

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #174 (2002-2003)

February 10, 2003

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: PROGRESS REPORT ON 2002-2003 GOALS

PERTINENT FACTS:

The School Board and Administration had a very productive work session on December 16, 2002, prior to formal School Board action on the Mission Statement and Goals for the 2002-2003 school year on January 13, 2003. At the January 13 meeting, the Board directed the Superintendent to bring back a report on how the Administration would address these new goals in several key areas. This summary attempts to meet that request.

- 1. Develop a preliminary six-year instructional plan to address the recommendations in the curriculum audit, particularly the achievement gap that exists throughout the District.**

This critical issue is our first priority. A community planning meeting will be held on Saturday, February 8, 2003, at Steller Secondary School to begin this process. This community/staff/student meeting will be facilitated by Dennis McMillian from the United Way and Foraker Group. Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Jan Christensen, and Director of Public Relations, Michelle Egan, have worked closely with the Superintendent, the Instructional Division staff, and Mr. McMillian to plan this day long activity. The media has been invited to attend.

The day-long activities will begin with a welcome and an overview of the purpose of the day by the Superintendent, and then a discussion of the key findings in the Curriculum Audit by the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. Following that, Mr. McMillian will lead a brainstorming session of the "big issues" for all of the participants; following that, the participants will be in small groups for discussion and planning. The goal for the day is for this group to develop the beginnings of a six year

instructional plan for the Anchorage School District. At the end of the day, each group will summarize and prioritize their ideas and then the information will be given to the Administration to develop specific action plans for year one and beyond.

The Administration will then review all of the planning committee work, along with the curriculum audit, the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Quality Schools Initiative, and other performance and demographic data, and develop a specific six year action plan with timelines and project assignments. This draft document will be reviewed internally and externally with as many of the February 8 meeting participants as possible prior to bringing the six year instructional plan to the School Board for adoption later in the year.

It is anticipated that the six year plan will need to be updated annually based on changes to federal and state law, student performance data, demographic issues, school board goals, and budgetary constraints.

2. Continue the alignment of the K-12 math curriculum to State and District performance standards within two years.

The K-12 math curriculum is aligned to State and District standards, but there continues to be major concerns from teachers and parents and some administrators about how the math program is being implemented at all levels.

The Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and the Executive Directors for the various instructional divisions have met with the Curriculum and Assessment department staff, including the math coordinator and the math teacher experts, to discuss how to best address this issue. This effort began in the fall of the 2002-2003 school year. Math achievement and our program was highlighted during the town meetings held in October and November by the Superintendent; many parents and teachers brought up concerns with the elementary Everyday Math program implementation and the concern about math achievement in the middle schools, and at the high school level.

It is obvious that the math curriculum is aligned, but the concerns needing to be addressed focus on developing pacing guides and model lessons to ensure that the aligned and tested curriculum is being taught each year, that appropriate and on-going training is addressed, and that adequate time is available for the math curriculum to be taught during the school year. Many elementary and middle schools are focusing on math and

science family night activities this year; these are advertised in many school newsletters and have been well-attended. We do believe that parental support and involvement is a critical factor in math achievement.

The math curriculum staff is reviewing the parental involvement information for the elementary Everyday Math curriculum this year; it must be modified and a plan developed to continue the distribution of this important information as new parents come into the system. The largest complaint received from parents about the math program is that parents do not understand how to support and assist their children, especially those struggling with their math, as the approach is very different than the parents are used to from their own schooling. In addition, our materials are not parent-friendly for the many parents who do not speak English well, thus another barrier to parent involvement is present. Strategies to address this issue will be incorporated into the six year instructional plan.

3. Strengthen the effective delivery of instructional services to students using all financial resources available.

The 2002-2003 budget focuses directly on student achievement, particularly at the school level and through the Instructional Division. This emphasis has continued in the preliminary budget now before the School Board for the 2003-2004 school year.

The legislature doubled the Learning Opportunity Grant funds and added almost \$2 million to the state funding last year. The Instructional Division has used this increased funding for school programs focusing on those students who have not been successful in attaining proficiency on the state-mandated Benchmark and Norm-Referenced tests. Each school has been required to develop a plan to increase student achievement for each student in each subgroup not proficient. Each division has focused on what will work best for their groups of students. Instructional technology is being used increasingly to individualize these learning plans for students. Before and after school opportunities have increased substantially, as has the number of remedial reading and math classes and summer school opportunities. Participation has increased each year as more students and parents realize how important it is to become proficient in order to earn a high school diploma by passing the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam and completing the required credits for graduation.

The Administration is committed to narrowing the achievement gap for all students each year, but at the same time challenging all students,

including those proficient and advanced, to reach their highest potential. Plans for this will be included in the development of the six year instructional plan.

The Instructional Division and the Curriculum and Evaluation department will develop a schedule for review of current instructional programs and textbook adoptions as part of the six year plan. The audit, and the School Board, have made it clear that we need to determine which instructional programs, materials, and instructional strategies are most effective in increasing student achievement and then replicate them where possible. Programs need to be reviewed regularly and those deemed successful continued, and those which do not meet a standard, discarded or modified in order to be more effective in increasing student achievement and success in school.

4. Attempt to limit the impact of budget constraints on student achievement.

The Administration has scrutinized every department's budget during this most recent budget process in order to ascertain which budgets needed to be increased and/or maintained at current levels in order not to jeopardize student achievement. It is clear that additional resources are essential for the ASD to narrow the achievement gap, to make "adequate yearly progress" as required by No Child Left Behind and the Quality School Initiatives and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Academic achievement is tied to a student being healthy and focused on learning in a safe environment. It is essential that our staff receive timely and on-going training in order to meet the learning needs and styles of all of their students. Teachers and support staff need collaboration and planning time on a regular basis; this will have to be addressed through the budget process. The needs of the academic program must be balanced with other needs: the critical impact of the extracurricular activities program on student success, the need for safe schools and strong behavior expectations, the need for adequate support staff so the schools can focus on teaching and learning, and the requirements for updated, well-maintained, and new facilities with enhanced technology.

Student achievement is our primary mission, but at the same time, it is essential that our large district have adequate support departments in order for the schools to meet this primary mission. The ASD has cut-back too severely on the support side, thus hampering progress in many areas.

The Board's and community's support for increasing the support staff during the last two budget cycles is making a difference and improving service to our schools and to the public; we still have much to do to provide the high level of "customer service" demanded by our publics and to remain competitive in our salaries and benefits in order to attract and retain our highly competent staff.

5. Develop a master schedule of programs, methods, and materials, for regular review, utilizing assessment data.

The Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and the Instructional Team will identify the key programs, and instructional materials for review on a regular basis. It is anticipated that formal and informal assessment data and surveys will be used to identify the priorities. In addition, input from the community planning meeting on February 8, 2003 will be incorporated into their discussions. A six year review cycle, much like that used by the Audit Subcommittee, will be developed and incorporated into the six year instructional plan. Resources needed will be identified to meet these requirements.

6. Increase parental and community awareness in understanding the critical role families and the community play in the academic success of students and facilitate their involvement in the active support of higher student achievement.

This is an essential goal for all staff, particularly in the Superintendent's Office and the Instructional Division. Our public relations staff and the Public Affairs office work closely with us and the media to be sure that we are communicating effectively the absolute importance of parents and families as partners in student success.

The Administration has long supported the strong School Business Partnership Program as a critical component in bringing the business community into our schools as role models, partners in events, and for ongoing support of their partner schools. The Anchorage Chamber of Commerce's long-standing support is valuable and essential to this success. The program was recently recognized as the Alaska state winner of the American Association of School Administration's Civic Star Award. Alaska will be competing along with all of the other states for the national award at the end of February.

Outreach to our very diverse parent community is critical and the Administration is developing a program to go out into the various racial

and cultural and religious communities in our district to listen to their issues and concerns, and to ask for their assistance as partners in the education of their children. We have begun translating our major documents into the five most prevalent languages spoken in the district: Spanish, Tagalog, Korean, Samoan, and Hmong.

Then Anchorage Council of PTAs, the MECC, the High School and Middle School Parent Advisory Committees, the Special Education Advisory Committee, the Bilingual and Native Advisory Committees all are focused on increasing parental and family involvement in education. Everyone recognizes that it is the most important factor in student achievement, but we also recognize that a variety of strategies must be employed in this diverse community in order to involve the most parents and families possible.

7. **Continue to create and strengthen positive community relations and understanding of issues critical to the Anchorage School District by establishing coalitions and advisory committees with parents, business leaders and political leaders at all levels.**

The Administration at many levels has made it a priority to participate on many community boards, committees, and task forces in an attempt to build productive relationships in the community. In addition, we are urging our staff to participate in their community councils, church groups, and other community venues to further educate the community about the strengths of the Anchorage School District.

The Superintendent has been appointed and/or elected to various Boards and committees and makes it a point to participate in numerous community events in order to foster positive relationships in the community and to reinforce the idea that we want to be seen as important contributing members of this community, and in the State. Assistant Superintendent for Support Services, Mr. Vakalis, currently serves as the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and serves on many state and local boards, committees, and task forces. Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Ms. Christensen, also serves on various boards and task forces in her important liaison role, as do many of her Executive Directors.

In addition to the above, the School Board and the Administration have developed an excellent working relationship with Mayor Wuerch, the Assembly, the Department of Education and Early Development Commissioner and staff, and legislators and other public officials. We

have taken a strong advocacy position of advocating for education for all students in the State as well as in the community and are expecting our elected officials to support public education. Dr. Wiget, Executive Director for Public Affairs and our legislative liaison, has established an excellent working relationship with the Council of Great City Schools at the national level, and with our newly elected legislators. Ms. Ossiander is currently President of the AASB, and Mr. Steele serves on the AASB Board of Directors; they are well connected to both the State and National network of advocates for public education. The School Board and the Superintendent are active in advocating for Anchorage with our legislators through the Legislative Subcommittee and while in Juneau and this will continue this year. Other key administrators serve on appointed and elected committees which serve to further this goal.

We will be establishing more coalitions and/or committees over time as a result of developing the six year plan in our ongoing efforts to encourage active participation from this broad and diverse community and school district.

8. Continue to refine our emergency preparedness in order to keep our schools and facilities safe and barrier free, and our students and staff free from disruptions to the teaching and learning environment.

This is an area we are moving forward on various fronts in a very positive, proactive manner. The Administration is proposing a new position, the Director for Security and Emergency Preparedness in the 2003-2004 budget. It is felt that there needs to be an office established to be the contact for all aspects of emergency preparedness in these times; this was recommended by the consultants who did our Emergency Preparedness Audit. The Director will interact with many district and other local and state agencies from Homeland Security, the Municipality's Emergency Preparedness Center, the Anchorage Police and Fire Departments, in order to insure that our students and staff are in safe facilities and receive current and appropriate training. In addition, we are retrofitting our interior lock systems as we renovate our schools in order to give teachers and staff the ability to lockdown their classroom from the inside in the case of a major incident where this action would be necessary.

Our staff has been trained to deal with violent incidents and crises by the Anchorage Police Department in a comprehensive and consistent manner. The training has been well-received by certificated and support staff each time it has been given. Updates and repeat training will be given as needed/requested. Defibrillators have been purchased for our high

schools and administrative support departments; we are pursuing grant funds for additional equipment for our middle schools and elementary schools. The Risk Management Department has developed an on-going safety program with additional training for our employees in order to have fewer Workers' Comp claims and to maintain safe working conditions. Our Maintenance Department works closely with our Operations Department to keep our schools clean and well-maintained for our students and staff.

Our comprehensive construction program has been well-received by the community; the community has been very supportive of our needs in renovating and/or replacing our aging facilities as well as the building of new facilities to house our increasing student population. These school plans are reviewed for safety and access for all students, staff, and community members who use our schools frequently. Our Capital Requests Advisory Committee is proving to be an engaged and supportive group; they are helping us assess our needs in developing our bond packages and our CIP. Our Six Year CIP is our guideline for future renovations and accommodations and is developed with a very public process.

These issues and our implementation of them will change and develop as we proceed to address them, and as a result of the community planning process.

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Prepared/Approved by: Carol Comeau, Superintendent