

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #234 (2003-2004)

April 12, 2004

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES UPDATE

PERTINENT FACTS:

The main goals of the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program are to personalize education for all students, to 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 are 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 Smaller Learning Community Grant sponsored a Districtwide Inservice Day on November 11, 2003. All ASD high school teachers, counselors, and administrators had the opportunity to attend multiple presentations and workshops at West High School. Teachers from each high school facilitated presentations including topics related to the 40 Assets, literacy, team teaching, technology, high school advisories, and many others. This Districtwide inservice was a tremendous success and received widespread positive review. ASD high school educators were able to share success stories and best practices from each of the large area high schools and gain a better understanding of the SLC initiatives from colleagues across the District.

The Smaller Learning Community Grant successfully co-sponsored a National Education Conference in cooperation with the National School Conference Institute and Learning 24/7 in March of 2004 at the Egan Center in Anchorage. Over 300 high school teachers, counselors, and administrators attended this unprecedented professional development opportunity. The conference theme was "Personalizing Education for High School Students." A particular highlight of the conference was Dr. Willard Daggett's opening session, which focused on "Making good schools great," and personalizing high school curriculum and instruction for education in the 21st Century. Conference sessions reviewed several major themes: maintaining high standards for all

students, literacy across the curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, innovative teaching ideas and strategies, educational leadership, and recognizing the academic value of increasing both social and emotional intelligence in teenagers. In addition to national guest speakers, local experts were utilized during the conference. The Smaller Learning Community Grant has partnered with Safe & Drug Free Schools to provide extensive training opportunities for teachers regarding the 40 Assets model. ASD Safe & Drug Free Schools provided training sessions at the conference, as well as the ASD NCLB Coordinator, Rhonda Gardner.

The SLC grant committee will be meeting with conference organizers to review evaluations and additional training opportunities that the SLC grant may afford for the coming school year.

The current SLC project is to host representatives from the Northwest Regional Education Lab during the week of April 5, 2004. Representatives will be visiting several high school sites in order to review grant goals and implementation of those goals. A report will be compiled and submitted to the District upon completion of the site review.

Each of the six high schools continues to address the main goal of personalizing education and restructuring our large high schools into smaller learning communities. Each school has been successful in promoting programs relevant to their own students' needs. Teaming of history and language arts courses at the ninth and tenth grade level is expanding. Advisory programs are being offered at several of the schools, and others are planning to implement advisories. West High School has been approved for the International Baccalaureate Program and is moving forward with implementation during the 2004-2005 school year.

Staff development continues to be a significant focus of the ASD SLC grant. The Smaller Learning Community Grant committee appreciates the Anchorage School Board support of this grant, as well as the support for necessary training time for the November Inservice and the National Conference in March.

CC/JC/MH/NB

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