

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #313 (2005-2006)

June 12, 2006

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW/END OF YEAR REPORT FOR FY 2005-2006:
WINTERBERRY 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 Winterberry 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.

Winterberry Charter School has just finished its first year as a school in the Anchorage School District. This year has been a difficult one for the school, but in spite of that, the school has become a wonderful place to educate elementary students. The most difficult hurdle the school has had to overcome was to reduce their operating budget by over \$600,000. This occurred because they did not make an average enrollment of 150 students during the count period in October. By missing that number, the school is funded by the State of Alaska at a lower funding formula than other charter schools of 150 or more. Additional reductions in enrollment took place when parents and students left the school after learning that the school facility would not be available for occupancy until the last week in October. In spite of these two major obstacles, the school did open and has thrived with a small but dedicated student body and school community. Connie Bensler, the District's Liaison to Winterberry 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.

The APC and principal have worked throughout the year to find ways to save money and meet the budget shortfall created by the lack of students. Classes were collapsed and students combined with other students to make larger classes and combination classes. Positions were closed with only a minimum support staff on campus at any time. Shanna Mall has been the full time administrator at the school all year. Other than Ms. Mall, there have been seven classroom teachers, one part-time special education teacher, one part-time administrative assistant, two part-time teaching assistants, and one full-time teaching assistant. Parent volunteers have helped in a number of areas. Teachers have worked to accommodate as much as their contracts would allow a schedule that maximized staff at a minimum cost. There has been a parent guild working all year to raise money to go into the operating budget to offset any short fall. The building is still being worked on to meet temporary code issues and to finish common areas. There has been an occupancy permit in place since December. Saving money and meeting budget shortfall concerns have dominated this school's energies, to say the least.

In spite of these overriding concerns, the school has filled a niche in the Anchorage School District that provides a Waldorf inspired curriculum and environment. Movement, music, art, handwork, story-telling and physical activities form the foundation of the school's operations. Academics are interspersed with all of these so that students learn in an environment that is peaceful and natural. The teaching staff has been trained in this methodology, with additional training planned for the summer

prior to school opening. The teaching staff is stable with all teachers planning to return next year at least part time. The staff and APC are confident that the school will not only meet its base-line of 150 students, but will continue to grow gradually as students loop with their teachers from first grade onward.

The Academic Policy Committee is committed to following the goals and mission of the charter. They have worked hard to create a school that fits their vision of appropriate education for children. They continue to develop policies and procedures that will help clarify what the school is about and what to expect when children attend school at Winterberry. The chief administrator has completed all work necessary to obtain her Type B certificate and will be the principal of the school in 2006-2007. She has done an outstanding job of keeping the school going in some very adverse conditions. She and the APC have followed every piece of advice the Anchorage School District Administration has given them to make the school survive. They have worked closely with the Administration to close the fiscal gap while making the school a viable working entity. Children and parents are overwhelming supportive of Winterberry and plan to return in the fall. Their experience has been extremely positive both in and out of the classroom.

With additional students and the continued support of parents and staff, Winterberry will become another successful choice for students in the ASD. The cooperative relationship that this school has with the ASD proves how seriously the school community wants to survive and flourish. It has been a pleasure working with the staff, parents, APC and children at Winterberry this year. Next year should be an even more successful one for the school.

SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS:

Attached to this memo is information regarding the current financial status of Winterberry Charter School (Attachment B). The school has a significant budget shortfall that must be addressed.

CC/RG/CB/mlh

Attachments

Prepared by: Connie Bensler, Charter School Liaison

Approved by: Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction.