

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #77 (2002-2003)

October 14, 2002

TO: SCHOOL BOARD
FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
SUBJECT: 2003 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board approve the 2003 Anchorage School District Legislative priorities (Attachment A).

PERTINENT FACTS:

The goal of the School Board is to work with the local, the state, and the 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 Legislative subcommittee of the Anchorage School Board met several times over the past month to consider legislative priorities proposed by members of the Anchorage School Board and the District administration. The attached 2003 Anchorage School Board Legislative Priorities reflect these legislative issues and concerns.

Upon approval of the priorities by the School Board, the Legislative subcommittee will work with the Administration to develop additional rationale and supportive materials for each of the priorities.

CC/LAW

Attachment

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Public Affairs
Approved by: Carol Comeau, Superintendent



ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
2003

*Educating
students
For success in life.*

*First Session
23rd Alaska State Legislature*

GOVERNANCE

**INCREASE LIABILITY FOR DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY BY
MINORS**

The Anchorage School Board urges the Alaska Legislature to allow a school district to recover the full amount of damages to school property from either parent, both parents, or the legal guardian of an unemancipated minor who, as a result of a knowing or intentional act, destroys real or personal property belonging to the school district. Current law, AS 34.50.020, limits such recovery to \$10,000.

Rationale. Vandalism damages a school district's physical plant, has a negative impact on student learning, and demoralizes hard-working staff and students. Every dollar spent on repairing vandalism is a taxpayer dollar a school district cannot invest in textbooks, teachers or technology.

Currently, school districts can recover a maximum of \$10,000 from either parent, both parents, or the legal guardian of an unemancipated who, as the result of a knowing intentional act, destroys real or personal property belonging to a school district. The current law forces taxpayers to bear the cost of vandalism even when a parent's liability insurance is otherwise available to pay the full cost.

REVISE PARENTAL PERMISSION REQUIREMENTS FOR QUESTIONNAIRES AND SURVEYS ADMINISTERED IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Anchorage School Board urges the Alaska Legislature to modify the requirements for parental or legal guardian permission for a student to participate in a questionnaire or survey administered in a public school by enabling local school districts in the State of Alaska to administer anonymous questionnaires and surveys to students with passive parental consent.

Rationale: As a result of the passage in 1999 of HB 70, current statute requires active written parental consent from the parent or legal guardian for a student to participate in a survey. A student, whose parents have no objection to a survey but fail to return the consent form, may not respond to the survey. This has resulted in insufficient data collection, due to the logistics and time required to collect parental consent forms.

For state and federal grants, school districts need school-by-school data to accurately assess the need and success of current efforts. When passive parental consent was used prior to the passage of HB 70, the State was able to collect sufficient data from the youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in both 1995 and 1999. In January of 2001 (the last YRBS cycle), the YRBS high school sample was drawn, the low response rate made this type of detailed data impossible to collect. In Anchorage, for example, the Anchorage School District Safe and Drug Free Schools alone had seven grants asking for such data.

During the fall 1999 Site Review, Federal auditors put the ASD Safe and Drug Free Schools program on notice that it was bordering on non-compliance due to lack of current data. The program lost three grants totaling \$296,915 in lost grant funds. Other grants have not been applied for because the criteria indicated that without contemporary data, the application would not be competitive. Other youth-serving agencies and programs in Anchorage and throughout the state face similar grant rejection prospects.

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE LAW

Current state law requires compulsory school attendance from age 7 to 16. The Anchorage School Board urges the Alaska Legislature to change the mandatory age for school attendance to run from age 6 to 17.

Rationale: State and local performance standards set high expectations in mathematics, reading and writing for children age 5 through 7. Furthermore, research indicates that earlier education is beneficial. In fact, most children in

Alaska are enrolled by the age of 6.

Most 7-year-olds are in first or second grade. With the renewed emphasis on reading, writing, and mathematics skills in the first few years, skills on which the child must by law be assessed, children starting school late are at a big disadvantage. With the enactment of federal No Child Left Behind legislation and state designators, the Legislature will be accountable for paying the cost of remediation to overcome that disadvantage.

Furthermore, lowering the compulsory school age to 6 does not eliminate active home schooling as a viable alternative for parents. The Anchorage School Board supports home schooling as a parent's choice for his or her child's education.

Many children who could pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) if they "hang in there" may drop out based on struggles with the benchmark tests. Increasing the mandatory age to 17 will help ensure that students who have not yet graduated from high school stay in school and have more opportunities to meet performance standards and pass the HSGQE. Regular school attendance is critical for student achievement.

FUNDING

SUSTAINABLE, RELIABLE AND ADEQUATE FUNDING

The Anchorage School Board supports sustainable, reliable and adequate funding for public education. To achieve this goal, the Board supports:

1. Development of a Long Range Fiscal Plan
2. Implementing the Recommendations of the Education A+ Study
3. Inflation Proofing the Education Funding Formula
4. Placing the Learning Opportunity Grants (LOGs) within the Education Funding Formula
5. Full Funding Debt Reimbursement
6. Increasing Funding for Special Needs Students
7. Implementing the Cost Factor Study

Rationale: The State of Alaska provides a wide range of services to a diverse population spread over a logistically complex area. Providing these services currently costs more than the state is receiving in recurring revenue. Achieving sustainable, reliable and adequate funding for public education can be accomplished through the following:

- Long Range Fiscal Plan: A long-term plan for fiscal integrity is needed to provide a stable business climate and to ensure the citizens are provided with necessary services.
- A+ Study: The A+ Study clarifies and makes recommendations on the issue of adequacy and equitability and recommends increased funding to provide for school district needs.
- Inflation Proofing: Alaska must continue to improve its educational system, and reasonably adjust education for annual cost increases. The Anchorage School Board recommends the adoption of a 2% annual increase to more fully keep pace with inflation, and a review and adjustment every 3 years to account for actual inflation. If inflation proofing is valid for the Permanent Fund, then it is valid for funding our children's education.
- Learning Opportunity Grants (LOGs): For the past few years the Alaska Legislature has provided for LOGs outside the education funding formula. Although school districts appreciate the funds, LOGs expire annually and as such are not a reliable source of funding. This lack of reliability impairs budgeting and precludes long-term planning for real educational improvements. Furthermore, the funds are distributed on a straight ADM basis, unadjusted to take into consideration the cost of providing services in different regions of the state. Funding revisions should be made within the formula.
- Debt Reimbursement: Debt reimbursement for capital projects and major maintenance are subject to annual appropriation by the Legislature. The Anchorage School Board thanks the Legislature for fully funding debt reimbursement last year and urges the Legislature to fully fund debt reimbursement this session.
- Increasing Funding for Special Needs: Special needs funding is available to a school district to assist the district in providing special education, gifted and talented education, vocational education and bilingual education services to its students. Currently, a funding factor of 20% is applied to the calculation of a district's state aid to fund special needs students. If the Education Funding Formula is reopened, then this factor

must be reexamined to meet actual district costs caused by increases in the number of students and severity of needs within these areas.

- **Implementing the Cost Factor Study:** The Cost Factor Student, due to the Legislature, November 2002, is a review of the District Cost Factors, often referred to as the Area Cost Differentials, used in calculating a district's adjusted Average Daily Membership (ADM) within the School Funding Formula. A thorough, fair, and legally defensible Cost Factor Study should be implemented to help ensure school and student success.

PERSONNEL

ASSAULT OF SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

The Anchorage School Board urges the Alaska Legislature to revise Alaska criminal code or sentencing guidelines so that an adult convicted of assault on a school employee during or because of the performance of official duties will receive a mandatory minimum term of imprisonment similar to that imposed upon an adult who assaults a uniformed or otherwise clearly identified peace officer, fire fighter, correctional employee, emergency medical technician, paramedic, ambulance attendant or other emergency responder engaged in the performance of official duties at the time of the offence.

Rationale: State statute provides for specific terms of imprisonment for crimes committed against certain public employees, such as peace officers, firefighters, etc., in the performance of their official duties. Our school employees, who each day work with our most precious resource, our children, deserve the same level of respect and protection under the law

STAFF RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The Anchorage School District urges the Alaska Legislature to develop strategies to attract and retain education professionals.

Rationale: Alaska is at a crossroads as its remote location, higher cost of living and non-competitive salaries create a greater teacher and administrator shortage than that being experienced by the rest of the nation. Attracting and retaining quality teachers has become a critical issue facing school districts as they work to improve education in Alaska's public schools. Alaska's colleges and universities supply about 30% of our state's annual demand for new teachers. More than two-thirds of new teachers come from out-of-state. A national

shortage of teachers and administrators forces Alaska to compete with other states for an ever-shrinking pool of applicants. Compounding the issue is the new federal law, No Child Left Behind, which places new qualifications on teachers and paraprofessionals.

Other states are offering teachers signing bonuses, down payment on homes, mortgage subsidies, and student loan repayment plans. As a result, Alaska needs to consider strategies for attracting and retaining qualified educators. These might include:

- Align vesting in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) with vesting in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Currently, it takes 8 years to vest in TRS, but only 5 years to vest in PERS.
- Eliminate Tier II in the TRS system. For example, teachers can retire at any age after 20 years of membership service under either Tier I or Tier II. However, for teachers hired before July 1, 1990, normal retirement age is 55, with early retirement at age 50. For teachers hired after July 1, 1990, normal retirement is age 60, with early retirement at age 55. In addition, under title I retirement, major medical insurance is provided to all benefit recipients and their eligible dependents at no cost. Under Tier II, retirees under 60 with less than 25 years of membership service must pay the full premium cost.
- Broaden the base of majors covered in the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) tuition subsidy program to include disciplines with high shortages. WUE is a program of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Through WUE, students in 15 western states may enroll in many two-year and four-year college programs at a reduced tuition level that is considerably less than nonresident tuition.
- Reimburse tuition or forgive loans for students preparing for high-shortage jobs such as special education.
- Reduce the hiring costs associated with coming to work in Alaska. For example, lower the cost for certification, fingerprinting, etc.

OTHER ISSUES OF NOTE

STATE

ALASKA STUDIES

The Anchorage School Board urges the Alaska Legislature to make an Alaska Studies course a high school graduation requirement. The Board further urges the Legislature to fund the development of the course and the instructional support needed to put an Alaska Studies curriculum in place and to prepare teachers to maximize the effect of the curriculum.

Rationale: Understanding our state's history is important to provide the context of where Alaskans came from and what we as Alaskans value about the diversity and richness of our state. It is fundamental to being an informed and effective participant in state and local affairs. An understanding of how Alaska's economy and form of government developed is crucial to understanding how to deal with today's issues.

Commonwealth North's study in 2000 on the urban/rural divide in Alaska found that if we do nothing to address the critical issues that divide Alaskans, the result will be an increasingly fragmented state, with discouraging economic growth and increasing social and cultural clashes. Commonwealth North put forth a set of recommendations and action items, including the teaching of Alaska history at the high school level, and backed up the recommendation with an active working committee.

In addition, resolutions have also been passed at the AFN Convention calling for Alaska history education. The Alaska Municipal League issued a policy statement in support of civic education for Alaska's students, noting that teaching children how to understand and influence their government is critical to the well being of Alaska.

The Anchorage School Board believes that every student graduating from an Alaska secondary school should have a demonstrable understanding of Alaska's rich and unique history. As a result, the Board approved a one semester (.5 credit) Alaska Studies course this past year as a graduation requirement for high school students at the junior or senior level. This requirement begins with the freshman class that entered high school this fall (Class of 2006). By expanding the requirement statewide, the Legislature will bring educational consistency to this area of statewide civic concern, as well as bring down the per-pupil cost of course development.

FEDERAL

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the most significant change in federal regulation of public education over the past 30 years. It affects public schools in four basic areas: testing and accountability, employment and hiring practices, choices for parents, and miscellaneous policy requirements. As a result, NCLB has huge fiscal implications for Alaskan schools and for Alaska's Department of Education and Early Development.

At the same time, however, Congress proposes funding far below the levels promised in the NCLB legislation. The Anchorage School Board requests the Alaska Legislature to urge Congress to meet its fiscal obligations to this federal mandate and to work with DEED and our schools during the Legislative session to ensure that education funding for FY 2003 – FY 2004 adequately addresses the requirements mandated in NCLB.

IDEA LEGISLATION

The Individual with Disabilities Education ACT (IDEA) is scheduled for reauthorization within the next year. There are two issues within the Act that impact all school districts in Alaska and which the Alaska Legislature may wish to support through resolution:

Full Funding of IDEA

When IDEA became law in 1975, the federal government promised to fund 40 percent of the cost of educating children with disabilities. Yet, Congress has never paid more than 15 percent of the cost, or about one-third of its obligation. School districts and local taxpayers make up the difference.

The Anchorage School Board believes this is an under-funded mandate and that Congress needs to live up to its original commitment to fund special education.

Revise Current IDEA Student Discipline Policy

While recognizing the need to protect the rights of students with disabilities, the Anchorage School Board supports revising IDEA to eliminate mandatory discipline rules for students with disabilities that are different from those for non-disabled students.

Currently, students with disabilities who are suspended or expelled retain the right to a free and appropriate education in an alternative setting. Non-disabled students do not have this right.