

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #308 (2005-2006)

June 12, 2006

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW/END OF YEAR REPORT FOR FY2005-2006:
AQUARIAN CHARTER SCHOOL

ASD Goal: *Ensure public accountability through effective communication with students, staff, parents, community and government at all levels.*

PERTINENT FACTS:

School Board Policy 333.10 on Charter Schools requires an Annual Review of each Charter School. To be specific, the Policy states:

“The charter school will be subject to review of its operations and finances by the School Board. Annually, the Academic Policy Committee will submit a concise written report and make a presentation to the School Board and the public no later than June 30 of each school year. This report will include, but is not limited to, information of the attainment of student performance expectations, including copies of the Terra Nova and Benchmark reports; recommendations for remediation of poor student performance; school goal attainment; trends in student/staff enrollment and mobility; an end of year preliminary financial statement showing revenues and expenditures; minutes of the meetings of the governing body of the charter school; descriptions of charter school activities; copies of any leases signed by the charter school; current bylaws of the Academic Policy Committee; notification of establishment of non-profit 501 (c) (3) status; list of officers in any PTA/PTO or other parent organization; any changes in facility location; any major changes planned for the following school year; a list of the Academic policy Committee for the past and coming school year, including officers, and staff members by position; a list of employees and job titles; and other information requested by the School Board.

If there is evidence of a breach of contract, then the School Board, through the Superintendent or designee, shall have a right to investigate this breach of

contract and meet with the charter school to discuss possible remedies and/or possible termination of the contract.”

Representatives from Aquarian Charter School will be available to present their Annual Report to the School Board. Their report is presented to the School Board as Attachment A. The Administration will also present remarks at the appropriate time.

This past school year has been another successful one for Aquarian Charter School. There continues to be a sense of excitement and pride at Aquarian, both for the excellent program that is available to students and the high level of parent involvement in the school community. Connie Bensler, the District’s Liaison to Aquarian Charter School, has attended the monthly meetings of their Academic Policy Committee, made up of parents and staff. There is a good working relationship between Ms. Bensler and the APC.

Sue Forbes is the principal at Aquarian, completing an exciting and successful third year as such. She continues to have wide parent and staff support. The school delivers to students an integrated, thematic curriculum enhanced by outdoor education, community service learning, Spanish, music, fine arts, and technology. The professional staff remains stable with a number of other teachers in the District requesting a transfer to Aquarian. The Academic Policy Committee is an outstanding group of parents and staff members who support the school in a variety of ways. By keeping with the mission of the charter when making policy decisions, the APC continues to maintain the high standards set when the school was created. The APC also understands that the principal is the manager of the school and as such, has a defined area of responsibility which is respected by them. The emphasis for this school year has been one of refining the existing program to meet or exceed all grade level equivalents and adhere to the tenets of the original charter.

One of the challenges facing Aquarian in previous years was the tenuous nature of their present building. A variety of renovations have been made in order for Aquarian to remain in the building at its present location for the time being. The Fire Department granted a waiver this fall for the building to exist without being sprinkled until such time as the ASD chooses to do major renovations or rebuild the facility. Interior spaces have been improved and upgraded with new carpet, paint, and furnishings. A new playground is being planned for construction this summer. This project will involve not only the Aquarian community but also the neighborhood. Local community leaders have taken an interest in this project. The school community continues to raise money for physical plant improvements such as safety issues.

Aquarian hopes to increase enrollment by at least one classroom making the total number of standard classrooms 15. They continue to have more students request Aquarian as their school of choice than available slots for these students. There are more primary grade students than intermediate students, but the intermediate numbers have grown considerably in the past three years. There has been a slight increase in individual class size simply to accommodate families who have children in more than one grade. The teaching staff has asked for these accommodations in order to keep families together.

In the coming year, the school hopes to increase its numbers to 335-350 students. The Anchorage School Board approved this increase during the 2004-2005 school year. That enrollment didn't materialize this year, but commitments by families and the lottery indicate that it will happen in 2006-2007. One change for next year will be the addition to the staff of a full time Spanish teacher. He/she will provide Spanish instruction to all students at some time during the school week. There will also be a full time bilingual teaching assistant with the Spanish teacher in order to increase the amount of support available to students during their Spanish instruction. Full time art, music, physical education, and technology will continue to be offered with core classes being held in the morning. Students are able to advance by ability and grade level because all grades are taking language arts and math instruction at the same time. Gifted education will continue to be an integral part of the school with over one third of the students identified by the Gifted Department of the ASD as certified gifted. The school is a vibrant, positive place for kids. Its parents feel welcomed and empowered. The staff continues to thrive and develop into a school of excellent teaching and support staff. Aquarian Charter School is looking forward to another successful year in 2006-2007.

CC/RG/CB/mlh

Attachment

Prepared by: Connie Bensler, Charter School Liaison

Approved by: Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction