

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #295 (2001-2002)

May 13, 2002

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: COURSE REVIEW/REVISION IN COMPLIANCE WITH REVISED
POLICY LANGUAGE - DIGNITY IN DIVERSITY

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve and authorize the Superintendent to accept the review and revision of the course Dignity in Diversity to bring it into compliance with revised Anchorage School District Policy, Section 114.2 - Harassment and Discrimination. It is also the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve and authorize the Superintendent to accept the suggested resources for pilot during the 2002-2003 school year.

PERTINENT FACTS:

In September 2001, the Review Committee was established for the purpose of reviewing the currently taught course called Dignity in Diversity. The primary purpose was to bring the course into compliance with language in the revised Anchorage School District Policy, Section 114.2 - Harassment and Discrimination“

It is prohibited to harass, discriminate against, or grant a discriminatory advantage based on race, creed, gender, national origin, age, marital status, political or religious beliefs, physical or mental conditions, family, social, or cultural background, or sexual orientation.”

A timeline (from September 2001 - May 2002) was set during which the following would occur:

advertisement, selection, and formation of the review committee;

committee meetings to review course syllabus, content, and adopted materials;

revision of syllabus, content, and selection of new materials;

submission of draft of course proposal to various groups (Social Studies Curriculum Review Committee, Language Arts Curriculum Review Committee, Parent Teacher Association, Minority Education Concerns Committee, Bilingual/Multicultural Education Parent/Community Advisory Committee, Indian Education Parent Advisory Committee, Student Advisory Board and the administration.

The committee is composed of ASD teachers (including teachers of the course) community persons, the Social Studies Coordinator, the Literacy Coordinator, and the Supervisor of Bilingual/Multicultural Education (who coordinated the development of the current course).

Dignity in Diversity focuses on four primary concepts to inspire students toward and prepare them for a democratic society. These concepts include democracy/equity, cross-cultural understanding, interdependence, and socio-cultural exchange. The methodology of the course encourages students to understand more than one perspective in a dilemma, to place themselves in the position of other people, and to be willing to express ideas in class without fear of ridicule. Through an interdisciplinary approach that uses social studies and literature, students have an opportunity to view the relationship of history to their lives and to explore the roles and responses of individuals and groups confronting difficult contemporary issues and dilemmas.

The course revision and selected course materials are consistent with the current goals and objectives of Dignity in Diversity. Along with the revision, the committee recognized the importance of providing adequate professional development. It is essential that training be provided specific to these issues for the teachers of the Dignity in Diversity course. Exposing teachers to concepts, knowledge, and skills that apply to multicultural education will enable them to become sensitive to the educational needs of all students. The proposed training will enable teachers to analyze various scenarios, to discuss with colleagues the implications for teaching and learning, and to identify what teachers can do to accentuate learning and reduce tensions and anxieties among students. Emphasis will be placed on approaches that apply to culturally-specific situations: to identify misconceptions, to acknowledge and respond with appropriate cues, and to reinforce understanding in appropriate ways.

Attachments

CC/PM/DC/MH/MB/MK

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Approved by: Pat McDowell, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction

Suggested Resources:

The GLSEN Lunchbox: A Comprehensive Training Program for Ending Anti-Gay Bias in Schools

Out for Equality, Out 4 Good Schools Manual

Challenging Homophobia in Schools

Teaching About the Holocaust: A Resource Book for Educators. Washington, D.C.:
US Holocaust Memorial Museum