

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #27 (2001-2002)

October 8, 2001

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: PRIOR APPROVAL OF DISCRETIONARY GRANT: SMALLER LEARNING
COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENTATION GRANT

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the Anchorage School Board approve and authorize the Superintendent to apply for a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to enable Anchorage's six comprehensive high schools to create or enhance Smaller Learning Communities.

PERTINENT FACTS:

In FY 2000-20001, the Anchorage School District won a Smaller Learning Communities planning grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Although the grant pertained to Bartlett, Chugiak, Dimond, and Service High Schools, East and West High Schools joined the planning effort as it unfolded throughout the year. The grant competition is specifically for large comprehensive high schools. The U.S. Department of Education's Smaller Learning Communities program provides both planning grants and implementation grants for high schools to create research-based learning communities that produce the effect of smaller and more personal learning experiences within the larger institution. The federal objectives are to prevent students in large high schools from "falling through the cracks;" to foster academic achievement for all students; to engage parents and the community in ensuring that students succeed; and to prepare youth for life after high school.

The planning grant cycle in FY 2000-2001 gave grantees resources to help conduct needs assessments and to plan for a larger implementation grant in the subsequent fiscal year. Schools could consider a wide range of approaches, among them schools-within-schools, interdisciplinary groups, mentoring programs, grade level clusters, school-to-career pathways, and special programs based on content area specialties. The planning process last year enabled Anchorage's six comprehensive high schools to explore and examine ways to prepare for school remodels, capitalizing on the strengths of each school community to produce the best possible education for *all* students. The process also helped our six high schools look at research-based ways to personalize education and improve instruction that is not tied to facilities renovation.

The U.S. Department of Education has issued its preliminary announcement for a FY 2001-2002 Smaller Learning Communities competition. The District is preparing an Implementation Grant application that includes all six comprehensive high schools. Grant funds will be allocated primarily to professional development. Funds will help schools facilitate a change process that encourages successful approaches and positive relationships both within the school and with the community surrounding the school. The project will support a broad consensus among the schools for developing models for more integrated approaches to instruction, particularly in the core disciplines. In some cases, standards-based interdisciplinary instruction will focus on certain populations, such as incoming ninth grade students. In other cases, integrated approaches will apply to wider cross-sections of students within "houses," clusters, or groups as these are formed over time. Grant funds also will help schools advance initiatives that are underway, specific to individual school communities. Some examples of these programs include: the national Partners in Learning conflict resolution implementation, literacy across the content areas, and faculty/student mentors programs. All of our high schools have in place a number of innovative programs that are consistent with the Smaller Learning Communities program objectives: grant funds will help schools strengthen and disseminate these approaches.

The budget will consist primarily of contract addenda and credit course support for school staff across the schools, and consultant services. The budget also will include such items as release time for observation and coaching, technology-related costs, materials, and conference attendance. The budget will support a full-time project manager reporting to ASD High School Education, clerical support, and external project evaluation. The grant application will demonstrate in-kind commitments from local resources already in place. Examples include school administrators' time, volunteer time and contributions of community partners, and equipment and materials that are part of the schools' programs. No cash match is required.

The preliminary budget estimate is \$2,500,000 each year for three years.

CC/PM/DC/MH/BT

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