

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #139 (2008-2009)

December 15, 2008

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: LEGISLATIVE SUBCOMMITTEE

SUBJECT: 2009 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

*ASD Goal: Ensure public accountability through effective consultation with the community to ensure wise use of financial resources and responsible construction and maintenance of facilities, and effective communication with students, staff, parents, community and government at all levels.*

RECOMMENDATION:

The legislative subcommittee of the Anchorage School Board recommends the board approve and adopt the 2009 Anchorage School District Legislative Priorities (Attachment A). The subcommittee further recommends that the board ask the superintendent to prepare a list of specific initiatives relating to each of the board's legislative priorities to enhance our advocacy to the legislature.

PERTINENT FACTS:

One goal of the Anchorage School Board is to work with local, state and federal government to secure legislation and regulation that will enable the district to provide the education programs and support services needed to fulfill its mission.

For the first session of the 26<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature, the legislative subcommittee recommends that the board focus its advocacy efforts on five areas: support for completion of work identified by the Joint Legislative Education Funding Task Force, forward funding, early learning, workforce development, innovative/best practice programs. The subcommittee also recommends that the Board identify a list of additional items of significant, though less critical, importance.

Upon approval of the priorities by the school board, the legislative subcommittee will work with the administration to develop additional rationale and support materials for each of the funding areas.

The subcommittee also discussed the need to develop district positions on relevant federal initiatives for presentation to the board at a future meeting. These may involve requests for state policy or legislation on pass through of recently proposed targeted federal funding.

CC/RG

Attachment

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Approved by: John Steiner, Chair, Legislative Subcommittee  
Carol Comeau, Superintendent

## *Anchorage School District Legislative Program*

The Anchorage School District depends on the legislature to help us achieve our mission to educate all students for success in life, including increasing student achievement and graduation rates and decreasing drop outs. The 26<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature has the opportunity to build on the historic steps taken for education by the 25<sup>th</sup> Legislature. Those steps include directly funding a portion of the PERS/TRS shortfall and reducing the employer share of employee retirement contributions, putting into statute increased contributions to the base student allocation, providing the opportunity for true forward funding of education, and establishing standing committees for education in both the senate and the house. Subsequently, the Department of Education and Early Development began the process of collaborative planning for the future of education in our state through its Education Summit. The Anchorage School District is excited to move forward collaboratively with DEED, the standing committees and the entire legislature as we work to realize our goals for our students and communities.

## **Joint Legislative Education Funding Task Force**

The district strongly supports the work done by the Joint Legislative Educational Funding Task Force and looks forward to continuing the processes suggested by the task force

**Standing committees:** Creation of standing committees on education in both the State House and Senate will provide a welcome focus on and oversight of the important education issues in Alaska. Critical are several important topics left by the task force to be addressed by these committees:

- charter and correspondence schools,
- the special needs block grant: bilingual, gifted, vocational, & special education (not intensive needs)
- vocational technology programs,
- innovative or best practices grants, and
- voluntary pre-k programs.

**District cost factors:** District cost differential factors are used to balance funding equitably by accounting for the varying cost of education across Alaska. The particulars of any cost study can be debated, yet few dispute it is more expensive to educate children in some areas of Alaska than in other areas. The district supports the task force recommendation to implement the most recent cost-factor study while simultaneously creating a commission to review and update cost difference factors. The district believes these cost factors, along with the

increased multiplier for intensive needs funding, need to be implemented at an accelerated pace.

**Intensive needs funding:** The district is appreciative of recent improvements in the funding formula regarding intensive needs students; however, inadequate funding for students with intensive needs has shortchanged districts for many years. The average cost of educating an intensive needs student in Anchorage is nearly \$75,000 per year. The current increased multiplier of nine times the base student allocation remains insufficient, requiring the district to strip funds from the general budget to provide these students with legally required services. The district supports accelerated phase-in of increased funding for students with intensive needs.

**Base student allocation:** The task force recognized that statutory annual increases would help districts with long-range planning. The recommendation calls for increasing the BSA for fiscal years 2009-11 by “at a minimum” \$100 per year. ASD’s analysis demonstrated that increases greater than \$100 per year for FY09 and FY10 would be necessary simply to maintain the current level of service. In fact, the Governor’s recommendation for \$200 on the base would have made the district whole in FY09 and FY10. To that end, the Anchorage School Board endorses an increase of \$200 on the base in FY10 and prospectively to FY11 and FY12 to keep pace with increasing costs. The Board further requests that the legislature continue to adopt into statute the base student allocation for each of the successive three years.

## **Forward Funding**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Alaska Legislature adopted a base student allocation amount in statute for the subsequent three years. With the money currently in the Education Fund, the Legislature has a unique opportunity to institute forward funding by actually appropriating funds one year in advance. Forward funding of the state education budget would eliminate much wasted effort in local district budgeting, provide greater stability, and permit more long-range planning and give districts a full year to prepare for any increase or decrease in funding levels. Forward funding would also allow districts to hire earlier in the year, helping them to attract candidates in hard-to-fill positions as well as more diverse candidates who are in high demand. Forward funding is vital to enable districts to make the multi-year changes required to advance student achievement, increase the graduation rate, and meet the changing needs of today’s students. Advance appropriation will not cost any additional money. At a time of such instability in our local, national, and global economy, predictability in education funding is critical to investing in the future of Alaska.

## **Early Learning**

All children should have opportunities to learn during the formative early childhood years. Children who have not had access to early learning opportunities are at risk for failure in school. As noted in the draft goals from the Education Summit, Alaska must create a seamless education system from infancy to grade 12, providing for early child care and education that is affordable, high-quality, and staffed by well-trained people. The Anchorage School District supports legislation to add additional funding for planning, programming, and implementation of voluntary early learning and family support programs for all pre-school children as an important long-term investment in Alaska's future workforce and citizenry.

## **Workforce Development**

Government can be a supportive and galvanizing force behind systemic change to address the workforce development needs in our state as demonstrated by recent joint efforts between the Department of Education and Early Development and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Continued investment in projects such as the Alaska Construction Academy is critical to the ongoing development of necessary workforce development programs and partnerships in our schools, as well as addressing dropout and graduation rates. Workforce development programs inevitably result in additional expenses that are not part of the standard budget schedules of school districts. Increased costs include the purchase of equipment and materials related to occupations, transportation for students between schools and workplaces, training for staff members, release time for staff members, new staff positions (school-to-work coordinator, transition specialist, job coach/career guide), and capital costs related to building retrofits.

## **Innovative/Best Practice Programs**

School districts around Alaska have unique needs when it comes to educating all students. Some face challenges associated with high mobility, some with high poverty rates, others with burgeoning immigrant populations. Whatever the combination of needs, school districts need assistance from the legislature beyond the funding formula to institute innovative or best practice programs in their districts to meet the unique needs of all their students. Such programs might include summer school or extended day programs, added days for

necessary professional development or collaborative staff planning, innovative use of technology, credit recovery programs for high school students at risk of dropping out, or expanded programs for mentorships or apprenticeships. The Anchorage School District supports the concept of funding, outside the current funding formula, for innovative project proposals that include accountability measures.

## **Other Legislation**

The Anchorage School Board looks forward to working with the Alaska Legislature as it addresses other bills affecting a range of other education issues. Board members welcome questions and requests for information from legislature on any education issue, but requests particular focus on the following:

- Modification of parent permission requirements for student surveys
- PERS/TRS – Bring forward for reconsideration a return to a defined benefit or hybridized program.
- Debt Reimbursement
- Compulsory education age
- Revenue Sharing
- Adequate funding for the Department of Education and Early Development
  - to provide necessary technical support as required by SB 285 (state-supported oversight for struggling schools)
  - other critical support for local school districts