

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

MEMORANDUM

November 18, 2002

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: CURRICULUM AUDIT RESPONSE

PERTINENT FACTS:

The curriculum management audit conducted by Phi Delta Kappa International was received by the Anchorage School Board on September 9, 2002. The audit findings were extensive both in scope and in quantity. The curriculum audit was widely circulated, was placed on the District's web site, and was reviewed internally by the instructional division, the curriculum, assessment, and staff development departments, human resources, budget, instructional technology, and the superintendent. Reviews of the audit recommendations were also requested of the Anchorage Education Association, the Anchorage Principals' Association, Anchorage Council of Education, Totem, and the M.E.C.C. Public input was received through e-mails, the District's suggestion box, four public meetings, and direct comments to the Superintendent. Input on the audit is an ongoing process that is expected to continue.

**Response to the Audit**

The administration reviewed all responses to the audit and categorized acceptance of the audit recommendations under one key, essential recommendation. The key concern addressed in the audit is the achievement gap between Caucasian and minority children. The administration is committed to ensuring the success of all children, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, mobility or any other characteristic. Any new initiatives or changes to existing programs will focus on providing opportunities to improve achievement for all students and on closing the achievement gap that currently exists. This memo focuses on the recommendations the administration considers the highest priority.

The administration recognizes the essential role teachers, principals and other school staff play in the academic development of students. School staff do an excellent job of teaching over 50,000 diverse Anchorage School District students and this is reflected in the District's above average scores on norm-referenced tests and college entrance exams. We believe the entire organization exists to

support learning in the classroom. We are committed to using the audit recommendations to focus District resources on providing support and service to principals, classroom teachers and other school staff. With focused efforts and support from all departments, we are confident schools will be successful and every child will achieve.

### **Key Recommendation**

The administration accepts and supports the curriculum audit's sub-recommendation 1.1: "Develop a six-year education plan which corresponds to the state and city's plans, and which becomes the basis for connecting all central functions to the goals and objectives of the school system. Such a plan will provide the focus and synergy now absent within the upper tiers of the Anchorage School District by preparing district personnel to improve the achievement of all students, with special emphasis on erasing the current achievement gaps of minority children. Link assessment data to the creation of site-level objectives, planning, staff development, budget priorities, and staffing and administrative evaluation" (p. 214). This is the primary recommendation of the curriculum audit, and the one that serves as the key to the other recommendations.

We believe the School District should engage in a public process to develop a six-year plan in alignment with School Board policies and procedures. This could be facilitated by retaining a planning consultant to work with both its internal and external audiences to develop a comprehensive six-year plan focused on closing the achievement gap and improving the academic achievement of all students.

It is expected the development of a six-year plan will take a significant amount of staff and community time. A preliminary plan will be presented to the Anchorage School Board for approval in August 2003. The six-year plan will facilitate the implementation of critical audit recommendations.

### **Board Policy Revision/Development**

Throughout the curriculum audit, references are made to the revision and/or creation of new School Board policies to facilitate the implementation of the curriculum audit recommendations. The administration believes the School Board Policy Subcommittee should review all School Board polices that are relevant to the curriculum audit and develop new polices as needed.

### **Curriculum Department**

The District recognizes the essential role the curriculum department's coordinators, supervisors and staff play in the achievement of all students and in closing the achievement gap. The administration accepts and supports many of the audit recommendations related to the curriculum department. Many of the

recommendations in the audit will require additional resources for the curriculum department. The audit indicated that the curriculum department should be redesigned to provide focused, integrated support aligned with state content and performance standards. (p. 220). Given the current staffing levels, the administration can not support implementation of several of the curriculum audit recommendations in terms of reassigning specific programs to the curriculum and evaluation department. The Superintendent is committed to analyzing the structure of the curriculum department with the possibility of reorganizing it to meet the intent of the audit recommendations. It is understood that the redesign of the curriculum department might necessitate some additional staff (p.221). It is difficult for the curriculum department staff to serve the needs of teachers and administrators in the 89 schools and programs in the District. The six-year plan would provide more specific direction on the redesign of the curriculum department.

The administration supports the recommendation that the curriculum department develop a comprehensive set of curriculum guides linked to state and local assessments for all content areas K-12, and provide inservice to teachers in the use of the guides to direct teaching in the classroom (p. 227). These guides will include consistent model lessons and pacing guides to assist teachers in implementing the curriculum. The current development of the Alaska Studies course curriculum could serve as a template for designing future curriculum guides. The Superintendent concurs that, "A school district should communicate clearly to its staff and students what its expectations are in terms of concepts, knowledge, and skills students are to master in each grade level or course" (p. 230).

The audit also recommended that the curriculum department develop a consistent programmatic evaluation in terms of the delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of curriculum for all content areas K-12. (p. 227). It is critical that all key programs are regularly evaluated by the assessment department. The Superintendent is reviewing the most effective placement of that department.

The administration supports the recommendation that the curriculum department establish a curriculum design/delivery advisory committee as indicated in the audit (p. 223). With input from the advisory committee, the curriculum department will develop a comprehensive curriculum management plan tied to the goals of the six-year plan (p. 228). The committee will also assist in developing a curriculum review cycle to focus on two or three content areas each year. All reviews will encompass K-12 (p. 223).

### **Assessment Department**

A key component of closing the achievement gap and increasing success for all students is providing disaggregated data to teachers, principals, and program staff. Teachers and other instructional leaders need to have essential tools such as data about their students to ensure success. The assessment department plays a critical role in delivering the disaggregated data.

The administration supports the recommendation that the assessment department develop procedures to allow for the use of student assessment data throughout the District in all schools. This is in alignment with recommendation A.14 which states, "Establish an assessment team that creates usable and understandable data indices for staff and public consumption in order to determine progress made towards district goals and objectives" (p. 216). Sub-recommendation 3.2 further states, "Develop an assessment plan which is linked to the district's educational plan and which provides policy makers, administrators, and teachers with data connected to district and site-level strategies to improve achievement for all students" (p. 229).

The assessment department needs to work with curriculum and the instructional division to develop measures over a three-year period beginning with reading, math, and writing. These assessments will be aligned with major objectives and aligned with required testing. Assessment results will be formatted for use in modifying instruction (p. 231).

The assessment department must assist schools in becoming data driven in decision making by providing disaggregated data to teachers, principals, staff, and the public. To accomplish this mission, the assessment department will require additional staff.

### **Staff Development**

The staff development department is an important key to long-term change in instructional practices. The staff development department will help guide the implementation of the new curriculum guides and the assessment tools by providing extensive training to teachers, principals, and staff.

In August 2002, the administration hired a new director of staff development who reports to the executive director of curriculum and assessment and evaluation (p. 236). The administration supports the creation of a "... comprehensive, long-range staff development plan" by the director of staff development, as stipulated in recommendation A.3.17 (p. 237). This plan will align with the District's goals, the six-year plan, the state's Quality Schools Initiative, and the requirements mandated in the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind.

The director of staff development currently leads a paraprofessional training committee to comply with the requirements in No Child Left Behind. This committee could serve as a model for the staff development coordinating committee indicated in the audit (p. 237).

The staff development department utilizes an evaluation model to provide a common assessment of all trainings. Additionally, there will be a common template to record all system-wide staff development as indicated in the audit recommendation (p. 238).

### **Instructional Division**

The instructional division plays a critical role in ensuring student success and in closing the achievement gap. Executive directors, supervisors, principals, teachers, and staff will implement new curriculum guides, modify instructional strategies as needed, and use data to drive decision-making. The superintendent and the assistant superintendent for instruction will “Create and provide oversight for a central monitoring structure that will provide building administrators, program administrators, and the School Board with timely reports on eradicating inequalities and inequities” (p. 216). Currently the assistant superintendent for instruction convenes monthly committee meetings on the District’s implementation of No Child Left Behind. A similar approach will be used to monitor the progress in meeting the goals of the six-year plan.

The assistant superintendent of instruction, in conjunction with the executive directors, will work with the building principals and teachers to implement the six-year plan and improve student achievement for all students.

### **Budget**

The administration supports transitioning to a budget development process based on data driven evaluations of programs in alignment with audit sub-recommendation 1.2. This recommendation states, “Revise the current budgeting development process to incorporate formal procedures that include a clinical needs assessment based on assessment data, cost benefit analyses, and district-wide curriculum priorities” (p. 216). This will take several years to fully implement, as the development of program assessments is a critical part of this process (p. 217). The budget will become connected to the District’s six-year educational plan (p. 214).

### **Instructional Technology**

The instructional technology department provides essential tools for the implementation of the audit recommendations. The ability of teachers, principals and staff to access needed data depends on the availability of sufficient hardware, software, and technology support. Currently, the

instructional technology department is working with Davidson Services to develop a Strategic Information Technology Plan. This plan will help the instructional technology department address audit recommendations (p. 238). The new plan will include specific criteria on which to measure its success. The new plan would also focus on enhancing instruction and improving student achievement (p. 238). The chief information officer is working collaboratively with the assessment supervisor to respond to the demand for data in all instructional areas.

### **Human Resources**

The audit makes several recommendations in terms of revising the teacher, coordinator, and principal evaluation format (p.225). Sub-recommendation: 2.3 states, "Revise the teacher, coordinator, and administrator evaluation instrument to provide feedback for professional growth which promotes student achievement" (p. 225). The current evaluation tools are in alignment with the state standards for teachers, principals, and central services administrators, and these were approved by the School Board. The human resources department, as it meets with the various bargaining groups, will discuss the implications of the audit in terms of job descriptions and evaluation procedures.

CC/JC

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