

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #33 (2006-2007)

September 25, 2006

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: HIGH SCHOOL INNOVATIONS: DIMOND AND SERVICE
HIGH SCHOOLS

ASD Goal: Establish and maintain a supportive and effective learning environment by providing safe, caring, and barrier-free schools; promoting health and wellness; continuing to retain, recruit, and train highly qualified staff; challenging each student academically; maximizing opportunities for lifelong learning; offering reinforcing extracurricular activities; and collaborating with other community agencies to maximize opportunities for lifelong learning.

PERTINENT FACTS:

There have been numerous innovations in the high school division over the past few years. This memo will highlight just a few and includes only Dimond and Service high schools. These schools and projects are representative of the outstanding work in all of our high schools in the Anchorage School District.

Service High School

Freshman Academy

Service High School's Freshmen Academy was developed during the 2004-2005 school year and implemented in 2005-2006 to improve the transition for students between middle and high school. This school year, the program serves over 400 of the school's 575 ninth graders, with 20 general and special education faculty members including a full time counselor. A full slate of core academic classes is offered, as well as a transition class entitled Academic Enrichment. Another key component of the program is an alternative daily schedule that provides for a separate lunch for freshmen and the opportunity for teachers to block classes. This is the second year of the program and it has shown positive results. Last school year course failures for freshmen declined significantly over the previous year. In the 04-05 school year 26% of freshmen had two or more F's. During the

first year of the Freshmen Academy, the number was reduced to 21.5%. Additionally the Freshmen Academy ran an extended year for students who came close to earning credit but fell short. Fifty-one students who had between 52 and 59 percent in classes on the last day of the school year attended school for two additional weeks and earned credit (Ds) in 66 classes. Several then moved on to the ASD summer school program and earned additional credit.

Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy serves our roughly 200 NJROTC students in grades 9-12 with eight core teachers and two ROTC instructors. The freshmen in the program focus on "Followership" skills while being inducted into the academy and into the larger Service community. Students in upper grades learn, practice, and hone their leadership skills while becoming ambassadors for our school and the greater Anchorage community. These students log many thousand community service hours in the school year, have regular community building events, and support each other in academic excellence. The program is designed to build leaders, scholars and productive citizens.

AVID

Service High School also has implemented a program to close the achievement gap. AVID, Advancement via Individual Determination, is a structured, college preparatory program working directly with schools and districts as a support structure for first-generation college goers. The mission of AVID is to ensure that all students, especially the least served students in the middle are capable of completing a college preparatory path. This is the second year Service High School has offered AVID.

Building Trades/Material Science Program

Service High is following pilot programs at East and West High Schools offering a Building Trades/Material Science class for students. The class is part of Service High School's effort through our Discovery Academy (see attachment) to build employability skills and increase vocational offerings to students, both college and non-college bound.

Dimond High School

Late Start Program

Dimond High School initiated the Late Start/Get Smart program in January of 2006. The program provides teachers with valuable professional development

time as well as study time for students. This program runs at a zero cost to the district because it works within the teacher's contract day, requires no additional staff, and uses the existing bus schedule. Teachers submit weekly log sheets to the principal to maintain accountability for attendance, project focus and progress.

During second semester of 2005-2006, the Dimond teaching staff created 24 Professional Learning Community (PLC) teams that ranged in size from three to 10 members. They worked on their targeted goal each Monday morning from 7:15 - 8:00. Meanwhile, a rotating group of 15 teachers helped students with homework in the Student Commons, Auditoria and Library from 7:15 - 8:00. An average of 400 of Dimond's 1,900 students came to school early for tutoring or homework help.

Teachers made impressive progress during just 14 Mondays available to them last semester. Twice during the semester the full faculty met as a Feedback Loop to provide input and make connections between the 30 PLC projects. We have seen gains in curriculum articulation between Mears and Dimond, as well as interdisciplinary connections.

Parent, staff, and student response to the Late Start Program has been overwhelmingly positive. Parents cite the benefits of additional study time, extra sleep and a more relaxed start to the day. Students also enjoy these aspects. Teachers appreciate the progress they have been able to make in curriculum areas in just 45 minutes a week.

We see continued positive results in this second year of the Late Start program. We are proposing to move the Late Start day from Monday to Wednesday because students have more homework mid-week than they do on Monday. We will gather parent input and fully inform families first semester before implementing a change second semester.

Freshman House

The Dimond High School Freshman House was implemented in 2005-2006 to create a successful transition from middle school to high school and greater academic and personal success. Freshman students' core classes and school lockers are located in the same academic wing. An administrator, counselor and safety/security specialist are assigned to the Freshman House, along with the Freshman House teaching staff. We purposely scheduled freshman teachers to teach at least one upper-grade class so that they and the freshmen would interact with sophomores, juniors and seniors each day. Freshman, however, do have their own separate lunchtime.

Academic supports include an *Early Warning System* for teachers/parents, Homework Center at lunch, Phenomenal Freshman recognitions, FastForward, Achieve 3000, peer tutoring, special education collaborators, springtime placement conversations with teachers and counselors at Mears, and extended learning for freshmen in danger of failing. In its first year, freshman second semester course failures declined from 203 the previous year to 142, or 30 percent fewer Fs.

In this second year of Dimond's Freshman House, the program serves 486 students. We will again hold full-house events such as the Battle of the Books, History Day, Poetry Slam, Mole day and Pi day.

CC/RG/MH/CG/LP

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