

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #116 (2003-2004)

November 10, 2003

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES UPDATE

PERTINENT FACTS:

The main goals of Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) are to personalize education for all students, increase educational opportunities and academic achievement for all students, and to create a safe and welcoming environment at school. Our high schools are large, and it is too easy for students to remain anonymous or get lost in the crowd. By dividing the large school into smaller parts (houses), we will be able to better serve all students. We want to retain the advantages of being large schools, while gaining some of the benefits that smaller schools have.

The major project for first semester is the November 11th inservice. Nationally acclaimed speaker, Carl Boyd, is scheduled to speak about the importance of teaching all students. His message to all 750 high school teachers is that "no one rises to low expectations." The remainder of the day will be spent with presentations from teachers at each of the high schools. Each school is responsible for 10 different presentations. Each presentation will highlight some of the best programs or initiatives at their school. Teachers will have the opportunity to select and attend four presentations out of the 60 total. The idea behind this is to share success stories among all high school teachers so they don't have to constantly reinvent the wheel. It will also show that some of the same ideas are being implemented across the District. Teachers will discover who is doing similar projects in other schools, fostering collegiality and networking between schools.

The professional development conference in March 2004 is the main project for second semester. The SLC grant has partnered with National School Conference Institute and Learning 24/7 to put on a conference March 18-20, 2004, at the Egan Center. The conference is being publicized nationally, but focuses on the needs

of the six Anchorage high schools. The main focus of the conference is on better personalizing education for all students. The conference fees for all high school teachers at the six comprehensive high schools served by the grant are being paid through the grant. The keynote speakers are all nationally known speakers, as are most of the breakout session speakers.

Each of the six high schools continues with the implementation of the planning that has gone on for the past three years. Key characteristics of smaller learning communities in which each high school is engaged are:

- Teaming: Each school is looking at adding or expanding teaming efforts within their school. Most include language arts and social studies at the ninth and tenth grade level. Some include other subjects. The main idea is to help make the curriculum more relevant to students.
- Outreach: There are a variety of outreach activities being pursued at each school to better inform faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members. These activities include student retreats, PTSA meetings, parent group meetings, faculty meetings, student forums, lunch discussions with students, meetings with eighth grade students and student government discussions.
- Coordination with curriculum specialists: Schools are trying to combine efforts to better meet the intent of No Child Left Behind, the Alaska State Standards, the Board Goals, and the High School Division goals.

CC/JC/MH/PP

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