

September 2002

**CURRICULUM AUDIT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT PROCESS

In the spring of 2002, the Anchorage School Board commissioned Phi Delta Kappa International to conduct a curriculum audit for the Anchorage School District. A curriculum audit examines the extent to which there is alignment between the delivery of instruction and standards, benchmarks, curriculum, instructional materials and student performance measures. An audit reveals the extent to which staff and officials have developed and implemented a sound, valid, and operational system of curriculum management. Such a system enables the district to make maximum use of its human and financial resources in the education of students. **The goal of the study is not to commend the district for its successes, but to make recommendations on how to improve instruction and student academic performance.**

The Board and administration requested that auditors respond to the following questions:

Expectations: To what extent are there clear expectations for students and teachers? To what extent do instructional practices align with district goals and expectations? To what extent do daily practices reflect approved course content, adopted standards, and adopted instructional materials?

Productivity: To what extent do the design and operation of the school district and its individual parts support productivity and efficiency? To what extent do processes support stated goals?

Standards: To what extent is there alignment between Alaska content standards, student performance standards, local curriculum frameworks and results shown through the Alaska student assessment system?

Assessment: To what extent and how effectively is assessment used to guide curricular and instructional decision making?

The Board and administration also asked the auditors to examine how well the District serves sub-populations including gender groups, racial-ethnic groups, bilingual populations, special education students, gifted students, and socio-economic groupings.

In order to assess a district's systems, auditors review three data sources: documents, interviews and site visits. Auditors evaluate these areas to determine if there is a relationship between the written curriculum, the material being taught and the skills being tested.

Auditors employ five standards that reflect an ideal management system. They describe a system that uses its human and financial resources for the greatest benefit of its students. The audit describes each standard and the district's existing state with respect to the standard. It also recommends measures the district can take to achieve the standard.

This executive summary outlines each standard and the most significant recommendations for reaching each standard. The full audit report describes the standards, findings and recommendations in more detail.

AUDIT STANDARDS AND MAJOR FINDINGS:

STANDARD 1: A school system is able to demonstrate its control of resources, programs and personnel. A school district meeting this standard has a clear set of policies with regard to management and curriculum and has clearly defined and measurable goals.

- Finding 1.1 Board policies and administrative procedures are inadequate to promote system-wide quality control.
- Finding 1.2 No strategic plan or long-range plan exists to guide District administrative decisions that will connect and focus organizational activities and tasks.
- Finding 1.3 The tables of organization for the District and the Curriculum and Evaluation Department do not meet audit criteria for the sound general management of the school district; many job descriptions are under revision or do not match the tables of organization. The role of coordinator is not defined by a recent board-approved job description.
- Finding 1.4 Staff development is fragmented, unfocused on system priorities, competitive of teacher time, and not provided for all staff. It lacks the coherence and long-range direction necessary to support instructional practices designed to improve student achievement.

Finding 1.5 Formal teacher and administrative appraisals are aligned with the state standards, but ineffective in providing constructive feedback to promote professional growth and consistent quality instruction within and across the District's schools.

STANDARD 2: A school system has established clear and valid objectives for students.

A district meeting this audit standard has clear, valid and measurable student standards for learning that are set into a workable framework for their attainment.

Finding 2.1 The District lacks a comprehensive curriculum management plan to establish processes, procedures, and timelines for curriculum review, development, and implementation.

Finding 2.2 Curriculum guides are adequate in scope to guide elementary teachers, but are not adequate for secondary schools.

Finding 2.3 Curriculum guides are inadequate in design quality to guide teaching effectively and inadequate to promote deep alignment. While connected to the Alaska Content Standards, there is insufficient specificity to ensure consistently high achievement for all students.

Finding 2.4 The Instructional Technology Plan does not meet all audit criteria and is inadequate to guide effective implementation and integration of technology in the educational program.

STANDARD 3: A school system demonstrates internal connectivity and rational equity in its program development and implementation. A district meeting this standard can show how its program has been created as the result of a systematic identification of its deficiencies. Such a district has equity in its curriculum/course access and directs its resources toward the areas of greatest need. The curriculum is monitored and supported by professional development.

Finding 3.1 Inequalities exist among schools in program participation and administrative practices for students of color.

Finding 3.2 There are inequalities in educational programs, facilities, and access to technology within the school system.

Finding 3.3 If classroom snapshot data are typical of day-to-day instructional practices, they are not consistently congruent with District goals, nor is there sufficient variation to be successful with all students.

STANDARD 4: The district uses results from system-designed or adopted assessments to adjust, improve, or terminate ineffective practices or programs. A district meeting this audit standard has a comprehensive system of assessment used extensively at the site-level to review and improve programs. Assessment is also used to formulate short and long-term goals for each site and for the district as a whole.

Finding 4.1 Anchorage School District test scores are above state averages, however, scores have been nearly flat for five years. The scope of assessment is not adequate. An analysis of achievement gaps between majority/minority students shows some progress, but other areas remain unchanged or worsening. Ratios of “years to parity” show that at the current rate, some gaps will take from one to 26 years to be closed, and some indicate that there is little hope for closure.

Finding 4.2 While test and other demographic data have been compiled in a comprehensive document, the “bridges” to data use are neither systematic nor systemic to inform decisions related to curriculum development, staff development, budget development, and site-level instructional decisions to improve student achievement.

Finding 4.3 There is inconsistent use of test and other data within the schools to improve student achievement growth. While some principals are aggressive and “data-focused,” others lack either interest and/or skill in using data to construct plans or pursue strategies that are likely to yield improved student achievement. Data disaggregation does not include ethnicity at the site-level.

Finding 4.4 There has been little systematic program evaluation by District personnel; Board members indicate frustration with the lack of data regarding program effectiveness, especially around budget development.

Finding 4.5 There is no assessment plan in place for the design or acquisition of testing instruments, the evaluation of curricular areas that are not state-required, or for

the stipulation of goals and objectives to guide the assessment process (and which fulfill a locally-adopted board policy).

STANDARD 5: A school system has improved productivity. A system meeting this standard demonstrates improved pupil performance, even in the face of diminishing revenues.

- Finding 5.1 The District's independent auditors' analysis of past financial trends reveals fiduciary soundness. However, if a projected trend of revenues and expenditures is realized, the District's financial condition will be compromised.
- Finding 5.2 The budget development process is comprehensive in nature but lacks procedures for considering assessment data and curriculum-related priorities.
- Finding 5.3 School facilities are generally in good condition, well-maintained, clean, and safe. There is a long-range facilities plan.

AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1-Policies and Six-Year Plan:

Develop new and revised school board policies that guide the administration in improving accountability for student learning, confront the inequalities among ethnic and racial groups, and link budgeting practices with system improvements.

- 1.1 Create a six-year educational plan for the District that focuses on student achievement and erasing the achievement gaps of minority children.
- 1.2 Revise the budget process to include needs assessment based on student data, cost-benefit analysis and district-wide curriculum priorities.
- 1.3 Upgrade and expand board policies regarding curriculum design and delivery to respond to federal and state accountability.

Recommendation 2-Curriculum Department and Staff Evaluation:

Define and implement a focused, sound and integrated support structure to carry out goals and erase achievement gaps.

Adequately staff the Curriculum and Evaluation Department linked to assessment and improving student performance. Reconfigure staff to support the development, implementation and evaluation of curriculum.

Create a teacher and administrator evaluation system that provides for setting goals and feedback on growth targets.

- 2.1 Reconfigure the Curriculum and Evaluation Department to provide focused and integrated support for the design and delivery of curriculum aligned to state standards. Require staff to monitor building-level staff efforts.
- 2.2 Establish administrative regulations that detail how the Department of Curriculum and Evaluation should function.
- 2.3 Revise teacher, coordinator and administrator evaluation documents to provide feedback that promotes gains in student achievement.

Recommendation 3-Administrative Plans:

Require top level administrators to create multi-year plans linked to erasing the achievement gaps. Support site-based plans that do the same and require a three-year review linked to student data.

Revise the Instructional Technology Plan so it directly relates to enhancing instruction and improving student achievement.

- 3.1 Create a comprehensive curriculum management plan including design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum. Design and implement curriculum guides that promote effective delivery of the curriculum and improve student learning.

- 3.2 Develop an assessment plan, linked to the District's educational plan. The assessment plan should provide policy makers, administrators and teachers with data connected to strategies to improve achievement for all students.
- 3.3 Create a procedure to require all programs undergo a three-year review linked to student achievement data.

SUMMARY:

A curriculum management audit is an "exception" report, designed to identify areas in which a district fails to meet an ideal standard. Auditors establish standards, review the district's current status relative to those standards, and make recommendations for improvement.

This audit recognizes that the Anchorage School District (unlike most of its counterparts throughout the United States) operates in an environment of fiscal uncertainty. The District's fiscal dependence on local and state funding authorities has made it difficult to plan beyond the current fiscal year.

In order to meet the demands of the recently reenacted federal law, "No Child Left Behind," and State of Alaska accountability mandates, the District must develop a long-term plan to improve student achievement.

The administration only recently acquired the ability to disaggregate assessment data to determine the rate of progress for socio-economic, racial-ethnic and gender groups. Having this data allows the District to evaluate the achievement gap and confront any inequities among students.

Some schools and departments have already begun to use data to drive instructional methods and emphasis. Others are being trained to use assessment results to develop goals. The challenge is to apply these efforts throughout the District.

District staff must review the successes in Anchorage schools and identify "best practices" that foster student achievement. These "best practices" must then be funneled through the curriculum system so that all students will have the benefit of quality instruction that yields proven results.

The administration embraces the opportunity to improve student achievement and considers closing the achievement gap its number one priority. The superintendent and staff will prepare a response to the recommendations and develop a timeline for implementation. The administration is committed to implementing a six-year plan that identifies specific student needs and areas of instructional success and ensures all students have the same opportunity to be successful.