

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #130 (2006-2007)

December 4, 2006

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF ALASKA NATIVE CULTURAL CHARTER SCHOOL

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 Alaska Native Cultural Charter School, scheduled to open in the fall of the 2007-2008 school year, in non-district facilities. If the target number of 150 students is not reached, the Administration recommends the school delay its opening for one year. If the applicants are unable to obtain a site commitment by December 15, 2006, the school would not be permitted to open, but the recommendation to approve the charter would remain in place for another year pending the site commitment being obtained by December 15, 2007.

PERTINENT FACTS:

The Alaska Native Cultural Charter School will be housed in non-District facilities dependent upon the identification of a site and commitment by the site owner to make the site suitable as a school location.

Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, and Connie Bensler Charter Schools Supervisor, met with the proposing group of the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School for its initial meeting on August 10, 2006. The Administrative review of the charter application was held on September 26, 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 major concern to be addressed is the acquisition of a viable site for the school and the commitment of the owner to the applicants. Lack of a viable building has been the biggest obstacle for charter schools not only during their formation, but also afterwards. Without a site, it is difficult to attract teachers to the school, recruit students or assure parents that the school is a valid educational option for their children. Historically, the most successful openings for charter schools were ones that postponed the opening until the building was available to move into immediately. Working with an owner for such space has been done by other charter schools and should be a part of the applicants' plan. Other issues related to site location are availability of public transportation to the site, outdoor space adjacent to the site, and compatibility of surrounding businesses to a school.

Another area of concern was the lack of a specific plan for remediation for students testing below proficient on the Standards Based Assessments that all students will be required to take. Supplementary to this plan is the Academic Policy Committee's direction to the school if it didn't make Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. Both of these issues need to be addressed by the applicants.

The school will have an interesting arrangement of classes with multi-age groupings and full inclusion for special needs children. Teachers with dual certification in regular education and in special education would be in charge of several of these classrooms in order to serve those students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The Administration is very concerned about the plan to use dual certification teachers to provide special education services. This model functions for students with very mild special education needs, but is far from ideal for students with more significant needs. In addition to concerns with the appropriate level of services to students, there are concerns with the defensibility of IEPs in terms of what services are being provided and who is providing the services. Such a model also frequently requires the use of additional teacher assistant time. There are concerns, as well, with teachers in this model having adequate time for the requisite paperwork.

There is also a plan to have one classroom that will be half day Yupik Immersion and half day English speaking. This may be a primary classroom, but the actual makeup of the class depends on the students who enroll in the school. All curricula will be taught in a way that will include an infusion of culturally relevant standards. These multi-age, full inclusion, culturally relevant classrooms will require a great deal of dedication and work from both the teaching and the support staff. It would be useful to know the names of people who are aware of the demands of the school and are willing to teach or assist in the school.

The budget was of concern in the area of funding for teaching materials, including those that will be used in the Yupik Immersion classroom. Other budgetary items that needed to be clarified include money for technology, textbooks, and teacher

collaboration. The budget should reflect the increase of current PERS/TERS by over 25 percent for employee retirement benefits.

The school will provide an opportunity for students from all walks of life to learn more about Native values and culture through regular instruction infused with Native culture. It is hoped that the school will attract students new to Anchorage who may be coming from a rural setting and may find the school a place for transitioning to urban life. The staff and faculty will be sensitive to Native students' needs and address these in a classroom environment that is geared to success for students with a rural upbringing.

Other languages, cultural activities, story-telling and Native sports will be introduced during the school day or in an after school enrichment setting. The school will provide a community center not only for the students, but also for their extended families. Native elders will be in the school frequently adding the multi-generational point of view so valued by many Native cultures. The school will be a place where Native children can learn to respect their ancestors' ways and be proud of their Native heritage.

Students will be chosen by using the ASD lottery procedure, with a first year preference given to founding parents of the school. There have been a significant number of interested persons meetings concerning the formation of the school. The applicants are confident that there will be more than enough students to meet their 200 student goal the first year.

If the charter school is approved, the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School 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 School Supervisor

Approved by: Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction