment in this imperative need cannot be met within current budget parameters.

The Anchorage School Board urges the legislature to provide the financial resources to implement a districtwide, innovative and effective Student Information System.

Governance

Increase Liability for Destruction of Property by Minors

Vandalism damages a school district's physical plant, has a negative impact on student learning, and demoralizes hard-working staff and students. Every taxpayer dollar spent on repairing vandalism is a dollar a school district cannot invest in textbooks, teachers or technology.

In 2003, the Alaska Legislature took the first step by modestly increasing the amount school districts can recover from either parent, both parents, or the legal guardian of an un-emancipated minor under the age of 18 years, who, as a result of a knowing or intentional act, destroys real or personal property belonging to a school district.

The 2003 measure was a step in the right direction, but we believe the liability limits remain unnecessary and counter to good public policy. An artificial ceiling is unfair to the taxpaying public. We believe school districts will reasonably evaluate when to seek full recovery, and courts will reasonably weigh circumstances in which full recovery is inappropriate due to family or financial circumstances.

The Anchorage School Board urges the Alaska Legislature to allow a school district to recover, with appropriate judicial protections, the full amount of damages to school property from an un-emancipated minor and from either parent, both parents, or the legal guardian of the minor who, as a result of a knowing or intentional act, destroys real or personal property belonging to a school district.

Workforce Development

The creation of, and long-term commitment to, a plentiful Alaskan workforce -- educated and skilled for the occupations of the future -- is a key to economic vitality.

Workforce development is a lifelong process of preparing and placing people into jobs. Workforce development and economic development require quality and relevant education from preschool through technical/vocational training or college.

There is no quick fix. Key stakeholders must develop a plan based on a shared vision that can be implemented over time.

The Anchorage School Board supports the establishment of a statewide task force to do a plan for improving workforce development opportunities and training statewide.

The Anchorage School Board also supports adequate and equitable funding for career development opportunities for students at all grade levels, while meeting the requirements of the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) and demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individual With Disabilities Act (IDEA).