

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #318 (2003-2004)

June 28, 2004

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW/END OF THE YEAR REPORT FOR FY 2003-2004  
HIGHLAND TECH HIGH CHARTER SCHOOL

PERTINENT FACTS:

School Board Policy 333.7 on Charter Schools requires an Annual Review of each Charter School. To be specific, the Policy states:

“Once approved by both the local and State Boards of Education, the charter school will be subject to an annual review of its operations and finances by the School Board. Annually, the charter school will submit a written report and make a presentation to the School Board and the public no later than June 30 of each school year. This report will include information on the attainment of student performance expectations, recommendations for remediation of poor student performance, school goal attainment, trends in student/staff enrollment and mobility, a list of working capital assets, an end of year preliminary financial statement showing revenues and expenditures, minutes of the meetings of the governing bodies of the charter school, descriptions of charter school activities, copies of any leases signed by the charter school, current bylaws of the Academic Policy Committee, notification of establishment of non-profit 501 (c) (3) status, list of officers in any PTA/PTO or other parent organization, any changes in facility location, any major changes planned for the following school year, and other information of interest to the local School Board. A list of the Academic Policy Committee for the past and coming school years, including officers and staff members by position, will be included.

If there is evidence of a breach of contract, then the School Board, through the Superintendent or designee, shall have a right to investigate this breach of contract and meet with the charter school to discuss possible remedies and/or possible termination of the contract.”

Representatives from Highland Tech High (HTH) Charter School will be available to present their Annual Report to the School Board. Their report is

presented to the School Board as Attachment A. The Administration will also present remarks at the appropriate time.

Highland Tech High Charter School (HTH) has had an extremely interesting first year of operation. The structure of the school is new to the Anchorage School District. The principal and founder of HTH, CJ Stiegele, has had previous experience in the ASD as the founding principal of another charter school, Aquarian Charter School. Most recently, she worked with several Bush districts that have used the standards-based approach to student assessment and placement, instead of the Carnegie Unit. This is the core of HTH's approach to instruction, assessment and advancement. Connie Bensler, the Anchorage School District Charter School Liaison, has worked closely with the administration and Academic Policy Committee of this school. Ms. Bensler attended APC monthly meetings and provided assistance to these groups in working within the confines of the Anchorage School District and Charter School rules and regulations.

For many students, HTH has provided a challenging year and a new way to approach their education. The learning curve for parents has been even greater than that for students since many still want to have letter grades as indicators of advancement for the students. As the year progressed, HTH adjusted some of the ways students were assessed with a combination of progress reports, grades and standards being completed. As the school grows and maintains a cadre of students and families familiar with this approach, it will become less confusing for families to understand how this model works. Already, there is enthusiasm for this approach on the part of many returning students and families.

The staff at HTH has had to work tremendously long hours to create from the start a model unfamiliar to many of them. Staff burnout has been somewhat of a problem, especially among those teachers who hadn't worked in this model before. Maintaining a working environment that allowed teachers to accomplish all that was asked of them and still keep morale high was a challenge for Ms. Stiegele and her staff. She has many fine professional staff members who have played key roles in this effort. However, there does seem to be a disproportionate number of non-instructional staff at HTH. Several staff members have expressed serious concerns about the working environment at the school.

Student turnover has been somewhat of a problem this past year and will play a role in limiting some of the plans for next year. Many students joined HTH because they wanted a new beginning without understanding what this new beginning was all about. Special needs students made up around 12 percent of the student body, which required readjusted staff to meet their needs. While

most of these students were successful in this model, a few provided major challenges that were a drain on the staff at HTH. Through some reorganization, there will be a different configuration of the student day for all students next year, providing more structure for middle school students and more division between them and high school students. A number of additional offerings in the curriculum should also appeal to students. Ms. Stiegele has an aggressive recruitment plan for August. She hopes to increase her enrollment substantially this fall during the August lotteries. Without additional students, it will be extremely hard to make her budget work.

The school acquired a rather large debt in order to get the current facility refurbished to meet the requirements of a school that makes the use of advanced technology an integral part of everyday life. This debt continues to grow and affects the school's ability to fund several needed budgetary items including some staff positions. The administration is making an effort to refinance a large note to reduce the note's interest rate. If they are successful, it will ease their financial burden somewhat. They still are faced with a heavy lease payment each month that has to come out of their operating budget. Fortunately, the school continues to receive grant monies from a number of different sources that offset some of the expenses allowed in these grants.

There is an excitement that greets you when you visit HTH that is refreshing and contagious. The students are dressed in business casual, which can be widely interpreted, but continues to make a difference in the students' behavior. There are many projects in the making; community outings and contacts, school business partnerships are creating opportunities for students to practice their knowledge in the real world, and "techies" everywhere. There are no blinking VCR clocks at this school! These students are pushing the limits of what we can offer students today in the world of educational technology. We sincerely hope this school is around for many years to come.

CC/JC/CB

Attachments

Prepared by: Connie Bensler, Charter School Liaison

Approved by: Jan Christensen, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction