

**ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA**

MEMORANDUM

June 2, 2000

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

**FROM: BOB CRISTAL
SUPERINTENDENT**

**SUBJECT: MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITY
ISSUES—BUDGET REDUCTIONS**

I have been asked to provide the rationale for the budget reductions recommended regarding middle school and high school activities. On April 4, 2000 the Anchorage Assembly voted to reduce the requested 2000-2001 Anchorage School District Financial Plan by \$8,000,000 and to reduce the requested local tax contribution by \$5,047,774. As a result of that Assembly action and subsequent approval of the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Anchorage Education Association, the District was required to reduce the proposed budget by \$11.2 million.

In order to achieve the required reductions, as Superintendent I recommended to the School Board a series of program cuts, employee lay offs and reduction in services. Included within this series of reductions were recommendations on activities at both the middle school and high school levels. None of these cuts were easy decisions and perhaps some have not clearly heard the rationale behind the recommendations. I would like to again explain the rationale for which activities were recommended for elimination.

MIDDLE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

First, I recommended that the middle school interscholastic activities be eliminated but that we retain the intramural activities at this level. If intramural activities continued, then students would still have opportunities to participate in a range of activities but the competition between schools would be eliminated. This recommendation would have reduced expenditures by over \$400,000. The topic of intramural versus interscholastic activities at the middle level has been discussed and debated at the District and School Board level for many years. The majority of School Board

members did not agree with my recommendation and reduced the middle school interscholastic activities by \$120,000 by eliminating swimming only. The fees for middle school activities will be increased from \$50 per activity to \$75 per activity since the Board did adopt this recommendation after reinstating middle school interscholastic activities.

HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

At the high school level there was significant discussion with the high school principals and the high school district level administrators about what would be the reductions in high school activities if we were forced to do so. The rationale behind the identification of hockey, gymnastics and swimming as the activities to eliminate was based on several factors. First, none of these three sports are a part of the District's physical education curriculum offerings for 2000-2001. While each school currently offers one class of swimming in the physical education program, due to the cost of the pool rentals we chose to eliminate that class next year. Several years ago the School Board eliminated the swimming requirement for graduation from high school. The other reasons included the fact that each of these three sports has a strong community based component outside the school district where youth can participate in competitive activity in hockey, gymnastics and swimming. It is our view that out-of-district organizations will continue the operation of these three sports for high school students who want to participate. These three sports each require a special facility or equipment in order to provide practice and competition at the high school level. Finally, we are cognizant of the need to be equitable in the offerings for a balance between the opportunity for boys and girls to participate.

We did not enter into the identification of the required cuts willingly. However, I also believe that while activities are important, the main critical mission of the District is heavily centered in the instructional program and the classroom offerings. Sports were not singled out as can be seen when one reviews the entire list of the \$11.2 million in reductions.

I have been asked to consider ways to operate the three sports for next year and allow more time for the community to prepare for ways to help assume responsibility for these three sports. As Superintendent, I believe that the only way the District should reinstate the three activities is if the Assembly will raise the upper limit spending authorization of the budget and if we can raise enough revenues to offset the reinstatement of these activities. If the activity fees are not increased to \$175, I do not believe the sports should be reinstated. If the Assembly does not increase our spending authorization, I do not believe the activities should be reinstated.

HIGH SCHOOL FEES

Another option considered was to substantially increase the student activity fee from \$75 per activity to \$250 per activity. The majority of the School Board has not yet reached agreement on that level of fees. We believe this level is justified given the fees a person pays to community organizations to have their youth participate in a one week camp or a two month long activity. It is not unusual for a parent to pay from \$150 to \$400 to community groups for basketball, hockey, gymnastics, etc. At this time the fees at the high school level have not increased.

I will be recommending that the School Board adopt an increased level of fees in order to offset some of the lost revenue at a rate of \$175.

COST REDUCTIONS IN OTHER ACTIVITIES

At the public hearing on the proposed reductions in May several people testified and encouraged the School Board to reduce costs as opposed to eliminating activities. It is evident that we must do both. We will be implementing some cost reductions for next year and some of these were raised during public testimony. Among those issues are:

1. The bussing costs will be reduced by eliminating busses within Anchorage for varsity teams to attend games at other Anchorage high schools in several sports. Not all bussing will be eliminated with the Municipality of Anchorage.
2. Increase gate charges for spectators at high school activities. This will be reviewed and considered. The increased revenues will not likely be a large amount but it will be pursued.
3. Reduce costs by requesting lower payment for officials. This suggestion will be pursued but it is not possible to unilaterally designate a reduced payment since we contract with officials through other agencies. We will attempt to reduce costs in this area.
4. Competitively bid ice rink rentals/reduce time for rentals. Had the District continued to offer hockey as an activity we would have pursued these ideas as ways to reduce costs. There would have been some savings but we could not estimate this at this time.
5. Establish an Advisory Activities Committee. It has been suggested that an Activities Advisory Committee be established to offer suggestions on the ways to reduce expenses for high school activities. We will pursue this in the fall as a way to increase community participation in the management of activities.

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