

MINUTES OF THE ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD
REGULAR MEETING OF FEBRUARY 2, 2006

The Anchorage School Board met in Regular Session on Thursday, February 2, 2006, at 5:02 p.m. in the Board Room, at the Anchorage School District Administration Building. President, Jeff Friedman, presided.

A. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, FLAG SALUTE, Jeff Friedman Presiding

Board Members Present: Macon Roberts, Crystal Kennedy, Jeff Friedman, and Tim Steele. Jake Metcalfe joined the meeting at 5:20 p.m. John Steiner joined the meeting at 5:25 p.m.

Board Members Excused: Mary Marks

Others Present: Jan Christensen, Enid Silverstein, Mike Henry, Patricia McRae, Jerry Sjolander, Leslie Vandergaw, Janet Stokesbary, George Vakalis, Ray Amsden, Michelle Egan, Larry Wiget, LTC David Jones, William Johnson, Johanna Lee, the press, and other interested people.

B. SCHOOL BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Comeau reported that she had the privilege and honor to go to Myrtle McLoughlan's retirement party at Dimond High School. There were students who had graduated over twenty years ago who came to say very publicly what an impact Ms. McLoughlan had made in their lives in her role as the safety security office at Dimond. Many said that if it hadn't been for her, the way she cared about them and never gave up on them even when they were in trouble, they would not have graduated. It was an amazing evening and a well-deserved celebration for Ms. McLoughlan.

Ms. Comeau reported that she had hosted a job shadow student, a young lady who had come to the United States and Alaska six years ago with no English ability. The student started in the District at the Newcomer Center and part time at Clark Middle School. She is now an honors scholar and in the top ten percent of her graduating class at East High School. Ms. Comeau noted that this student is an incredible success story attesting to the wonderful work District staff does and the difference they have made for this particular student.

C. CONSENT AGENDA

ASD Memorandum #180 - FY 2006-2007 Proposed Financial Plan (Second Reading)

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve and authorize the Superintendent to prepare the Anchorage School District's FY 2006-2007 Proposed Financial Plan as set forth in the projected revenue and expenditure schedules in the memorandum (Attachment A). The total budget recommendation is \$607,873,223. This includes individual fund budgets currently projected as follows:

General Fund	\$ 466,563,008
Food Service Fund	15,000,000
Debt Service Fund	77,310,215
Local/State/Federal Projects Fund	49,000,000
Total - All Funds	<u>\$ 607,873,223</u>

The total local tax contribution to be requested is \$191,249,120.

It is further recommended that the School Board authorize the Superintendent to adjust the budget expenditure ceiling and the above tax amount in accordance with any adjustment to the base student allocation approved by the Legislature and Governor or to any changes in Charter Schools, enrollment adjustments, voter approval of April 2006 ballot propositions, and the upper limit of the local tax cap.

ACTION:

Moved by: Tim Steele
seconded by: Macon Roberts

To approve ASD Memorandum #180, FY 2006-2007 Proposed Financial Planning on Second Reading.

Ms. Barb Jacobs, a counselor at Romig Middle School, spoke to the Board about retaining the two mid-level counseling positions in the proposed budget. She referenced an educational study indicating that middle school students in fully implemented guidance programs earned higher grades, thought school was more relevant, had more positive relationships with their teachers, and felt safer in school. These are all goals of the Anchorage School District. In addition, the District's Six-Year Instructional Plan has recommended a districtwide developmental assets

plan, the K-12 Social and Emotional Learning Standards and Benchmarks, recognizing that this will increase achievement of all students and help reduce the achievement gap in certain groups. Ms. Jacobs listed some of the important roles that counselors play in the middle schools such as academic consultant, student advocate, and parent liaison. Some of their responsibilities include setting up parent-teacher meetings, mediating conflicts, facilitating standardized testing, and implementing the District's Aggressor/Victim/Bystander program. They deal with many student issues that need to be addressed before the student can be successful in school. Ms. Jacobs indicated that counselors are the front line child advocates. They deal with student's personal and social issues such as substance abuse, suicide intervention, child abuse and violence prevention. She related her personal experience with a student and how the situation would not have had such positive results for the child if she or another counselor not been available.

Ms. Bernadette Boring spoke to the Board regarding the elective program at the middle school. She noted that the largest portion of the budget reduction is being placed on the backs of elective teachers in the middle schools. She indicated that the planning time being eliminated will limit teacher contact with the students. She believed that balancing the budget on the back of any one group of teachers and dividing elective teachers from core teachers creates a very bad atmosphere in the schools.

Mr. Roberts asked Ms. Jacobs how many students she works with. She stated that her case load is about 300 students. She explained that there are about 850 students at Romig Middle School and they have a seventh grade counselor, an eighth grade counselor, a counselor who works with the English Language Learners, and a part-time Intervention/Prevention Counselor. She believed that the national standard indicates a standard of 250 to one, student to counselor ratio.

Ms. Mary Showers, Ms. Brenda Avery, and Ms. Alex Pastorino, counselors at Goldenview Middle School spoke on behalf of middle school counselors and encouraged the Board to not support their proposed reductions. They each went through, in detail, their activities during a typical school day. It was their belief that the number of middle school counselors really needs to be increased.

Ms. Showers explained that counselors are dealing with a new culture of young people. The culture is not the same as it was twenty years ago when one counselor for an entire school may have sufficed. With the change in culture there is a need for as many counselors as possible.

Students are faced with more conflicts, more demands, and more pressure, all of which lead to stress. In the absence of guidance counselors she wondered who would help students alleviate stress at school, who would intervene when a conflict arises, who would encourage students to reach for academic success, who would facilitate workshops explaining harassment, and who would facilitate grief groups for students who have lost a loved one. Ms. Showers stated that, as the needs of students increase, it is important that the number of counselors increase, not decrease.

Ms. Kennedy asked what happens when a counselor is not available to see a student. Ms. Avery explained that a principal, vice principal, nurse or other available staff member would work with the student although they often do not have the training or the skills that counselors have. Sometimes the students just have to wait. Ms. Kennedy clarified that, even if the counselor was unavailable, someone would be there to address the student's need.

Mr. Roberts stated that the message from the speakers is centered around the changing nature of the student. One of his concerns is whether counselors are receiving appropriate preparatory and ongoing training to deal with the changing culture and the types of problems students encounter today. Ms. Showers reported that counselors are receiving appropriate training. Counselors are now trained to be able to understand, identify, and deal with harassment, which is a relatively new issue. There are a variety of classes and workshops available for experienced counselors. New counselors learned about the new and changing culture as they complete their training.

Regarding the proposed cut in middle school counselor positions, Mr. Steele questioned whether the administration had specific schools in mind. Ms. Comeau noted that very few of the cuts in the budget were anything that the administration wanted to make. She explained that the greatest amount in the budget is personnel costs. To get to a balanced budget every division and every department had to look at where the resources were being used. The middle school model is a very expensive model. This cut is not identified at any one school. Final information regarding District revenue will be available in June. Based on that information, the final decision regarding these cuts will depend on student population, what other staff is at the school and other issues. Ms. Comeau reiterated that she values each of these professionals. The issue is simply trying to bring forward a balanced budget now that could be used as a starting point as work is done to get more resources.

Mr. Steiner asked the administration to address the fact that there is an unallocated adjustment within the middle school that is \$200,000 less than last year. He wondered how the decision is made as to how large that line item should be relative to a reduction such as the cut to the counselor positions. Ms. Comeau explained that she had required every supervisor to submit a prioritized 5% reduction list. That was the number brought forward from the middle schools. She further explained that the only area that did not receive cuts were the mandated services for the Special Education, which are significantly increased. Mandates drive increases and then the budget must be balanced from there based on direction from the Board. The recommended cuts do not in any way negate the value of employees or the services they provide.

In a follow-up, Mr. Steiner requested clarification on what the unallocated line item is for and why it is important that it not be cut in order to restore other items, such as middle school counselors. Ms. Comeau explained that there is \$16 per student in the Quality School Initiative money given to each school district, which is divided up by elementary, middle, and high school level. The schools then bring forward school improvement plans that address those students who are not succeeding. At the high school level most of the efforts have been driven toward students who have not passed one or more sections of the exit exam. At the middle school and elementary school levels it has been targeted to the struggling learner. Those unallocated funds go to schools based on the plans they have developed. The money is unallocated because the individual schools have to apply for it and it is given out only after the principal presents a proposal and it goes through a review with the executive director. Ms. Comeau noted that there is an obligation to utilize the funds in this manner under the terms of the grant. It is an annual appropriation and is not part of the base student allocation. Ms. Kennedy noted that, following this process, a school could use those unallocated funds to hire an additional counselor if they believe that is the best way to try to target those underachieving students. Ms. Comeau agreed that the funds could be used in that way; however, there is usually not enough funding at the individual school level to pay the salary and benefits of a counselor.

Ms. Comeau called attention to a couple of items in the memorandum. On page 4, under Revenue Revision, the revenue resulting from the slight increase in the Musical Instrument Fee has been incorporated into Budget Revenue. She also noted that the official Consumer Price Index is now coming in at 3.1% rather than the 2.6% that this budget was based on. However, the municipal population growth has been reduced. These

changes result in an increase, at this time, of \$432,967 which has been put into an unallocated account pending final action by the Legislature and the Assembly. The actual revenue picture will be reviewed again in June in light of any expenditure adjustments. It is recommended that those monies be reserved, so they are now in the revenue picture but not part of the expenditure side at this point in time. In addition, the new construction property improvement amount will probably not be known until the end of March. If there is an increase over the Governor's allocation and if the bonds pass in April the District will have to go back for another adjustment.

Under student projections on page 6, Ms. Comeau pointed out that District enrollment is projected to decrease next year. In addition, the sixty students who may come into the District through the "Bring Our Children Home" initiative are not included in the budget. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that this piece, including both the costs and revenues associated with educating these children, is missing from this budget.

Pending negotiations are another unknown that will impact the budget. The District is currently in negotiations with three bargaining groups. A certain amount has been allocated based on some assumptions, but this issue will also need to be addressed in June if the District is fortunate enough to have those contracts settled before the end of this year.

Ms. Comeau explained that Attachments C and D are the summary documents showing major revenue and expenditures, as well as recommended decreases.

AMENDMENT:

Moved by: Tim Steele
seconded by: Crystal Kennedy

To reduce the high school Unallocated Fund by \$40,000 and add that \$40,000 to the high school budget under a line item for "Paideia".

Ms. Comeau noted that a recommendation to make that exact change is included in the budget and explained on page 5 of the memorandum. In light of this information, Mr. Steele withdrew the proposed amendment without objection.

Mr. Steiner suggested that a broader name be used for this line item in order to clarify that the budget item is for all of the seminar programs, regardless of whether they go by "Paideia" or another name. Ms. Comeau indicated that the line item can be titled "Paideia/Seminar" in order to be clear that it is to support all of the programs that use the Socratic Dialogue Method.

Mr. Steele voiced his appreciation for the extensive information provided by the Special Education Department. Mr. Steele presumed that unless the District expects a significant increase in funding for Special Education for 2006-2007 the reported \$8.45 million shortfall will increase. Ms. Comeau indicated that the shortfall will most certainly increase, particularly in light of the fact that congress recently cut Special Education funding in the federal budget which will soon be signed by the President. This is a substantial problem and is part of the reason the District is in this situation. There are federal mandates for both No Child Left Behind and IDEA that must be met. If the District does not receive the 40% funding that has been promised for the past thirty years it must make up the difference with local and state funding.

Ms. Kennedy noticed that most of the comments regarding elective planning time came from Mears Middle School and wondered if this problem is due to the loss of planning time or if it is because the proposed change would cause a particular hardship at that location because of the crowding there. Ms. Comeau noted that there were also several comments on this issue from Goldenview Middle School. There is no doubt that many elective teachers are teaching students during their second planning period. While this recommendation was also a difficult one to make, Ms. Comeau indicated that through discussion with a number of people, including the principals and assistant principals, it was discovered that there is wide discrepancy in how that second period is used by a number of elective teachers. It is not always being used in the way it was intended. In response to the question from Ms. Kennedy, she explained that the issue goes beyond Mears Middle School. It really depends on individual teachers and individual schools. While this cut might be painful and will certainly change things at the middle school level, it is better than other reduction ideas that were being entertained.

Mr. Friedman requested questions regarding any of the items that are not being funded this year. Mr. Steele asked for details on the elementary reading expansion. Ms. McRea explained that a new literacy curriculum was adopted last year. That curriculum is being implemented in all Title I schools and eleven non-Title I schools this year. The Six-Year Plan

indicates that 10-12 elementary schools will be added each year until 100% of the elementary schools implement this core curriculum in literacy. The plan to stagger the schools coming into the program allows on-site support from reading teachers least one day a week. It is hoped that implementation will be able to be continued on that schedule. Ms. McRea reported that the program is very successful and there are a number of schools who want to implement it next year. Ms. Comeau noted that this program is a high priority for the District but the budget could not afford the cost of \$760,000 to bring it to the next group of schools at this point in time.

Mr. Steele reported that he had asked the cost of adding one educational day to be used for professional development. He noted that this item is not on the list of budget enhancements provided by the superintendent, but he hoped that it could be included as an item that could be presented to the legislature. Ms. Comeau noted that the enhancement list prepared in response to Request for Information #07-12 is not an exhaustive list, there are many more items that are needed to implement the Six-Year Plan. Adding a day to the contract would have to be negotiated with all bargaining groups and the State would have to be willing to fund an extra day. This request as well as many, many others could be added to the list of enhancements. Ms. Comeau commented that she had requested not only the 5% cuts in priority order from each department but also their recommendations for enhancements.

Ms. Kennedy noticed that the purchase of ten school buses is on the list of enhancements. She recalled that the District had, in the past, bonded for the purchase of school buses. She wondered whether this indicated a shift in philosophy regarding bonding for buses. Ms. Comeau explained that this item is included because the purchase was not put on the bond proposition in an effort to keep the bond package under \$100 million. Ms. Kennedy indicated that she was pleased to see this item here rather than in a bond package.

Ms. Kennedy requested additional information regarding the emergency and security radios, which had received some bonding money in the past. She also thought that there was some kind of arrangement made with the Municipality and requested clarification on that. Mr. Mew explained that the radios on the enhancement list referred to the replacements for the current 800 MHz radios, often called the emergency and security radios in the schools. The amount stated on the enhancement list will cover the District conversion to the new system if the same numbers of radios continue to be used. The amount reflects the most it would cost to move

to the Municipality's new system. If the District does not move to the new system the existing fleet of radios will not access the network or interface with police, fire, emergency management or the other agencies on the system. Ms. Comeau explained that if the Municipality's bond for this system passes, the administration will probably have to approach the Board to request funding these out of the Fund Balance as a one-time expense. The District has to be able to communicate with the Municipality and among the schools. This is another example of a critical need that the District cannot fund that should be brought to the attention of the legislature. Mr. Mew noted that the State is currently converting to the Alaska Land Mobile Radio system which makes all state and federal public safety agencies interoperable. Mr. Steele questioned what the timeline is for the Municipality to convert to the system and how they are going to fund it. Mr. Mew explained that the City has turned this into a three-phase process. Phase I was funded, at least in part, out of Homeland Security grants. That Phase brings up some of the infrastructure as well as rolling out about 50 mobile and portable radios to test the system. Phase II is being contemplated for their April 2006 bond. That funding would bring most of the Municipal users onto the system. Phase III will probably be on the 2007 bond and will essentially be clean-up of the system. The major piece, if the 2006 bond passes, will begin immediately after the election and will take about a year to complete. With this timeline the District will start losing connectivity between April 2006 and April 2007. Mr. Steiner observed that this is a one-time purchase for which it may well be appropriate to approach the legislature for support.

Mr. Metcalfe questioned whether this is being coordinated with the State or if it is just a Municipality/School District effort at this time. Mr. Mew stated that this is a very big project which goes beyond just the District and the Municipality. The State wants a different technological solution so the Municipality is funding its own system and will have a computer controller allowing the two systems to talk to each other. The District has a voice in the Municipal effort. Mr. Metcalfe was concerned about whether information was getting to the legislature about the money that is needed to connect the two systems. Mr. Mew clarified that the State would like a VHF solution and would like the Municipality to be part of that solution. If it was, the State would fund the radio system and the Municipality would pay a fee to be on it. The Municipality has backed out of that model, choosing to fund their own system and then interface with the State. The Municipality would like to use a higher radio frequency system which makes more sense in a hilly, urban environment and will be a better system for Anchorage. In order to do this the Municipality will

have to do their own fundraising and development rather than being able to ride along on the State effort. Mr. Friedman stated that he believes it is worth making sure that the legislature is made aware that, if the Municipality and the District are unable to fund radio systems, much of what the State is doing will not be applicable where 35-40% of the population lives. The State has a vested interest in making sure that the Municipality of Anchorage is able to do this. Mr. Mew stated that the Municipality is working hard to secure funding and the District is supporting them in that effort. Ms. Comeau mentioned that, before Board members go to Juneau, the City Manager could be contacted to make sure that we coordinate lobbying efforts.

Mr. Steiner added that the interconnectivity is all the more important because, in addition to the large percentage of the State's population that is here in Anchorage, the International Airport is the biggest pipeline to outside. The operation of Anchorage as a whole is critical to the State in every way, so the connectivity is vitally important.

Mr. Steiner reviewed the Student Information System, another capital item on the enhancement list, which will provide the means to track students individually throughout their careers in the District and will eventually give parents access directly to student information. The system is extremely important but extremely expensive. After reviewing the list of enhancements, Mr. Steiner questioned why restoration of the middle school guidance counselor positions was not included. Ms. Comeau indicated that those positions were inadvertently left out and should be added to the list.

Mr. Steiner noted that the Board received many suggestions from the public on ways to save money, several related to energy savings. He emphasized that all suggestions are extremely valuable and much appreciated. Ms. Comeau reported that she has asked Mr. Vakalis and his staff to look at the issue of energy conservation and how to aggressively get a campaign going throughout the District to address important practices that could save money on utilities. One important component is to get the students more involved in the solution. The District needs to do more in this area so several suggestions are being looked at very closely. It is important to do everything possible to be efficient with energy usage as money saved in that area can be directed back into school programs.

Mr. Steele acknowledged that budget development is a long, difficult process and he thanked the staff who worked so hard on it. He voiced his continued concern that while school budgets are increasing exponentially,

not enough is being said about the fact that \$40 million of the Governor's proposed \$90 million in education funding is going directly to the State's \$5 billion retirement system deficit. That figure is going up every year even as the legislature continues to work on the issue. He explained that the District is labor intensive, noting that labor costs make up 87.5% of the budget, an increase over previous years. Even though the Consumer Price Index (CPI) went up 2.6% last year, the budget increased 7.65% for the same period. It is increasing at such a high rate because of retirement and medical costs that are going up at a much higher rate than items typically included in the CPI. Mr. Steele indicated that he is also concerned about the seriously under-funded Special Education mandates. The educational community has worked for thirty years to try to get the federal government to fund 40% of the cost of these mandates as was promised when IDEA was passed. The federal government has never even funded the mandates at half of that amount. He reiterated the need to speak to legislators about the approximately \$8.5 million that has to be taken out of the regular instructional budget to augment special needs funding. Transportation is another area that is impacted by changes in State funding and reimbursement. He noted that the District used to be able to bond for buses and write them off over seven years and the State would pay for them. This year the State is not even providing a cost of living increase on transportation costs while the cost of fuel is significant and going up at a very fast rate.

Ms. Comeau noted that the District needs to educate legislators at both the State and Federal level about the needs in the education system. The IDEA bill, with 40% funding, has just been re-submitted. It is important to communicate and educate our representatives about the need for the federal government to do their part by adequately funding the mandated programs because it is the right thing to do for all special needs students.

Mr. Metcalfe indicated that he supports the motion, but does so reluctantly. He voiced his concern with rising retirement and health care costs, not just in Anchorage but in communities all across the country. He remarked that the Board needs to urge the Governor to show leadership on these issues and call a summit, including both employers and employees, to find a solution. Until the ever increasing costs of retirement and health care are addressed, budget cuts will continue to be necessary in other areas. He noted that the Board should specifically request an increase to the Governor's proposal that would make this at least a maintenance level budget.

Mr. Friedman stated that it is his hope that the Alaskan congressional delegation in Washington, DC and the Anchorage delegation in Juneau would hear the same concerns regarding education funding from the public as the Board has heard over the last few weeks. The information is very compelling and our legislators need to hear it directly from the people that are living it everyday. Ms. Kennedy added that local legislators will meet on February 25th in the Wendy Williamson Auditorium at UAA. Ms. Comeau noted that the District will have a set time to address the Caucus at their meeting, but District employees and other members of the public can testify at the meeting. It is very important that they hear from employees, parents and students regarding education funding.

Mr. Friedman noted that Ms. Marks is traveling to Washington, DC but that she had made some statements last week and also via e-mail voicing her support of the budget. Like other board members she indicated her support because there is only so much money available, not because she likes cutting particular items from the program.

Mr. Roberts thanked the counselors from Goldenview for their presentation. He also appreciated that they acknowledged the difficulty of developing a balanced budget. It is a difficult job, but one that the Board takes great honor in having been elected to do. Finally, Mr. Roberts agreed with earlier statements that the time has come to sound the alarm at the national level in a non-partisan manner that there is a significant disconnect between the stated intention of student improvement and providing sufficient funding to accomplish that mandate. He believed that this message can only be articulated effectively across party lines at the national level. He reiterated that the message is more effective when it comes from the public; teachers, parents, and students.

VOTE

Ayes: Steiner, Roberts, Kennedy,
Friedman, Metcalfe, Steele

Nays: None

Absent: Marks

MOTION PASSED

I. PERSONS TO BE HEARD ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

J. COMMUNICATIONS & SCHOOL BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Metcalfe announced that February is Black History Month and also the month in which Elizabeth Peratovich is honored. Ms. Comeau noted that there will be a resolution honoring Elizabeth Peratovich at the next meeting.

Mr. Steele pointed out that there is a Joint School Board/Assembly meeting tomorrow, February 3rd, at 10:00 a.m. at City Hall for continued discussion on the school bond package.

K. EXECUTIVE SESSION - PERSONNEL/FINANCE/NEGOTIATIONS
LITIGATION

L. ADJOURNMENT

The Special Meeting of February 2, 2006, was adjourned by unanimous consent at 6:45 p.m.

Jeff Friedman, President

John Steiner, Clerk

Johanna Lee, Recording Secretary

Date Minutes Approved