

MINUTES OF THE ANCHORAGE SCHOOL BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING OF FEBRUARY 7, 2008

The Anchorage School Board met in Special Session on Thursday, February 7, 2008, at 5:00 p.m. in the Board Room, at the Anchorage School District Administration Building. President, Tim Steele, presided.

A. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, FLAG SALUTE, Tim Steele Presiding

Board Members Present: Tim Steele, Jeff Friedman, Mary Marks, Macon Roberts and Chris Tuck. Crystal Kennedy arrived at 5:02 p.m. John Steiner arrived at 5:10 p.m.

Others Present: Carol Comeau, Rhonda Gardner, Leslie Vandergaw, Mike Henry, Enid Silverstein, Jerry Sjolander, Jeff Wood, Eric Tollefsen, Michele Egan, Janet Stokesbary, George Vakalis, Jose DelReal, Ray Amsden, Marie Laule, Chad Stiteler, Johanna Lee, the press, and other interested people.

B. SCHOOL BOARD COMMENTS

C. PERSONS TO BE HEARD

Mr. Jake Todd, a first year teacher at Service High School, addressed the Board on a number of topics. He voiced his appreciation to the Board for providing the funding for the mentor program and on-site professional development classes. Both of those programs are making a positive impact on him as a teaching professional. He also voiced appreciation for the administration at Service High School and for his teaching colleagues there.

Mr. Todd shared his concern with the state regulations on teacher certification and the retirement system currently in place for teachers. He indicated that he will, in all likelihood, be leaving the teaching profession due to the concerns he has regarding his financial future under the TRS retirement program. He noted that the district will bear the burden of high teacher turnover resulting from these issues. He urged the Board to take an active role to find a solution on the issues of teacher certification and the TRS retirement system.

Ms. Marks asked for an explanation regarding the difficulties Mr. Todd has encountered with the teacher certification requirements. Mr. Todd briefly explained the requirements being imposed on teachers including the video tape component.

Ms. Marks asked about the concerns Mr. Todd has regarding the retirement system. Mr. Todd explained the difference between guaranteed retirement and the system now in place.

Ms. Marks asked for the speaker's opinion on the mentorship program. Mr. Todd indicated that he was extremely appreciative of the mentorship program and felt that the program is well worth the money. He indicated his concern, however, that the teachers who benefit from the program will not stay in the district or in the state due to the troubling issues of teacher certification and retirement.

Mr. Roberts encouraged Mr. Todd to give the system and the district a little more time before deciding whether or not to leave. Mr. Todd indicated that his major concern is with the retirement system and he does not feel that waiting an additional year will change his perspective.

Mr. Tuck thanked the speaker for voicing his concerns and that the information that he provided will help the board when they go to the legislature. He noted that most employees are looking for the same things including affordable housing, the ability to provide a living for their families, to have health care coverage and to retire with dignity without being a burden on society. He noted that the issues Mr. Todd raised are based on decisions made not by the board but by the state.

Mr. Friedman noted that the board had fought rather vehemently against the changes in the retirement system when it was coming in. The board has also testified against and argued against some of the certification requirements without a lot of success. He thanked Mr. Todd for his testimony and noted that the board can use him as an example of a teacher who is being driven out of teaching in Alaska due to the certification requirements and the changes in the retirement system. Mr. Friedman explained that the board will keep trying.

Mr. Steele indicated that repaying student loans also has an impact on teacher's decisions to remain in the profession and in the district. He believed that student loans may have an even bigger impact on new teachers than the retirement system.

Mr. Steiner indicated that there is a real irony that it might take teachers leaving to send a message and make an impact on the issue. He noted that the people in Juneau are aware of the issue and there is some recognition that the current retirement system is detrimental to the state. He believed that there is a real possibility that reason may prevail and that the retirement system may move back in the direction of defined contributions.

Ms. Marks requested some additional information from the administration regarding the video portion of the teacher certification requirements. Ms. Comeau explained that the district was adamantly opposed to the video requirements. She and others in the administration testified vociferously against the requirements to the State Board of Education and continue to do so whenever possible. She briefly explained the process of completing both the video and the paperwork. Ms. Comeau noted that the administration and the board had also testified against the changes to the retirement system. The challenge is the lack of accurate data regarding the impact the change is making on the recruitment and retention of employees. The district is gathering that data as time goes on and using that data to inform policy makers. The retention aspect is significant in light of the investment being made through professional development programs like the mentorship program.

Mr. Todd expressed his appreciation to the board and the administration for allowing him the opportunity to express his concerns. He encouraged the board to continue to work for change.

D. CONSENT AGENDA

ASD Memorandum # 168 - FY 2008-2009 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 2008-2009 Proposed Financial Plan as set forth in the projected revenue and expenditure schedules in the memorandum (Attachments A, B and C). The total budget recommendation is \$737,185,525. This includes individual fund budgets currently projected as follows: General Fund, \$581,188,491; Food Service Fund, \$16,277,000; Debt Service Fund, \$83,720,034; and Local/State/Federal Grants Fund,

\$56,000,000; for a Total for All Funds of \$737,185,525. The total of local tax contribution to be requested is \$218,957,368.

It is further recommended that the School Board authorize the Superintendent to adjust the budget expenditure ceiling and the tax amount in accordance with any adjustment to changes in charter schools, enrollment adjustments, and voter approval of the April 2008 ballot propositions.

ACTION:

Moved by: Jeff Friedman
Seconded by: Mary Marks

To approve and authorize the Superintendent to prepare the Anchorage School District's FY 2008-2009 Proposed Financial Plan as set forth in the projected revenue and expenditure schedules in the memorandum (Attachments A, B and C). The total budget recommendation is \$737,185,525. This includes individual fund budgets currently projected as follows: General Fund, \$581,188,491; Food Service Fund, \$16,277,000; Debt Service Fund, \$83,720,034; and Local/State/Federal Grants Fund, \$56,000,000; for a Total for All Funds of \$737,185,525. The total of local tax contribution to be requested is \$218,957,368.

It is further moved to authorize the Superintendent to adjust the budget expenditure ceiling and the tax amount in accordance with any adjustment to changes in charter schools, enrollment adjustments, and voter approval of the April 2008 ballot propositions.

Ms. Comeau noted that, at the direction of the board during the first reading of the financial plan, the technology/computer replacement

expenditures were moved from General Administration to Instructional Support. The change reduces the amount in General Administration from 3.23 to 2.55 percent and increases the amount in Instructional support from 4.41 to 5.09 percent. The 2.55 percent for the General Administration brings the FY 2008-2009 percentage back to slightly less than the 2.58 percent for FY 2007-2008. This will more accurately reflect that the funds are going into Instructional Support which is the intention of the computer replacement. The decision as to where those computers go will be made jointly by Ms. Gardner, the Executive Directors, the Educational Technology staff and the Information Technology staff based on need. The action does not change any of the numbers in the recommendation as moved by Mr. Friedman.

Ms. Comeau noted that the budget is still a moving target. The way that the budget is being built is based on the Legislative Task Force report with the \$100 per student increase to the base. She explained where the state education budget is in the process of legislative review and approval. She noted that if additional funding became available it would go to support and enhance our instructional program. That is a message that she hoped to share with legislators when the board and administration meets with them over the weekend.

Ms. Comeau hoped that the board would continue to work with the administration until district revenues are from the assembly and from the legislature are known. If adjustments are needed it would be better to make those changes later in the spring when final revenue numbers are known.

Mr. Friedman noted that the enhancements are things that have been identified as what district students and schools need for academic achievement and safety in order to meet the objectives set by the state and the district. The enhancements should not be considered extras but rather they are things that we need to accomplish our mission.

Mr. Steiner noted that the board has been using the term enhancement as anything that is in addition to the program in place last year. Ms. Comeau noted that some enhancements have been incorporated into the budget.

Mr. Steiner explained that the cost for implementing Everyday Math had been laid out in a response to a request for information. He requested clarification that those funds are included in the budget as proposed. Ms. Gardner explained that a portion of the funds needed to implement Everyday Math are in the budget. The exception to that is \$77,868 which

is the cost of teacher materials and non-consumables for K-6 2004 Everyday Math schools to move to the 2007 edition. Mr. Steiner asked whether there has been a discussion as to where those funds might be identified or if the district is looking at not getting those materials unless additional funds are found. Ms. Comeau explained that the district is looking to implement the program and that funds will have to be identified.

Mr. Steele noted that adjustments will have to be made to this budget unless the legislature changes direction. Ms. Comeau explained that the financial picture will be much clearer by the end of the year.

Mr. Steiner asked how much higher the average attrition rate and the corresponding dollar amount is over the last few years than the .5 percent rate and corresponding \$1.5 million amount in the budget for next year. His concern is that the amount of money budgeted for attrition not be set up in such a way that it is seen as a slush fund. Ms. Comeau assured him that the district works very hard to fill critical positions as quickly as possible. If the positions can not be filled quickly some of the funds have been used to buy substitutes or temporary people. In no way is this account being looked at as a slush fund. At the end of the year under-expended accounts are assessed to find monies for items such as the \$77,868 for Everyday Math implementation as mentioned earlier.

Mr. Steiner asked if there has there been any evaluation as to the likelihood of filling all of the Special Education positions. Ms. Comeau noted that it is an ongoing struggle but that the ability to hire early has helped. Mr. Steele added that forward funding as is being considered by the legislature will add stability and allow for earlier recruiting and hiring.

VOTE:

Ayes: Steiner, Kennedy,
Friedman, Tuck,
Steele, Marks, Roberts

Nays: None

MOTION PASSED

E. COMMUNICATIONS & SCHOOL BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Comeau distributed the bond presentation schedule and asked board members to indicate if they would like to volunteer for any of these

speaking opportunities. She noted that these meetings often offer a good opportunity to field questions about the district in general as well as specifically about the bond proposals.

Ms. Kennedy noted that she has heard positive public comments regarding the decision to only bond for an amount equal to the amount of debt being retired. People seem to appreciate the sense that the district is attempting to be as conservative as possible. She noted that a question regarding the wisdom of borrowing money was raised at yesterday's Chamber of Commerce Business and Economic Development committee meeting. She appreciated Mr. Friedman's response to that question as he explained that the legislature must think that borrowing money is a good idea because they reimburse the district 60%-70% when we do.

Ms. Marks thanked the superintendent for attending the recent AFACT meeting. The ISER report had been shared at that meeting. She noted that the ISER report is not as accurate as it should be so it difficult to get a true understanding as to what is really happening. Ms. Marks acknowledged that the district is doing a lot to address issues raised by the Native Alaskan community. She felt that it is important to explain to the community that funding for Indian Education is determined by the federal government not by the local district. She asked her fellow board members to prioritize Native issues.

Ms. Comeau noted that both the ISER report and the news report on the meeting have been placed in the board mail boxes. Ms. Comeau has scheduled a meeting next Friday with the two main researchers from ISER. She had voiced major concerns with the report and what was left out of the report. Ms. Comeau noted that she had occasion to talk with two ministers from AFACT. They apologized for some of the testimony in the sense that they had not expected that much concern coming from Special Education. The two ministers felt that the district has made a lot of progress. Ms. Comeau assured Ms. Marks that the district puts General Fund money into supporting Native students and does not depend solely on Indian Education funding from the federal government. We have an obligation to educate every student in the Anchorage School District and we do the best we can within the available resources.

Mr. Steiner noted that the issue is not necessarily just about better funding for Indian Education. The solution also has to include a connection with the community and a consciousness of the issues that are important to them.

Mr. Steele noted that he had pointed out many of the unfunded or under-funded mandates early in the budget process. It seems as though the federal government does not see the need to fund mandates after they have them securely in place.

Ms. Kennedy asked the superintendent to clarify something that had been stated at an earlier meeting regarding our correctional institutions using third grade non-literacy numbers to determine their future population estimates. Ms. Comeau explained that she had heard that information from a number of people through her interaction with Juvenile Justice. Most recently Mr. Joe Schmidt, Alaska Department of Corrections commissioner, referenced that information on Gavel-to-Gavel. The statistics are very clear that the number of children who do not learn to read and are not successful in school by the end of the third grade is a determining measure that can be used to predict future correctional institution needs. This does not discount the importance of grades 4 through 12 but it clearly indicates that pre-school up through the third grade is vital to the future success of our students. This information also highlights the importance of the district's intensive reading initiative.

F. EXECUTIVE SESSION - PERSONNEL/FINANCE/NEGOTIATIONS
LITIGATION

G. ADJOURNMENT

The Special Meeting of February 7, 2008, was adjourned by unanimous consent at 6:05 p.m.

Tim Steele, President

Crystal Kennedy, Clerk

Johanna Lee, Recording Secretary

Date Minutes Approved