

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #287 (2008-2009)

April 13, 2009

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF SEARCH PROGRAM REFOCUS

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 the proposed refocusing of the SEARCH program. This would require discontinuing the current Behavioral Modification program and establishing a new Positive Approach Program, along with matching instructional staff who support and maintain the new program.

PERTINENT FACTS:

The current Behavioral Modification approach that is being used in the SEARCH program is ineffective, does not meet the needs of ASD students and does not reflect the district's philosophy of learning. The Behavior Modification system of dealing with at-risk seventh and eighth grade students may be defined as the use of rewards or punishments to reduce or eliminate problematic behavior and is intended to teach new responses from an individual in response to environmental stimuli. It is further defined as "a therapy that seeks to extinguish or inhibit abnormal or maladaptive behavior by reinforcing desired behavior and extinguishing undesired behavior." This system has not produced the changes in student behavior intended and has left too many students out of school as their punishment.

A more supportive approach is required. A system that is less punitive and more student-centered is needed. A discipline system that promotes respect for self and others and one that emphasizes specific strategies and structures for educators to help students be successful is necessary.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) will be embraced and woven into all aspects of the newly defined SEARCH program. It is the process through which students learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors. It is the process through which students enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to achieve important life tasks. Within the school setting, SEL can best be accomplished through a layered approach of skills lessons, infusion into the curricula and classroom practices, and an environment of safety, respect, and caring which models SEL values.

The new positive approach in the SEARCH program will also follow many of the principles and structures as outlined in Dr. Richard Curwin's "Discipline with Dignity" philosophy and use strategies that embrace instruction that emphasizes the principles of multiple intelligences based on the most recent brain research. The program will incorporate the use of many of the ASD technology resources in an effort to differentiate and individualize instruction including: Fast ForWord, Read 180, Achieve 3000, and My Access.

Students should have meaningful learning opportunities. Teachers will be trained and will use teaching strategies that will make learning active, authentic, challenging and meaningful. Learning will be more project-based. Students will be given more choices in the learning process, and students will be involved in learning experiences that are enjoyable. Students will have more opportunities for one-on-one interaction with teachers, and support will be provided to foster success and development of a positive self-concept.

The SEARCH program will move from a predominately seventh and eighth grade program to a program that emphasizes successful transitions for seventh, eighth and ninth graders who are in need of a solid educational foundation before entering the high school. The focus of the curriculum will be on the development of reading, writing, and math skills; building toward mastery of HSGQE standards.

Due to the significant change in program philosophy, structure, and content, it is imperative that staffing of this small program match its mission. To achieve that, all AEA positions in the SEARCH program will be opened and all existing AEA staff members invited to reapply for the teaching positions in this new program. Any existing staff member who chooses to apply and is not selected will be assigned a position in another school through the normal staffing process and as outlined in the collective bargaining agreement.

CC/RG/MH/LV/SS

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