

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #38 (98-99)

September 14, 1998

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADE CONFIGURATION REPORT

PERTINENT FACTS:

During the 1997-98 school year Capital Projects planning discussions and subsequent School Board action, the Anchorage School Board directed the Administration to conduct a study to attempt to assess the level of support for different grade level configurations for elementary schools and middle schools in the Anchorage Bowl, specifically excluding the Chugiak/Eagle River schools. The Chugiak/Eagle River Schools were excluded due to the fact that this issue had been vigorously discussed in the past during the establishment of the boundaries for Mirror Lake and Gruening Middle Schools.

• **Historical Summary**

Discussions on possible solutions to school over-crowding in the Chugiak/Eagle River and South Anchorage communities began during the 1991-92 school year; one of the topics pursued was the possibility of moving to a 6-7-8 grade level configuration for middle schools. The net effect of such a change would negate the need to build as many elementary schools to accommodate rapid population growth, to construct more middle school facilities, and to continue to expand the successful Gruening Middle School model to all junior highs in the District.

In attempting to give information to the public and to receive input from the community and staff at the schools, community presentations and surveys were scheduled during 1991-92. A 1991 survey done in the Chugiak/Eagle River area was problematic due to distribution problems, but those who returned the survey showed that: "The majority of residents of the Chugiak/Eagle River area prefer the "middle school" program over either the traditional junior high program or a K-8 program. The preferred grade levels in such a program would

be grades 7 and 8, though there is substantial interest in a 6 - 8 grade middle school model."

Community discussions continued during the 1992-93 school year on this topic. Parents and school staff in the East Anchorage area began to look at how to resolve the over-crowding at Clark and Wendler as well as many elementary schools in the area. The Community Councils and the PTAs in the area have expressed strong interest in a 6-7-8 grade middle school in the future as a way to bring more cohesion to the middle schools in the East/Bartlett attendance areas (three years vs two years) and to reduce the over-crowding in the elementary schools. Two town meetings were also held in South Anchorage and in Chugiak/Eagle River on this and other topics surrounding the serious over-crowding in these two areas. Boundary change discussions were held during the 1992-93 school year; boundary changes were put off with the successful passage of bonds for new middle schools in these two areas.

The School Board directed the Administration to hold community discussions on middle schools and grade level configurations during the 1994-95 school year after the Gruening Middle School program was approved as a regular model. In addition, the School Board directed the Administration to pursue the expansion of the middle school program to additional schools as new schools were added and where communities and staff supported the expansion/conversion to middle schools. Meetings were scheduled in each Middle School/Junior High School attendance area to discuss middle schools characteristics and grade level configurations. A community survey followed these meetings. The survey conducted in November of 1994 did not generate a strong return; there was a 23 % return rate. There appeared to be strongest support (2/3 or more) for interdisciplinary curriculum, teacher teams, seven period day, increased contact with parents, and a change in the grade level organization. There was division, however, on the specific grade level organization: elementary parents preferred 6-7-8, and middle school and high school parents favored 7-8-9. There was also strong support for the specific model adopted by the Anchorage School District in providing the extra teachers and electives. The School Board did approve additional funding for expanding the number of middle schools for the 1995-96 school year. In addition, two additional middle schools were approved for construction for the Chugiak/Eagle River area and the Hanshew area by the voters.

More community meetings in the Chugiak/Eagle River area were held in the fall of 1995 on the subject of grade level configuration for middle schools. Two community meetings were held, one at Chugiak High School and one at Gruening Middle School. Information on this topic was discussed by area principals, the Executive Director of Middle Level Education and the Assistant

Superintendent of Instruction and the public. The intent of these meetings was to try and determine a community preference for the new Mirror Lake Middle School and possibly Gruening Middle School in the fall of 1997. The grade level determination had to be established prior to setting the boundaries for the new school and Gruening. As a result of these meetings, the Administration recommended a 6-7-8 grade level configuration for both Mirror Lake and Gruening Middle Schools. The division in the community continued; there was concern on the part of some of the Chugiak High School parents that the new school should be for grades 7-8-9 in order to relieve the over-crowding at the high school; there was also opposition from some of the parents from Ravenwood and Alpenglow over having their sixth graders attend a middle school. The School Board voted to establish Mirror Lake as a 6-7-8 middle school, and leave Gruening as a 7-8 middle school. The beginning of the 1997-98 school year saw the opening of these two schools in their present configuration.

### •1998 Study

The various configurations to be studied/compared in 1998 were 6-7-8 middle schools and K-5 elementary schools and the current K-6 elementary schools and 7-8 middle schools. This is an essential discussion because of the future impact on bonding for school construction, boundary changes, the location and size of future school sites, budgeting, and many other factors.

As the Anchorage School District population continues to increase at all levels, K-12, the School Board is faced with making decisions as to the schedule for bonding/future school site purchase and school construction in order to meet the housing needs for the instructional program. At the current time, the most pressing need for a decision centers on the East Anchorage area: the question is whether to build another K-6 elementary school to relieve the over-crowding at many of the elementary schools or whether to build a new 6-7-8 middle school and then balance the enrollments at Wendler, Clark, and a new middle school and at the elementary schools by moving sixth graders out of the elementary schools and into the new middle school.

A study was conducted during the Spring of the 1997-98 school year by John Norman, the Interim Executive Director of Middle Level Education, and the Anchorage Bowl middle school principals working closely with their elementary feeder schools. An information packet was prepared by the Executive Director for Middle School Education and the middle school principals working with the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction; this packet was similar to ones prepared for the Chugiak/Eagle River community meetings held prior to establishment of the boundaries and Grade Level Configuration for Mirror Lake and Gruening Middle Schools (Attachment A).

This study was conducted in three ways: 1) a series of PTSA/Community Council meetings in middle school attendance areas using the information packet as the basis for the discussions and presentations; an end of meeting survey was given for immediate feedback (Attachment B); 2) surveys of students, staff and parents at Mirror Lake Middle School (the only Anchorage School District School with a 6-7-8 configuration) and its feeder elementary schools: Chugiak and Fire Lake (Attachments C, D, E, F, G); and 3) one part of a three part community survey conducted in June 1998 by Ivan Moore Research (Attachment H). Each component of the study will be discussed below.

### **•Middle School Attendance Area Meetings**

The Middle School Department took the lead on this project. The Information Packet (Attachment A) was distributed by Mr. Norman in February to the middle school principals along with a tentative schedule; each middle school principal was encouraged to work with their feeder schools, PTSAs, Community Councils, and other community groups to schedule one or more meetings depending on area preference. Presentations for staffs and communities were scheduled after Spring Break and throughout the Spring. This effort met with varied success due to the many other activities going on at the schools in the spring of the year, and obvious confusion with the purpose of these meetings and the regularly scheduled sixth grade orientation meetings/open houses held every spring for incoming students and parents. The results of each Middle School area meeting are summarized below.

### **Central Middle School of Science**

Principal, Keith Taton, Assistant Principal, Jacque Repp, and Administrative Trainee, Curt Green, a Central parent and a Central teacher conducted a series of meetings at four elementary schools in April: Inlet View (for Inlet View and Government Hill), Kennedy (Fort Richardson), Fairview (Fairview and Denali), and Aurora (Elmendorf).

The Central team worked with their feeder schools, which include schools in the downtown core and on Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson, in order to provide opportunities in various parts of their attendance area for parent/staff convenience. In addition, students from the entire district who attend the school on zone exceptions were afforded the opportunity to attend meetings at any of the middle school area meetings. With the exception of the Inlet View meeting where 35 attended, attendance was very low at these meetings (Kennedy (5), Fairview (5), Aurora (3) in April. There appeared to be quite a bit of confusion with the purpose of this meeting and that of Central's

regular 6th grade orientation which was also in April, even though separate information flyers were sent home and to the feeder schools.

At each meeting, Dr. Taton made a presentation and then discussed the issues of 7-8 vs 6-7-8; at all locations, parents appeared to support the 6-7-8 grade level configuration. The comments from the military parents were that, in many cases, they had come from districts with a 6-7-8 configuration.

Dr. Taton reported that the Central staff is supportive of a 6-7-8 program and asked during the 1993 restructuring presentation to the School Board that they become a 6-7-8 alternative school. The Central Middle School of Science continues to support becoming a 6-7-8 alternative school focusing on math and science. This would allow 250 students per grade for each grade for a total school enrollment of 750 students. Dr. Taton's Parent Advisory Committee continues to support a 6-7-8 grade alternative program for math and science.

Dr. Taton has also been the principal of the 6-7-8 grade middle school in another district and professionally supports that configuration as a superior model. He cited the following strengths of the three year model: two years is too short a time to transition a student successfully from elementary to middle school to high school; the current seventh grade is a transition in and the current eighth grade is a transition out. He feels that students need a solid year in the middle to establish a feeling of "belonging:" parents appear to feel the same way at Central.

### **Clark Middle School**

Dr. Mim Chapman scheduled a series of staff meetings with the feeder schools in the Clark attendance area and at Clark Middle School in late April and early May. The presentations consisted of reviewing the information packets via transparencies and surveyed the staff at each school. She encouraged each elementary principal to share the information with their parents at their next PTA meeting. Dr. Chapman also made a presentation to the Clark Parent Advisory Committee on April 21; all PTA feeder school representatives were invited to that meeting.

In addition, Dr. Chapman invited all feeder school parents, K-12, to attend a community meeting to discuss the issue on May 12, and repeated the same presentation as in April. The issue was one of many on the agenda for the regular 6th grade orientation for incoming Clark students on April 29; incoming principal Sheri Stears was also in attendance at that meeting. No attendance figures were provided by Dr. Chapman, but 55 surveys were returned from the various schools.

Survey results from Clark and its feeder schools show strong support from those who responded: 37 supported the 6-7-8 grade configuration, two (2) were neutral, 12 were opposed, one (1) preferred K-3, 4-7,8-9, and 10-12 grade configurations, one (1) preferred Year Round Schooling with intermissions, and two (2) preferred 7-8-9. Supporters of the move to 6-7-8 stated the following reasons: sixth graders do not belong in elementary schools, they are ready for more challenge and daily electives, especially music and physical education; students need the change in order to be more successful; three years is better; three years increases and stabilizes parental involvement; this would relieve the space crunch at the elementary schools in the area; parents prefer teaming; students are ready for sports and other intramural activities; many wanted the change to happen as soon as possible. Those who did not support the change stated the following reasons: concern about the negative influence of older students on younger sixth graders; not enough space at Clark to accommodate sixth graders; prefer keeping current K-6 and 7-8; and some sixth graders too immature to be successful in middle school.

### **Goldenview Middle School**

Principal Connie Bensler reported the following activities for the Goldenview meetings: Goldenview PTSA meeting on March 26, Elementary feeder school meeting on April 30 (Goldenview and Hanshew feeder schools), Rabbit Creek Community Council on May 14, and the Goldenview staff on March 10. No attendance numbers were reported by Ms. Bensler, but the surveys showed trends as did the feedback from the Goldenview PTSA and the Rabbit Creek Community Council which is summarized below.

The Goldenview PTSA stated the following concerns: this change would take more funding; 6-7-8 driven by numbers of students; documentation of test scores needed; concerns about the effects of older students on younger students; bus behavior concerns; inappropriate books for sixth graders in the library; each community should be able to decide separately depending on their need; more definitive process and information needed; need formal report on the Mirror Lake experience; what is the impact on girls in the middle level in the areas of math/science; detrimental to the elementary schools in south Anchorage; overcrowded conditions if sixth graders added to Goldenview; sixth graders need to stay in elementary so they stay in a more personal group.

Eighteen (18) surveys were returned from the parents/staff at Goldenview and the feeder schools. Of the 18 returned, 12 were strongly opposed to the 6-7-8; two supported the change; and four were neutral on the subject. In addition to the comments listed by the PTSA above, other issues stated were: it is more

important to focus on the overcrowding in the high schools in south Anchorage and Eagle River; feel the District should not be prioritizing changing the DOE funding for sixth grade, but eliminating the DOE restrictions on high school debt reimbursement; south Anchorage does not want this, but it would be all right if another area of town did support the change. Supporters cited the benefit of three years in a school rather than two and the need for sixth graders to leave the elementary school. One teacher suggested that teams should stay together for three years, thus establishing a bond and good communication between the teachers, the students, and the parents. Electives would benefit from three years. A concern was raised about how socio-economic differences would affect student participation in the 6-7-8 middle school with regard to activities.

Four surveys were returned by the Rabbit Creek Community Council. Three (3) supported the 6-7-8 change; one (1) did not. Supporters stated the need for sixth graders to have more choices, the ability to reduce the overcrowding in the elementary schools, and the need for another middle school within a few years due to the population growth in the area; support dependent on results of the Mirror Lake experience, both academically and socially; and the need for research on the benefits to sixth graders academically in elementary vs middle schools needed. The person who did not support the change cited "empire-building," the advantages of year round schooling instead of 6-7-8, and no reason to change.

### **Hanshew Middle School**

Sherry Ellers, principal at Hanshew reported that none of the feeder school PTAs wanted to meet on this topic; they were also invited to the joint meeting with the Goldenview and Hanshew PTSAs; one Huffman parent attended, the rest were middle school parents. Ms. Ellers reports that she circulated 5,000 flyers to the elementary schools and the middle school parents at Hanshew.

Staff surveys returned showed 24 in favor of the 6-7-8 configuration and nine opposed. The major concerns surround the preference to have the District focus on the overcrowding at the high school level first and that 6-7-8 would overcrowd the middle schools. Supporters felt that this is best for all of the students and even felt that the younger students would influence the older ones to stay "kids" longer! Other positive comments cited the need for elementary certification for the teachers, rather than just secondary; on the other hand, there was also a concern expressed that more elementary teachers might weaken the content areas because of lack of training; three years providing more stability and opportunity for investment in the school rather than just a transition zone; and longer time builds school spirit. Teachers who did not support the change cited the negative impact of the older students on the younger students, the lack

of strong content teachers for sixth graders, the need to refine and perfect middle school teaming and teaching prior to changing again, the need for additional schools and over-crowding concerns.

### **Mears Middle School**

Former Mears principal, Guy Okada, reported that he shared the information packet with the staff at Mears as well as the Dimond area PTA Presidents and Principals at an area meeting. An invitation was extended to set up individual PTA meetings on the topic at that time; only Klatt PTA had a meeting which had approximately 15 in attendance.

Mr. Okada's summary of the information he received shows that overall, parents and staff agree that sixth graders could be with seventh and eighth graders successfully, but their main concern is the negative influence an eighth grader may exert on a sixth grader. There was no consensus expressed from the 21 surveys returned. There appears to be no disagreement that sixth graders would benefit from the educational program offered at a middle school over that of an elementary school. There was some concern expressed about the cost of building middle schools rather than elementary schools to accommodate the over-crowding and all agreed that the area is not ready for another boundary change!

Concerns expressed by parents/staff were similar to those expressed at the other middle schools and elementary schools: concern with the increased proximity to more mature students in a middle school; some preference to move ninth back to middle school by two people rather than 6-7-8. Those expressing support stated the benefits in terms of three years in a school providing stability for students and parents; enriched curriculum and activities and more challenging for sixth graders than elementary schools presently offer; believe that middle school provides a safety net for young people, particularly girls; and support for moving sixth graders out of elementary schools.

### **Romig Middle School**

Romig principal, Sophia Dawson, reported that a meeting was held with the staff on the 6-7-8 configuration where John Norman, Interim Executive Director for Middle Level Education, gave a presentation and a full discussion ensued. Ms. Dawson also met with the Middle School Team Liaisons to discuss this concept. The staff was not opposed to the 6-7-8 grade configuration, but felt that the discussion was premature because so many additional facilities would have to be built in order to house all ASD 6-7-8 graders. In addition, a PTSA meeting was held at Romig on April 9, 1998; parents from Romig and its feeder schools were

invited to attend to discuss the possibilities of a 6-7-8 grade configuration. Eight people attended; one survey was filled out and returned. The survey supported the change to 6-7-8 grade configuration. Reasons cited for support were much the same as stated above. The person who filled out the survey stated that sixth graders are increasingly isolated in their elementary schools because of their maturity and the need for more academic rigor. More information from the Mirror Lake experience was desired by the person filling out the survey.

### **Wendler Middle School**

Activities conducted by Margo Bellamy, principal at Wendler Middle School, followed the same pattern as the other schools. A summary of the Wendler activities follows.

On March 10, a Parent Coffee was held to discuss the 6-7-8 configuration and other issues; concern centered around space concerns and curriculum issues; 16 parents attended.

Other activities held in March were a presentation to the Wendler Department Chairs and Team Liaisons. Their general concern centered around space and teacher certification issues, especially 7-12 staff currently teaching in the middle schools. This meeting was followed by an Open Forum discussion with the Wendler staff. The staff was overwhelmingly against the 6-7-8 configuration; there was strong support for the 7-8 status quo. Other issues centered around appropriate curriculum, teacher certification, space, numbers of students who may be involved if no new middle school were built and the fact that Wendler is an older building, and it would not be able to accommodate sixth graders.

On March 26, a PTSA General Membership meeting was held; only the PTSA officers came. After a brief discussion, they agreed that the information packet would be included in the next edition of the Wendler newsletter so all parents would have it. The next night, March 27, parent sectionals were held on 6-7-8 configuration during their Transition Night for incoming 7th grade parents; information and flyers were distributed. Fifty-six parents attended one of two sectionals during the evening. Parents were receptive, but not overly supportive. Questions centered around safety of the younger students and appropriateness of mixing the grades. Many requested additional discussion during the 1998-99 school year.

Ms. Bellamy also discussed this with the School Business Partnership Board in March. She met with all of the business partners and students in the School Business Partnerships Class to present the 6-7-8 grade configuration; there were 17 business partners in attendance. Students seemed to have more questions

than the business partners; students main concerns thought it would be "ok" to have sixth graders, but thought there would be more crowding and too few lockers.

Ms. Williams, a counselor at Wendler and a member of the Rogers Park Community School Board of Directors, presented the 6-7-8 grade configuration to that Board at their April meeting. The general consensus from that meeting was that the District will need to do much more in the area of construction, especially in this community, before any decision is made. Several RPCS Board members felt that the final decision should be left up to the community in each attendance area, but that the new schools should be designed to accommodate all three grades if that configuration is decided upon. Several members were concerned that there were too many high schools over-crowded and that emphasis should be placed on those issues also. Many elementary parents are not aware of the high school issues.

#### •**Mirror Lake Experience/Fire Lake and Chugiak Elementary Feedback**

Mirror Lake Middle School opened in the fall of 1997 as a 6-7-8 Middle School; sixth graders from severely over-crowded Chugiak Elementary School, Birchwood ABC, and Fire Lake Elementary School were included. As part of the Grade Configuration Study, the parents, students, and staff at Mirror Lake were surveyed as well as the principals and staff at Fire Lake and Chugiak Elementary schools. The results are discussed below.

#### **Mirror Lake Survey**

Survey results from students, staff, and parents at Mirror Lake for the 1997-98 school year show a high level of satisfaction with the change to the 6-7-8 grade configuration in their new school. The survey results are shown as attachments to this memorandum: student survey (Attachment C), staff survey (Attachment D), and parents (Attachment E). An article from the *Alaska Star* summarizes the 1997-98 school year survey results and is included in this memorandum as Attachment F.

Student Survey: Eight-nine percent, (202) of the 227 sixth graders surveyed, reported they liked being in the sixth grade at Mirror Lake Middle School; 11% (25) responded negatively (Attachment C). When asked what their top five activities were at Mirror Lake, sixth graders prioritized the following five: 1) Physical Education (187), Activities and Sports (153), Lunch with friends (151), Computers (106), and Other (97). Academics were valued differently by the sixth graders, but Music showed strong support at 40% and Technology was given a 42% rating of support. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the sixth grade students felt that most of their teachers liked them; 91% of the students reported that their

teachers helped them be successful; 84% of the students said that there was at least one adult at the school who they can talk with comfortably; 55% felt that they were doing better in school this year; and 72% of the students were involved in at least one extra activity at school. The staff at Mirror Lake will be using this information to adjust their program and to set their goals for the 1998-99 school year.

Staff Survey: Twenty-five staff members responded to the survey; of that number, 96% stated that they liked having sixth graders at the school; one staff member was neutral to having sixth graders at Mirror Lake; there were no negative responses. These results are compiled with comments and shown as Attachment D. The insights provided by the staff clearly show strong care for students and a willingness to work to resolve issues; it is interesting to note that the teachers are very supportive of more interaction of all grades in the school because of the common set of disciplinary expectations and the common commitment to the mission of this middle school. The staff is obviously happy to be at Mirror Lake and seem very committed to the students and their success in school.

Parent Survey:

Results of the Mirror Lake Sixth Grade Parent Survey are shown as Attachment E. Of the 34 parents who returned surveys, 25 or 74%, were satisfied with their child's teaching team in the four core areas of math, science, social studies, and language arts; three, or 9%, were neutral, and six (18%) were dissatisfied in this area. Mirror Lake parent satisfaction with their student's progress in the four core areas ranged from 59% satisfied, 18% neutral, and 24% dissatisfied. Parent satisfaction with their student's progress in electives such as art, music, computers, foreign language, technology, physical education, living skills, etc. ranged from 91% satisfaction, 3% neutral, and 6% dissatisfied. To the question of parent satisfaction with the degree of personal attention and treatment their child received at school, 62% were satisfied, 18% were neutral, and 21% were dissatisfied. Overall, parents felt valued and welcomed at Mirror Lake: 74% were satisfied, 21% were neutral, and 6% were dissatisfied. Seventy-one percent of the Mirror Lake sixth grade parents support the 6-7-8 grade configuration at Mirror Lake, 21% were neutral, and 6% were dissatisfied with the configuration. When asked if parents were satisfied with their sixth grade student being at Mirror Lake Middle School, 56% were favorable, 18% were neutral, and 24% were dissatisfied. When asked whether parents supported their sixth grader attending a 6-7-8 grade middle school in the fall, 71% were favorable, 21% were neutral, and 9% were dissatisfied. Parents were also asked which parent involvement activities they participated in and their responses are shown on the survey summary on Attachment E.

**Chugiak Elementary Staff Survey:** The staff at Chugiak Elementary School was surveyed as to their experience in transitioning from a K-6 school to a K-5 school during 1997-98; a summary of the survey and their comments is found on Attachment G. Twenty staff responded to the survey; of the 20, 15 or 75% responded to the change favorably when asked which they preferred, a K-5 or K-6 school; in addition, two were neutral, and three were negative about the change. The staff at Chugiak also responded strongly in favor (85%) that moving the sixth graders had a positive impact on the school as a whole. The benefits cited revolved around the developing leadership qualities in the fifth graders, a major reduction to the over-crowding and all of the issues surrounding that situation as well as a calmer tone to the school when there were just K-5 students at the school. The staff supporting the K-6 school seemed to miss the sixth graders and their leadership at the school.

**Fire Lake Elementary Staff Survey:** The staff at Fire Lake Elementary School was also surveyed as to their experiences this past year as a K-5 elementary school. A summary of their comments and the survey is found on Attachment H. Twenty-three staff members responded and of the 23, 21 or 92% were favorable to the change; one staff member (4%) checked neutral, and one (4%) was negative to the change. The staff was equally positive to the question on the overall impact to the school as a whole because of the change. Positive comments were similar to those for Chugiak Elementary School; overall, the tone of the school is calmer, there is less over-crowding, and the fifth graders are exerting leadership roles which are seen as very positive.

• **Anchorage School District Parent Opinion Survey (June 1998)**

The Anchorage School District commissioned a survey of 384 parents of school district children in June 1998. Respondents were screened to ensure their status as a parent or legal guardian of Anchorage School District students since parental response to the three topics being studied was critically important to the School Board and the Administration of the ASD. The entire survey and accompanying report is Attachment I to this memorandum.

The objective of the study was to measure parental attitudes towards: 1) moving sixth graders into middle school; 2) changing school starting times; and 3) the teacher evaluation process. For the purposes of this memorandum, the pertinent information can be found on pages 1-5 of the Executive Summary; the specific questions asked appear as questions I A and I B on the survey; the cross-tabulations and more detailed information follow the summaries.

Key points from the survey show the following on the subject of sixth graders in middle schools:

- Of the three issues tested, this issue shows the greatest degree of support among ASD parents. Just under half of all parents, 49.6% favored the idea of moving 6th grade into the Middle School level, 45.8% opposed the idea, and 4.5% had no opinion.
- A similar result was seen when parents were asked whether they preferred the change being made for every school or on a case-by-case basis. Parents preferring a Districtwide approach, 50.7%, and 43% preferred each school to be considered separately.
- Among elementary parents (page 9), the opinion is somewhat less supportive. Elementary parents oppose the move, 46.4% favor, 48.1% oppose, while parents having no elementary students favor the move, 57.3% to 40.6%; this is considered statistically significant. This could be interpreted to mean that those parents, whose children are in middle school or who have been in middle school, are more supportive and knowledgeable about the issue.
- A similar look at the Middle School level shows no difference at all between the opinions of those with middle school children and those without.
- In Chugiak/Eagle River, where parents have had experience of sixth grade in the Middle School level, the idea is more favorably received, 54.4% support, 40.9% do not support this grouping.
- The parent population is split on the question of moving sixth grade into the middle school level; just under half of the parents surveyed support this change. If the Administration and the School Board choose to recommend moving sixth grade into the middle school level, support could be increased by providing concrete, money-related reasons for making the move, beyond the idea that sixth graders are more suited to the middle school level than the elementary level. If the District decides to do this, than an information campaign, with financial, demographic, and research-based factual information is essential to convince the public, particularly those with young children or no children in our schools.

## **Administrative Recommendation**

The Administration believes that the 6-7-8 grade level configuration is a viable educational model for middle schools if the community in an attendance area supports it and space is available. In order to move toward all middle schools with a 6-7-8 configuration, two to three additional middle schools will be needed in the future. The community seems to support the 6-7-8 configuration in different communities where parents and school staff are supportive; the community is also supportive of retaining the current 7-8 configuration if additional schools are not built. The Mirror Lake Middle School appears to be very successful after its first year of operation using the 6-7-8 grade level configuration.

BC/CC

Attachments

Prepared by: Carol Comeau, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction

Approved by: Carol Comeau, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction