

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #256 (1999-2000)

April 10, 2000

TO: SCHOOL BOARD
FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
SUBJECT: NEWCOMERS' CENTER STATUS REPORT

PERTINENT FACTS

On April 8, 1996, the Anchorage School Board unanimously approved ASD memorandum #211 (95-96) which authorized the Superintendent to submit the state regulated (Alaska Education Regulations Chapter 34) three-year Bilingual Plan of Service FY '96-'99 to Alaska Department of Education (DOE) for state approval. DOE subsequently approved the plan in August 1996; and implementation began during the fall of 1996. A proposal for the Newcomers' Center (NC) was included in the required three-year Plan of Service (POS) 1996-99. The purpose of the proposal was to further meet the needs of students of limited-English-speaking proficiency by providing educational opportunity to identified students through the establishment of bilingual education programs. The NC planning phase was carried out in year-1 (1996-97) and implementation began in year-2 (1997-98). Currently (1999-2000), the NC is in its third year of implementation.

Many of the older immigrant students enrolling in our schools lack basic literacy skills in their first language. Social mores and customs dictate a very different way of living daily life, consequently producing enormous and serious issues. Recognizing the drastic change in the educational background of immigrant students enrolling in the District, secondary teachers expressed a concern for being able to work effectively with them. The recommendation was to provide a "school-within-a-school" setting for this project. Ideal housing was determined to be at the King Career Center since buses already transport students there from the six area high schools. At the time of the development of the POS each high school, with the exception of West High, would send students. Romig/West already had a learning center and the type of instruction proposed was already in existence. Since the 1998-99 school year, however, due to an entirely new ESL/bilingual staff at that site, students from West/Romig have been accepted at the NC.

Students are accepted based on referral from area school ESL and counseling staff, permission of parents, and agreement of the identified student.

Instruction is based around two 3-hour blocks consistent with KCC scheduling. Because of the high needs of the target group space and staff would accommodate no more than 20 students per 3-hour session. This year, however, both sessions exceed that number by 3 students in each session. The curriculum consists of beginning level English with emphasis on the four basic literacy skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing; and U. S. History focusing on U. S. geography and culture. Basic survival/life skills and study skills are emphasized and supported. The chart in the attachment presents a schematic diagram showing how the Newcomers' Center Structure with District Support results in a positive Learning Environment for newly migrated students.

STAFFING

Staffing at the NC currently consists of 2.0 certificated ESL teachers, 0.5 certificated bilingual/ESL counselor (shared with Dimond High School-0.5), and 1.0 bilingual/ESL tutor. The additional teacher was hired in January of this year.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Over the past 2.5 years the Newcomers' Center has grown in size and diversity. Enrollment has increased from 22 in 1997-98 to 34 in 1998-99; and to 59 currently (1999-2000). Chart 1 provides a history of the number of students, the number of languages of the students, and the number of different countries of origin of the students over the past 2.5 years.

Chart 1

Enrollments in the Newcomers Center 1997-98 through 1999-2000

Linguistic and national diversity increased significantly from 1997-98 to 1998-99. The number of languages spoken by NC students grew from 3 to 11 and countries of origin from 6 to 15. Although the total number of languages and countries declined slightly in 1999-2000, the mixture changed and the year is not yet completed. The percentage of Spanish speakers declined and there was an increase in the number of students who speak Korean, Chinese, and Russian (See Charts 2, 3 and 4).

ASSESSMENT

The NC student body encompasses a wide range of students' prior academic background. Both literacy in students' first language and the prior study of the English language help students learn English more quickly. The Idea Proficiency Test – Form II (IPT-II) is used to assess students' English language proficiency.

Many NC students have had some exposure to the study of English in their home countries. However, most NC students are non-English-speakers (97.3%) as well as non-English-readers (92.8%), as measured by the IPT II upon enrollment (Table 1). Adding to this challenge, some are low in oral English proficiency skills, but more competent in reading and writing; for others the reverse is true.

Table 1

English Language Proficiency – IPT Oral Scores (at enrollment)

<i>Year</i>	<i>NEP</i>	<i>LEP</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Range</i>
1997-1998	21	1	1.05	1-2
1998-1999	32	2	1.12	1-3
1999-2000	55	4	1.12	1-3

The IPT-Oral Assessment classifies students who score at Level A (1) as non-English-speakers; those who score B through E (2-5) are limited-English-speakers, and those who score at Level F (6) are considered fluent-English-speakers.

On the IPT-Reading test, high school students who score from 0-27 are considered non-English readers; from 28-40, limited-English readers; and from 41-51, competent-English readers. Entry level data for the NC for the past three years is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

English Language Proficiency – IPT Reading Scores (at enrollment)

<i>Year</i>	<i>NEP</i>	<i>LEP</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Range</i>
1997-1998	18	4	20.27	0-34
1998-1999	32	2	15.56	0-31
1999-2000	53	6	16.74	0-35

For those students whose first language is Spanish, the IPT-III Spanish language version is also used to assess their first language proficiency. Information for Spanish language students is provided in Table 3. There is no other reliable tool available for the other languages.

Table 3
Spanish Language Proficiency (at enrollment)

	<i>Non-Reader</i>	<i>Limited-Reader</i>	<i>Competent-Reader</i>
1997-1998	4	4	8
1998-1999	6	3	7
1999-2000	0	3	16

DATA ON EXITED STUDENTS

Given the recent beginning of the Newcomer Center and the number of students involved, reliable measurement of student progress remains, at this point, somewhat elusive. More long-range, cumulative data are required. However, the following review of available statistics and some anecdotal observations, are contained in this report.

Students study at the NC an average of 25 weeks. Some enter after the beginning of the semester; in a few cases students have left during the course of the semester. Students generally leave after the NC staff, in consultation with the student, parents, and area high school staff, evaluates progress, motivation and overall readiness.

Table 4
Three Year History of Pre-Test, Post-Test Information
Newcomer Center
1997-1998 through 1999-2000

	1997-1998		1998-1999		1999-2000	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
IPT-Oral	1.053	2	1.154	2	1.333	2.27
IPT-Reading	21	27.59	15.69	24.54	18.67	26.73
Washoe II	51	78	39	68	63	NA

Exited students show an average growth on the IPT-Oral test of .879, roughly equivalent to one level of oral proficiency from Level A (non-speaker) to Level B (limited-speaker). An average increase of 7.85 points on the IPT-Reading test, from an average of 18.09 to an average of 25.94 (near limited-reading level) is gained. Historic pre-test and post test information is presented in Table 4.

FOLLOW-UP DATA

The most important evaluative measure is long-term educational progress and adjustment of students upon exiting the NC. Through the end of fall 1999-2000, 57 students had exited the NC. During the first semester after leaving the Newcomers' Center, 48 (84%) of the students continued their education in either a secondary school (middle school, high school) or university. Four (7%) returned to their home countries, 4 (7%) dropped out of school, and 1 (2%) moved out of state. The matriculation patterns are summarized in Chart 5.

Of the students who continue enrollment in ASD, eight entered beginning level ESL courses in area schools, 26 entered intermediate level courses, one entered advanced level ESL course, and one entered a regular language arts course (Chart 6). Students accumulated an average grade point average (GPA) of 2.81. Six students out of 45 failed one class during the first semester from the NC. Students who exited at the end of fall 1999-2000 semester are not included in this data.

Over the same period, eight students exercised their option to return to their home schools full time, although Newcomer Center staff advised them to remain. The average initial IPT reading score for this group of students was 17.5, and the average exiting score was 21.8. This group of students showed some overall growth, but they did not reach the level of "Limited English Reader." In the opinion of the NC staff, they may, therefore, face difficulty in intermediate ESL classes. Of this group, three returned to their home countries and five attend schools in Anchorage.

Although the program has not been in existence long enough for true long-range data to be available, information is available on the current status of exited students. Educationally, 42 students are in middle school or high school; three are enrolled in a university; three graduated from high school and are working; four dropped out; and seven moved and have left no information. Most of the students (45) are still in Anchorage; nine returned

to their home countries; and three moved out of state. The students who returned to their home countries all left for various personal reasons, not because of problems in school: difficulties adjusting to new family settings here; family problems and concerns; homesickness and difficulty adjusting culturally; and immigration problems.

Of the three students who are currently enrolled on the university level, two were 1997-98 NC students (who attended 2 semesters), and were graduates from Dimond High School. One student maintained a 4.00 GPA and received a four-year scholarship to the University of Alaska as part of the new Alaska Scholars Program. The other student earned a 3.80 GPA while enrolled in advanced math and science classes in preparation for a college education to pursue a career in pediatric medicine. The achievement of these students stands as especially laudable in view of second language acquisition research. This body of data shows that students normally require between 5 and 9 years to develop genuinely functional academic literacy in a second language.

Logistically, locating the Newcomer Center at the King Career Center and accessing KCC busing from area high schools is very successful. This arrangement allows the Newcomers' Center to efficiently serve students from all Anchorage high schools.

NEWCOMER CENTER CHALLENGES:

- As noted above, some students arrive with inadequate academic background in their first language, making English acquisition and adjustment more difficult.
- The extreme academic diversity of the newcomer population means that students are functioning at many different levels, from rank beginners to those almost ready for intermediate ESL classes. Some students arrive with several years of academic study of English, needing exposure to oral English; others have been in the U.S. long enough to learn a great deal of oral English, but lack experience reading and writing; still others enter with no English background at all.
- Newcomer Center students range in age from 12 to 17, in grades 7 through 12; therefore, producing a wide range of diversity in age and maturity.
- Communication between home and school often presents problems. Sometimes parents do not speak English, and interpreters must facilitate all communication. Recent immigrant parents may feel intimidated or fearful of school officials and avoid contact. Several students live with older siblings, who are often barely out of their teens themselves.
- Recent immigrant families may reside with relatives or live in other transient circumstances, leading to excessive mobility/transience.
- Older students often must work to help the family survive, sometimes interfering with schoolwork.

- Others provide periodic childcare for their family during the school day, leading to excessive absences.
- Housing the program to meet the increasing enrollment. Space at KCC is very limited.
- Since the beginning of the second semester 15 new students have enrolled filling the vacancies of students exited at the end of the semester.
- The current 0.5 counselor staffing allocation is inadequate for the steadily increasing enrollment.

Counseling challenges include the following:

- Nearly all students are unfamiliar with American culture and with the procedures and organization of American schools.
- Advising and scheduling Newcomer students is complex. Regular liaison among several different home school counselors and home school teachers must be conducted. Students are often unaware of the options available to them in American schools. Neither are they knowledgeable of the post-secondary and career opportunities available in American society.
- Students enroll at many different times during the school year, requiring on-going attention to assessment and scheduling.
- Some students arrive with a background of traumatic experience and must be observed for delayed stress reactions.

BC/FS/MH

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**Newcomers' Center: A Safe Place
for New Immigrant Students**

