



# Anchorage School District 1999 Legislative Priorities

1st Session 21st Alaska State Legislature

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## **Relief from Unfunded Mandates**

All new mandated programs or fiscal management activities or new regulations must be supported with adequate funding.

**Rationale:** The Anchorage School Board opposes unfunded mandates and urges the Alaska Legislature to require:

1. a study of current mandates and their impact on local school districts;
2. a needs assessment and cost-benefit analysis before consideration of any new mandate;
3. a periodic re-evaluation of existing mandates, including a meaningful cost-benefit analysis of existing mandates to identify those that should be removed or revised; and,
4. full funding of all mandates imposed on the Anchorage School District.

For example, in 1997 the Alaska Legislature mandated secondary pupil competency testing that students must pass prior to receiving a high school diploma from any school district in Alaska. No funding appropriation was made to cover increased costs to school districts for the implementation of the test or the related costs in the preparation of students to pass the examination.

## **Local Control and Local Accountability of Charter Schools**

The Anchorage School Board supports existing statute as it relates to local control and local accountability issues with charter school formation and governance.

**Rationale:** Local school boards are ultimately responsible for the public funds expended for the Charter Schools in their district. The Anchorage School Board supports local control and local accountability of charter schools including:

- ability to deny Charter Schools applications, and not be overturned by another group;
- ability to add other requirements for Charter Schools, including Principal/Head Teacher Certification; and,
- authority to specify financial and building and material resources available from the district to the Charter School.

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### **Funding Of Charter Schools**

The Anchorage School Board supports legislation to provide full funding for the creation and start-up costs of all charter schools. Adequate planning, supplies, equipment, and funding for additional facility space for charter schools is necessary to successfully implement the charter schools that have been provided for in state statute.

**Rationale:** SB 88, Formation of Charter Schools, became law at the end of the 1995 legislative session. The law gave local school boards the ability to approve or deny charter school applications. Funding for the day-to-day operation of the charter schools was provided through the Foundation Formula. No state funding was provided for planning and start-up costs.

Many of our schools are over capacity and do not have space to house a charter school. Many charter schools prefer to be housed in their own, separate facility because of the nature of their programs. Without adequate planning and start-up funding, school districts may have to deny charter school applications because of a lack of resources or fund charter schools out of already reduced budgets for neighborhood schools. The legislature must step-up to funding the costs associated with charter schools.

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### **Full and Early Funding for Public Education**

The Anchorage School Board supports full and early funding of foundation revenues, school construction debt reimbursement and pupil transportation.

**Rationale:** The Anchorage School Board supports full and early funding of foundation revenues, school construction debt reimbursement and student transportation for the following year by March 15 of each year to meet personnel requirements under the law. A school district's and municipality's early knowledge of its anticipated revenues for the following school year is essential for responsible budgeting decisions.

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### **Support For Construction/Major Maintenance of School Facilities**

The Anchorage School Board recommends that the Legislature establish a constant source of funding, separate from the foundation formula, for capital construction and major maintenance funding.

**Rationale:** In 1998, the Legislature reinstated the debt reimbursement program through SB 11, which greatly increased capital funding for schools over previous years, and for which the School Board is very grateful. However, the State Capital budget and the current debt reimbursement program is still inadequate to fully meet current and future District needs.

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### **Definition of a Secondary Student**

The Anchorage School Board supports changing education regulations to expand the definition of junior high to include the words “middle school” and include the option of sixth grade in the configuration of the junior high/middle school. The Anchorage School Board also urges that the language on facility square footage be changed to accommodate the funding difference.

**Rationale:** All Anchorage junior highs have been converted to middle schools. The middle school concept is a more developmentally appropriate approach to the junior high experience. Middle schools positively affect all children regardless of ability or socio-economic background.

The way that the law and current regulations are written, however, the middle school model is not addressed. Many sixth grade students across the state are in middle school programs. Sixth grade is not given approval to be included in the junior high/middle school mix. The grade configuration of middle schools varies but may include 6, 7, or 8th grades in various combinations. Several districts, including Anchorage, already have configurations ranging from 6th

grade to ninth grade and are therefore out of compliance with Department of Education regulation.

Inclusion of sixth grade in the middle school configuration also has an impact on facilities planning. All students in the middle school program require the same programs and space allocation. It is requested that the square footage allowable for 6th graders housed in a middle school be calculated at the secondary allowance of 150 square feet per student, rather than the elementary calculation of 106 square feet per student. The reduced square foot allowance hinders a district's ability to properly plan and design a middle school facility to meet the educational needs of the students it serves.