

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #129 (2006-2007)

December 4, 2006

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF RILKE SCHULE – GERMAN SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

ASD Goal: *Establish and maintain a supportive and effective learning environment by providing safe, caring, barrier-free schools.*

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve the application for the Rilke Schule - German School of Arts and Sciences, scheduled to open in the fall of the 2007-2008 school year in non-District facilities, as specified in the application. (If the target number of 150 students is not reached, the administration recommends that the school delay its opening for one year while continuing recruitment efforts.)

PERTINENT FACTS:

Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, and Connie Bensler, Charter Schools Supervisor, met with the proposing group of the Rilke Schule - German School of Arts and Sciences for its initial meeting on July 17, 2006. The Administrative review of the charter application was held on September 20, 2006. The applicants successfully responded to many questions and concerns the Administration had regarding their application.

The School Board held a work session on October 30, 2006, to discuss the proposed charter school. Following the Board work session, a list of concerns/issues was presented to the charter applicants by charter school supervisor Connie Bensler.

The applicants successfully responded to most of the questions asked by School Board members concerning the formation of the school. One of the main areas of concern was the budget. There were several areas of the budget that needed attention and consideration. This included contingency plans that would reflect not reaching the

target enrollment of 180 students, as well as the reductions needed to balance the budget with the increase in PERS/TERS. Special education was another budgetary concern. Since it isn't possible to predict the level of special education teaching and support staff the school would need, it was felt that it was better to inflate these numbers somewhat rather than keep them as low as the application reflected. Other budgetary items that needed addressing included funding for development of immersion materials, funding for staff development, and the general need for a qualified financial advisor to help the applicants develop their budget adequately.

Additional concerns that were not budgetary in nature included the need to request approval for a different calendar from the Commissioner of Education for an earlier release of students on Fridays. There was concern that the applicants were interested in hiring a retired principal for their administrator, which could be problematic if the person had retired from the Anchorage School District under any service recognition programs.

A major concern of at least two Board members was the school's chosen name, Otto Geist. Mr. Geist was an early explorer and archeologist from Germany in Alaska whose relationship with several Native groups has been tarnished by actions apparently taken on his part with some Native artifacts and grave materials. There was a request to contact these Native groups to get permission to use his name for the school and later a request to change the name completely. In response to this concern, the applicants have decided on a new name for their school: Rilke Schule-German School of Arts and Sciences. It is named in honor of a famous German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke. His poetry is often memorized by German secondary students in the ASD for the annual declamation contest. His most famous poem, Der Panther (The Panther), will give the school its mascot, a panther.

The school will be a German language immersion school with the primary grades receiving instruction in German for half a day and English for the other half. Initially, the intermediate grades will receive German instruction as part of their school day, but not in the immersion model. As students pass through the school, more and more grades will be able to be fully immersed in German, as they were in the primary grades. Other aspects of the school will include a community service component with each student actively involved in the community to learn about helping others and being a responsible world citizen. Students will travel to Germany, have pen pals and e-mail pals from Germany, celebrate traditional German holidays, and enjoy all aspects of German culture. The faculty and staff will be either native speakers, competent second language users or learning the language as they work at the school. There will be an emphasis on parent participation in learning German at night classes available for adults.

Students will participate on all required assessments of the Anchorage School District. Performance in these assessments will drive any remediation for students. A number of remedial activities have been planned for low performing students. Parents will be regularly updated as to their students' progress through a variety of means. A wide variety of enrichment activities that encompasses all the arts will be available for students after the standard instructional day. The school will practice healthy life styles through recommended brown bag lunches and will practice conservation and ecological respect by recycling. In all classes taught in English, the Anchorage School District adopted curricula will be used.

The faculty and staff will be given a number of opportunities to travel to Germany and other German speaking countries for language and culture enrichment. All staff and faculty will be either expected to speak German or encouraged to learn to speak it.

There will be a dress code requirement that all students will have to follow. There will be a large choice of colors and styles from which to choose, but beyond these choices, other clothing will not be allowed. Staff will be expected to maintain a certain professional dress as well.

Students will be chosen by use of the ASD lottery procedure with a first year preference given to founding parents of the school. A large market study has been done to identify interested families for the school. There seems to be great interest for this school and for the chance to learn a world language in an immersion classroom. There is a significant German speaking community in Anchorage that has shown interest in this school and has in some cases taken an active role in helping to form the school.

If the charter school is approved, the Rilke Schule Academic Policy Committee will submit an application to the Department of Education and Early Development for planning and implementation costs for the school. The application is due to DEED no later than 20 days beyond the approval date by the local school board. Once a charter is approved, the Academic Policy Committee can refer to DEED web site under charter schools to access grants available to them for start-up and implementation.

CC/RG/CB/mh

Attachment

Prepared by: Connie Bensler, Charter Schools Supervisor

Approved by: Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction