

Anchorage School District



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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BACKGROUND

The Anchorage community initiated this report to create and define a vision for the future of the West Anchorage High and Romig Middle School campus. The vision developed creates a campus that serves as an active cultural and educational hub; a center of community.

As we worked to define the vision for the West-Romig Campus, input was obtained from a wide ranging group including students, faculty, administrators, parents, neighbors, elected officials, municipal agencies and planners, service groups, businesses, and philanthropic organizations. We held both private, single issue meetings and open, interactive, public community workshops. The minutes of the private meetings are included in the Appendix of this report and the details of the public community workshops are discussed in Chapter 3.

The West-Romig Campus contains 45 acres and is located in northwest Anchorage near the intersection of Minnesota Drive and Northern Lights Boulevard. It serves West High School's 1,850 students and Romig Middle School's 800 students. Adjoining the campus are a municipal swimming pool and the Dempsey Anderson Ice Arena housing two municipal indoor hockey rinks.

The student bodies of West and Romig contain a unique mixture of academic and cultural diversity. There are forty languages spoken on the campus. West High School has the highest drop-out rate of

any comprehensive high school in the Anchorage School District. Yet, it also has the highest number of National Merit Scholars in Alaska. In order to serve this diverse population, West and Romig offer a rich array of educational programs.

Schools that serve as a center of their community are not an experimental concept. The concept is successfully incorporated throughout the country. Common themes that emerge from successful experiences are:

- Partnerships must be formed between the school district, businesses, and other community groups.
- Programs that tie the business presence to the curriculum have a positive impact on students. Teacher training must be provided in order to fully utilize this opportunity.
- Schools that open their facilities for use by the community are viewed positively.
- Student safety must always be on the forefront.
- The partnerships must be well organized, with clearly established expectations and fully documented procedures.

THE VISION

The campus location and the diversity of the student bodies provide an excellent opportunity to modernize the campus as a center of community. The campus is centrally located. It is also adjacent to an area of recent economic and cultural revitalization. Further, the academic and cultural diversity within the schools is a perfect match for the educational opportunities that are available with public-private partnering.

West and Romig both have existing school business partnerships under the guidance of the Anchorage School Business Partnerships program. In Chapter 4, we envision an enhancement of that concept with the creation of Educational Enterprise Partners who would collaborate with the schools to share their expertise and interest to enhance the educational experience of the students of West-Romig.

The types of businesses or organizations that have expressed an interest in participating are:

- **Banking:** providing financial literacy classes for students and the community and mentoring opportunities for students interested in financial careers.
- **Multi-Media Technology Provider:** teaching students and community members the use of sophisticated multi-media equipment and software and providing mentoring opportunities for students interested in multi-media technology careers.
- **Police / EMT:** exposing students to careers in law enforcement and health care and teaching basic health and safety classes.
- **Coffee Shop / Internet:** providing practical job skills for students while being a community gathering place.
- **Mentor Center:** coordinating and structuring mentoring opportunities for the community and students.
- **University Classes:** providing educational opportunities for students and the community to take classes and obtain college credit.
- **Community Welcome Center:** teaming multi-lingual students with service providers for new immigrant families.
- **Health Clinic:** providing basic health screenings for students and mentoring opportunities for students interested in health care careers.
- **World Trade Center Alaska / Interpretation Services:** providing a business hub that offers conferencing capabilities with access to 21st century communication technologies while offering multi-lingual students the opportunity to offer their language skills as a service and for all students to be mentored in international business.
- **Performing and Fine Arts:** providing classes and mentorship opportunities for students and the community with performing and fine arts professionals.
- **Public Library:** providing coordination of library collections and convenient access to library services for the community.

An organizing theme for this vision provides continuity through the integration of the various programs. Recognizing the cultural diversity of the West-Romig Campus as a unique asset, the organizing theme most supported in the public workshops was "International Languages & Culture." The ability to embrace the language immersion and the International Baccalaureate programs suggest this would be a good unifying theme; however, before committing to a particular theme, we recommend additional student and community input prior to the adoption of any one particular theme.

ORGANIZATION

The development of Educational Enterprise Partners will create many opportunities for students. The positive benefits of the interaction between students and adults must be counterbalanced by a regard for student safety. The public should not have uncontrolled access to the main body of the school during normal operating hours. The solution is to create a pre-entry enterprise zone. In Chapter 4 we describe the creation of a new flexible use, education and community space called "The Forum." It is in this space the community will partner in the education of the students of West-Romig.

Administration of this program will require time and resources beyond those available to the administrators of the schools. As we describe in Chapter 4, a distinct non-profit entity should be developed to administer this program.

FUNDING

A significant issue moving forward will be funding the construction, maintenance, and operation of the campus as a center of community. No single entity will be in a position to fund the renewal of the

campus as a center of community. Funding will likely come from an array of public and private sources. We have outlined some of those potential funding sources in Chapter 6.

CONCLUSION

Based on the views expressed by the community and the stakeholders, we believe that renewing the West-Romig Campus as a center of community should be pursued. The West-Romig Campus is uniquely suited to serve as an educational and cultural hub for the northwest Anchorage community. The academic diversity of the school is a perfect match for the kinds of educational opportunities that will be made available. At-risk students will see a relevancy between their studies and career opportunities. Academically gifted students will be exposed to challenging real-world opportunities.

Most importantly there is a desire within the community to participate in a partnership with the schools. Brought to fruition, the West-Romig Campus will be a dynamic place serving as the source of recreation and life-long learning for the entire community. It will also serve as a model for Alaska and the nation of how public-private partnerships can be leveraged to improve education and community opportunities in the 21st century.

The development of a master plan that incorporates these concepts will offer insights and options to guide future decisions. To take advantage of the enthusiasm and synergy that has developed, the creation of the master plan should begin as soon as possible.