

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #50 (1999-2000)

September 27, 1999

TO: SCHOOL BOARD
FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
SUBJECT: 2000 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve the 2000 Anchorage School District Legislative Priorities (Attachment A).

PERTINENT FACTS:

The goal of the School Board is to work with local, state, and federal government in obtaining the necessary resources, laws, and regulations for the District to provide the educational programs and support services necessary to fulfill its educational mission.

The Anchorage School District legislative priorities reflect the legislative issues and concerns of School Board members. Upon approval of the priorities by the School Board, the Legislative subcommittee of the School Board will work with the Administration to develop additional rationale and supportive materials for each of the priorities.

The School Board has indicated a desire to discuss ways to modify existing laws relative to collective bargaining and possibly the Open Meetings Act to allow for alternate methods of collective bargaining. Since this did not go through the Legislative subcommittee process, it is our belief that the School Board may wish to discuss this further.

The School Board may wish to add or modify the priority list during discussion of the overall package at the Board meeting.

BC/law

Attachment

Prepared and Approved by: Lawrence A. Wiget, Executive Director, Public Affairs

Attachment A



Anchorage School District

2000 Legislative Priorities

Second Session

21st Alaska State Legislature

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 financial 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 school districts.

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.

Maintain 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.

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 are 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.

School Vouchers

The Anchorage School Board urges policy makers to oppose efforts to use public tax dollars to finance private, parochial, or home school vouchers. The Anchorage School Board also urges policy makers to work with local communities to ensure that our public schools provide world-class educational opportunities for children.

Rationale: Public schools educate every child, regardless of race, ability, religion, economic circumstance or special need. Public schools, through their elected school boards, are directly accountable to the citizens of the community for the expenditure of public funds.

Taxpayer-funded vouchers for private, parochial, or home school tuition and fees drain scarce resources from public school classrooms and diminish revenues available for public schools.

Full and Early Funding for Public Education

The Anchorage School Board calls upon the Legislature to support full and early funding of:

- The Foundation formula
- School construction debt reimbursement

Rationale: The Anchorage School Board encourages the Governor and the Legislature to continue to make public school education a top funding priority by fully funding the Foundation formula; school debt reimbursement; and, pupil transportation.

A school district's early knowledge of its anticipated revenues for the following school year is absolutely necessary for responsible budgeting decisions. Therefore, the Anchorage School Board supports funding of education formula revenues, school-construction debt reimbursement and student transportation by March 15 of each year in order to meet personnel requirements under the law.

Maintain State funding for Community Schools

The Anchorage School Board recommends that the Community Schools Act of 1980 be fully funded.

Rationale: Under the original Community School Act of 1980, half of one - percent of a district's operating budget will be funded by the State for community schools. Statewide, schools should have received \$3,171,728 in FY 1999. Instead, only \$500,000 was appropriated.

This past year, the Legislature reduced Community School Funding by \$100,000 or twenty percent statewide, from \$500,000 to \$400,000. This reduction resulted in a loss of approximately \$25,000 in Community School Funding to the District for FY 1999-2000 over the previous year.

The Community School Act of 1980 is separate from and does not interfere with School Foundation funding.

The District is requesting that the current level of funding be maintained, if not increased, for FY 97-98.

Development of Post Secondary Special Education Programs in Alaska and Educational Opportunities for Alaskans to Complete Special Education Certification Training Outside Alaska

The Anchorage School Board promotes the establishment and expansion of post-secondary educational programs to train additional individuals as certified special education teachers and the initiation of programs to train related service providers (i.e. school psychologists, physical therapists, and speech therapists) within our state university system.

The Anchorage School Board also supports Alaskan residents completing certification as a special education related service provider while attending an academic program outside the State of Alaska who, upon certification, are committed to provide services to Alaska public school systems.

Rationale: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA-97) mandate appropriate educational services be provided to all certified special education students; the Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities (34 C.F.R. Part 300), Section 300.381 identifies the role of "the State (to) undertake (activities) to ensure an adequate supply of qualified personnel including special education and related services personnel... necessary to carry out the purposes of this part;" and, the Assistance to States for the Education of Children with Disabilities (34 C.F.R. Part 300), Section 300.382 identifies the role of "Each State plan (to) include a description of the procedures and activities the State will undertake to ensure that all personnel necessary to carry out this part are appropriately and adequately trained ... to include a system for continuing education of regular and special education and related service personnel to meet the needs of children with disabilities."

However, the Anchorage School District, as well as other school districts throughout the State of Alaska, is having difficulty meeting the educational requirements of our special needs students due to a significant shortage of certified special education personnel. Furthermore, the University of Alaska has limited special education and related services professional preparation program opportunities available to individuals aspiring to become certified special education or related service professionals.

Support Construction/Major Maintenance of School Facilities

... Establish a continuing and adequate 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 are still inadequate to fully meet current and future District needs.

... Allow flexibility in State Capital Improvement Grants and School Debt Reimbursement

The Anchorage School Board supports changes to education statutes and regulations for state capital improvement grants and debt reimbursement to address District needs.

Rationale: Geographically isolated schools in a funding community should be allowed additional time to reach and sustain their design capacity. It is not feasible to change the boundaries of either the Chugiak/Eagle River or Girdwood attendance areas. Current regulations call for any new schools in those areas to be full within five years of occupancy. This requirement forces an isolated 1,600 student high school to grow to over 2,500 students before construction of a new high school could possibly justify full matching grant state funding.

... **Expand the 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 to 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 law and current regulations, however, do not address the middle school model. 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.