

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, AK

ASD MEMORANDUM #132 (2008-2009)

December 1, 2008

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS  
CURRICULUM

ASD Goal: *Increase student academic achievement using data to guide adoption of curriculum, methods, materials, and professional development specifically designed to ensure that each group as designated by No Child Left Behind makes adequate yearly progress.*

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve and adopt the following language arts textbooks and materials for Language Arts 6, Language Arts 7, and Language Arts 8:

McDougal Littell, *Literature* (2008)

(Student anthology formats: print, interactive DVD, and interactive online)

McDougal Littell, *Grammar for Writing* (2008)

(Student handbook in print)

PERTINENT FACTS:

During the summer of 2007, representatives from Middle School Education, Curriculum and Instruction, and Assessment began the development of a language arts survey to ascertain whether the curriculum for Grades 6 through 8 was meeting the needs of all students; the strengths and weaknesses of the curricula, the extent of use of adopted and supplemental materials, the articulation between grade levels, and professional development needs. The online survey was distributed to all middle school language arts teachers in October of 2007. One hundred language arts teachers from regular education, special education, and the English Language Learner (ELL) program responded.

During the winter of 2007, an ad hoc Middle School Language Arts Review Committee, facilitated by Amy Goodman, Middle School Literacy Support Teacher with guidance provided by Dr. Enid Silverstein, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instructional Support, and Leslie Vandergaw, Executive Director of Middle Schools, began an examination of the current Anchorage School District Middle School Language Arts Program. The goals of this committee were to examine the curriculum in a sixth-eighth grade context; build a common knowledge base about district demographics; and study current research on instructional strategies, assessment, and how students learn. The tasks of the committee were to clarify the vision for the Middle School Language Arts Program, establish rubrics (student, teacher, content, assessment) which encompass an ASD set of non-negotiable beliefs (Attachment A), analyze data from the Language Arts Online Survey, and use the rubrics to perform a fit-gap between the present curricula and the research findings. The committee consisted of 33 teachers, support staff and principals with expertise in regular and special education, ELL, Indian Education, educational technology, elementary education, Title I, and curriculum and instruction (Attachment B).

The initial summary report of the Middle School Language Arts Review Committee identified issues that needed immediate attention as well as issues that need to be further studied in order to improve the middle school language arts curriculum.

The primary finding was the need to update and equitably standardize resources available for middle school language arts teachers. The last adoption for middle school language arts was in 1993 and resulted in the purchase of three separate comprehensive anthologies districtwide for seventh and eighth grade: *Elements of Literature* (Holt), *Literature & Language* (McDougal Littell), and *Become the Music/Dream a World* (MacMillan/McGraw Hill). With site-based decision-making in place, each middle school determined which program to purchase. Below is a list of issues related to not having a current and equitable standardized resource across the district:

1. The textbooks and their ancillaries are no longer available for purchase, which makes maintaining the resources problematic.
2. Due to the variety of textbooks and their availability at each site, there is no possible standardized approach for delivery of instruction.
3. Students who move from school-to-school do not benefit from the predictable structure of one districtwide resource.
4. Providing on-going staff development is difficult with schools using different materials.
5. Sixth grade is now part of the middle school division at Mirror Lake, Begich, and Clark (when it reopens in fall 2009). The Houghton Mifflin

*Reading* program used in elementary sixth grade classrooms is not a good fit at middle school since it requires longer blocks of instructional time. A textbook written for middle school students in grades 6-8 would provide the consistency necessary for student mastery of the language arts standards.

In February 2008, the Purchasing Department issued an Invitation to Submit Textbooks and/or Instructional Materials for Evaluation and Adoption. The invitation was published in the Anchorage Daily News, posted on the WOATRA (Washington Oregon Alaska Textbook Representatives Association) Web site, and e-mailed to known publisher representatives. Submissions were due March 14, 2008. A total of nine publishers/vendors responded to the invitation.

The Middle School Language Arts Review Committee used the rubrics it developed to evaluate these programs in March and April of 2008. Based on extensive screening, the field was narrowed down to three major programs and a supplemental writing program. The committee requested additional information, so the Purchasing Department was contacted and asked to organize formal publisher presentations.

A Notice of Short-Listed Publishers was issued by the Purchasing Department on June 18, 2008 and faxed to all nine publishers of record. A Notice of Short-Listed Publishers for August 2008 was issued to the four short list publishers (Great Source, Holt, McDougal Littell, and Perfection Learning) with specific details regarding presentations.

The publishers were required to submit an alignment of their textbook to ASD Grade Level Expectations in both reading and writing. They were also required to provide a list of selections and page numbers from the textbook that would support each theme in the current ASD 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade language arts curriculum guides. After hearing the formal presentations, the committee requested additional time to evaluate more in-depth two of the programs: Holt, *Elements of Literature* (2009) and McDougal Littell, *Literature* (2008).

In September 2008, the committee convened for a final meeting to evaluate and score the finalists: Holt and McDougal Littell. Five parents joined the committee in this effort; three at-large parent representatives as well as a representative from the Minority Education Concerns Advisory Committee and a representative from the Native Advisory Committee. The results from the committee scores indicated overwhelming support for the McDougal Littell *Literature* program (Attachment C).

In October 2008, the Student Advisory Board received a presentation from Amy Goodman, Middle School Literacy Support Teacher, about the McDougal Littell *Literature* textbook.

The McDougal Littell *Literature* program has many strengths and will serve as an excellent resource to the current ASD sixth-eighth grade Language Arts Curriculum Guides. These strengths include:

1. A balanced collection of classic and contemporary literature selections from fiction, nonfiction, media, poetry, and drama
2. Engaging, quality visuals to support each selection and a student-friendly layout with audio support
3. An explicit, instructional sequence to vocabulary acquisition
4. An integrated grammar strand along with the availability of additional grammar instruction through a stand alone handbook
5. Six-trait writing workshops in each mode of writing with student models provided
6. Media literacy lessons integrated throughout the textbook
7. A set of suggested differentiated instructional activities to support each selection
8. Formative and summative assessments aligned to the Alaska state standards to monitor and assess student growth
9. Extensive electronic resources for teachers and students

Textbooks are available for review in the Superintendent's Office on the second floor of the ASD Education Center at 5530 East Northern Lights Blvd.

Funds in the amount of \$500,000 were approved by the School Board at their meeting on June 23, 2008, for middle level language arts materials acquisition/adoption (ASD Memorandum #326).

The above referenced level of funding allows for partial implementation of the middle school language arts materials (anthology and grammar text). It does not include needed trade books or support materials. These needs will be addressed in the 2009-2010 budget development process.

CC/RG/LV/PC

Attachments

Prepared by: Leslie Vandergaw, Executive Director, Middle School Education  
Pamela K. Chenier, Director, Purchasing/Warehouse

Approved by: Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction