

**A Curriculum Management Audit**  
**of the**  
**ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Anchorage, Alaska**



Students at Susitna Elementary School engage in a geography lesson about the United States.



**International Curriculum Management Audit Center**  
**Phi Delta Kappa International**  
**Eighth and Union**  
**Bloomington, Indiana 47404**

**A Curriculum Management Audit**

**of the**

**ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Anchorage, Alaska**

**Conducted Under the Auspices of  
International Curriculum Management Audit Center  
Phi Delta Kappa International  
P. O. Box 789  
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**September 2002: Anchorage, Alaska**

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# A CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT AUDIT

of the

## Anchorage School District

Anchorage, Alaska

### I. INTRODUCTION

This document constitutes the final report of a Curriculum Management Audit of the Anchorage School District. The audit was commissioned by the Anchorage School Board of Education/Governing Authority within the scope of its policy-making authority. It was conducted during the time period of May 12-17, 2002. Document analysis was performed off site, as was the detailed analysis of findings and site visit data.

In its request for proposal, the Anchorage School Board desired “a study that examines the extent to which there is alignment between the delivery of instruction in Anchorage schools and standards, student benchmarks, curriculum, instructional materials, and student performance measures. The goal of the study is to discover the degree of alignment that exists and to make recommendations that may be implemented to improve instruction and student academic performance.”

The award to Phi Delta Kappa International also requested a report that would respond to the following questions:

1. “To what extent are there clear expectations for teachers and students? To what extent do day-to-day instructional practices align with district goals and expectations? To what extent do daily practices reflect approved course content, adopted standards, and adopted instructional materials?”
2. “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?”
3. “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?”
4. “To what extent and how effectively is assessment used to guide curricular and instructional decision-making?”

In addition, the Board’s Request for Proposal (RFP) noted:

“In conducting the audit, the successful contractor will be expected to examine the district’s programs, practices, and results for specified sub-populations as well as the student body as a whole. Specifically, those programs and practices that lead to success for all students and those programs and practices that inhibit success of specific groups of students should be identified and highlighted. Specific groups that might be the basis for examination include gender groups, racial-ethnic groups, bilingual populations, special education students, gifted students, and socio-economic groupings of

students. Recommendations should reflect the findings of these analyses related to sub-populations as well as to the student population as a whole.”

A curriculum audit is designed to reveal the extent to which officials and professional staff of a school district have developed and implemented a sound, valid, and operational system of curriculum management. Such a system, set within the framework of adopted board policies, enables the school district to make maximum use of its human and financial resources in the education of its students. When such a system is fully operational, it assures the district taxpayers that their fiscal support is optimized under the conditions in which the school district functions.

The general location of the findings and recommendations of the audit are shown in Exhibit 0.1 to assist the reader in identifying where the Anchorage School District audit team responded to the questions contained in the RFP.

<b>Exhibit 0.1</b> <b>Responses Within the Curriculum Management Audit</b> <b>Corresponding to Questions Contained in the Anchorage School District RFP</b> <b>Anchorage School District</b>		
<b>RFP Questions</b>	<b>Findings Corresponding to RFP Questions within the Curriculum Audit</b>	<b>Corresponding Recommendations to the Questions of the RFP</b>
#1-Clear expectations; instructional practices aligned; daily practices?	1.1; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5	Recommendation 1 (Sub-Recs. 1.1; 1.3) Recommendation 2 (Sub-Rec. 2.3) Recommendation 3 (Sub-Rec. 3.4)
#2-Design and operation of the school district; processes and goals?	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5; 5.1; 5.2; 5.3	Recommendation 1 (Sub-Rec. 1.1; 1.2; 1.3) Recommendation 2 (Sub-Rec. 2.1; 2.2) Recommendation 3 (Sub-Rec. 3.1; 3.3; 3.5)
#3-Extent of alignment?	2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2	Recommendation 1 (Sub-Rec. 1.3) Recommendation 3 (Sub-Rec. 3.4)
#4-Is assessment used to guide decision-making?	1.1; 2.1; 2.3; 3.1; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.5; 5.2	Recommendation 1 (Sub-Rec. 1.3) Recommendation 3 (Sub-Rec. 3.2)
#5-Programs which lead to success and/or inhibit success of specific sub-populations?	1.2; 2.2; 2.3; 3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3	Recommendation 1 (Sub-Rec. 1.1; 1.3) Recommendation 3 (Sub-Rec. 3.2)

### *Background*

The Anchorage School District was established in 1915 as a four square-mile area in downtown Anchorage. Block 52 was designated for the site of a school. The first school was erected in October of 1915 using funds raised by the Anchorage Women’s Club. The first principal was Ora D. Clark. The four teachers hired were paid \$125.00 per month. The second school was constructed in 1917 and comprised six classrooms as well as indoor heating and plumbing for flushing toilets. The building had one water fountain.

In 1959 Alaska became a state, and today the Anchorage School District serves a bustling city spanning 1,955 miles and a diverse population of 270,000, in which the Anchorage School District website indicates that over 120 languages have been spoken. The 49,000+ students served by the city’s schools make it one of the nation’s 80 largest entities spread over a political-geographical landscape that includes the inner city, suburbia, and semi-rural mountainous regions. In the 2001-2002 academic year, the Anchorage School District operated 60 elementary schools; nine middle schools; one middle school/high school combination; six high schools; one K-12 school; one vocational school; seven specialized programs and schools; and three charter schools. Anchorage School District employs 3,113 full-time teachers (also includes counselors, special education, nurses, and school

psychologists); 151 principals and administrators; 88 supervisors and managers; and 1,800 support staff. Anchorage School District serves approximately 2.95 million lunches and 273,000 breakfasts each year, and transports students over 3.3 million miles on school buses. Each day nearly seven million square feet in the district's facilities are cleaned and swept.

The Alaska native population has doubled within 30 years, and the most striking feature of Anchorage's student population is that it is quickly becoming a minority-majority entity where the English as a Second Language population has grown over 50 percent in five years. In 1996-1997 the majority-White student population was 69.9 percent. In the 2000-2001 school year that figure dropped to 62 percent (see [Exhibit 0.2](#)). Over 33 percent of the school system's students live in poverty and are classified as Anchorage School District Title 1 Free/Reduced Lunch participants. Approximately 20 percent of Anchorage's school age children move each year. This mobility figure is higher than the child mobility rate in the United States, which is 17 percent. Education statistics for Alaska show that Alaska's high-school students are less likely to graduate than students in the United States as a whole, and half of Alaska's tenth graders failed required math and writing tests in 2001. One in five children in Alaska are residing in families receiving some form of public assistance. In some areas outside of the cities, the figure is six in ten. Alaska has very high rates of alcohol-instigated problems related to disease and death. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is four times the state average among Alaska Natives and ten times the rate in the United States.

The overall fiscal support for education in Alaska is tenuous. The state had budget deficits in six of the last eight years, despite the fact that Alaskans have paid no personal state taxes since 1980, and for many Alaskans, payments from the state's permanent fund exceed what they pay for local taxes. The state's general spending per capita has decreased 50 percent since 1985. Alaska continues to face budgetary deficits, and while the population increases the oil revenues upon which it has depended for state services has also shrunk. As Alaska's economy was slowed by falling petroleum production and lower oil prices, reduced harvests of timber and the consolidation of the seafood industry, Alaska's economy was improved by a rise in tourism, which has added more jobs than any other basic industry since 1990.

From the 1999 Alaskan census, 16 regions showed a positive gain in per capita income. The leading area was Denali with 64 percent. On this list, Anchorage showed a positive gain in per capita income of only three percent. The state average per capita income was \$28,629 in 1999, compared to Anchorage's average per capita income of \$33,813. According to the Institute of Social and Economic Research of the University of Alaska Anchorage, where most of the economic data reported here were cited, "Alaska was the only state where incomes of the poorest families grew faster than incomes of the wealthiest in recent times—likely due to Permanent Fund dividend payments" (October 2002, p. 9).

The fiscal dependency of the Anchorage School District, evident from its earliest beginnings when the Anchorage Women's Club had to solicit donations to build a school in the nascent metropolis, remains a vestige of the past that continues to haunt the School Board in its quest to provide a sound, modern education to the students it is pledged to serve. This dependency casts a very long shadow over the efforts to improve the schools as this audit will show.

**Exhibit 0.2**  
**Ethnic and Racial Diversity**  
**Number and Percentage of Initial Year Student Membership**  
**Anchorage School District**  
**1996-97 to 2000-01**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>American Native</b>	<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2000-01</b>	49,499 62%	6,177 12%	4,760 10%	4,227 9%	2,754 6%	695 1%	<b>49,499</b> <b>100%</b>
<b>1900-00</b>	31,759 64%	5,950 12%	4,460 9%	4,263 9%	2,665 5%	197 .17%	<b>49,294</b> <b>100%</b>
<b>1998-99</b>	32,551 65.6%	5,893 11%	4,299 8.7%	4,334 8.7%	2,250 5.1%	NA	<b>49,597</b> <b>100%</b>
<b>1997-98</b>	32,557 66.9%	5,644 11.6%	3,819 7.9%	4,234 8.7%	2,381 4.9%	NA	<b>48,635</b> <b>100%</b>
<b>1996-97</b>	32,546 69.9%	5,392 11.3%	3,558 7.4%	4,182 8.7%	2,233 4.7%	NA	<b>47,911</b> <b>100%</b>

Source: Anchorage School District (2001, September) *Profile of Performance and School Report Card to the Public 2000-2001. Part 1 District Overview*, p. 6.

**Governance of the Anchorage School District**

The Anchorage School District is governed by an elected seven-member School Board. Each member is elected at large and serves for three years. The School Board has eight standing subcommittees. The School Board meets on the second and fourth Mondays of each month. Board meetings are broadcast live on Channel 14.

**Current Anchorage School Board Members are:**

- Jake Metcalfe, President, Seat B through April 2004
- Tim Steele, Vice President, Seat A through April 2004
- Harriet A. Drummond, Treasurer, Seat F through April 2003
- Mary Marks, Clerk, Seat C through April 2005
- Rita J. Holthouse, Seat E through April 2003
- Debbie Ossiander, Seat G through April 2003
- John Steiner, Seat D through April 2005

**Superintendent of Schools**

The current superintendent of schools is Ms. Carol Comeau, who began her work in the Anchorage School District as a noon-duty attendant position at Ocean View Elementary School in 1974. She has served as a teacher aide, elementary school teacher, president of the teacher’s union (Anchorage Education Association), an elementary school principal, and executive director of elementary education. In 1993, she became the assistant superintendent for instruction in Anchorage School District. In September 2000, she became the Acting Superintendent and was named Superintendent in December of 2000.

**Current 2001-02 Anchorage School District Mission: To Educate Students for Success in Life**

The current mission of the Anchorage School District is to:

- Increase academic excellence by emphasizing student achievement, developing respect for diversity, maintaining quality staff retention, recruitment and training, and maximizing opportunities for life-long learning;
- Establish a supportive learning environment by providing safe and caring schools which are barrier-free, by promoting health and wellness, and by collaborating with other community agencies where appropriate;
- Ensure public accountability by continued participation in the state-required testing program, through the continued use of the writing assessment in selected grades, through wise use of financial resources, through construction and maintenance and facilities, and through effective communication to internal and external audiences.

Many of Anchorage School District's students do very well scholastically as evidenced by performance on national benchmarks.

Anchorage School District's average SAT score is 37 points above the USA average, and its California Achievement Test average scores are similarly 14 percentile points above the USA average. Of those Anchorage School District students who take the Advanced Placement exams, 70 percent scored at the college level. Three Anchorage School District seniors were named as Presidential Scholars for 2002. Only 141 students from the rest of the U.S. were similarly honored in 2002. One high school senior at Service High School scored a perfect 1600 on her SAT, one of only 587 students to do so nation-wide, and only one of 187 girls in the nation to achieve this distinction. An Anchorage School District eighth grader was the only Alaskan student to obtain a perfect score in the American Mathematics Competition. For the Anchorage School District, student statistics show that the average daily attendance is 93.4 percent; nearly 30 percent of middle and high school students attained honor roll rank in 1997-98; Anchorage School District graduates more than 91 percent of its seniors; and students need 22.5 credits to graduate from high school, the most stringent in Alaska. While Anchorage School District has identified 2,270 students as gifted, 7,538 students are similarly identified as possessing special needs. Another 2,731 are bilingual. Anchorage School District has been selected as one of Apple Computer's founding partners in the Alaska Learning Exchange.

Similarly, some of Anchorage School District's administrators have enjoyed national honors. For example, Clark Middle School principal, Sheria Stears is one of three finalists for the National Middle School Principal of the Year given by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Anchorage School District school psychologist, Deborah Ward was also one of three finalists for the national School Psychologist of the Year award given by the National Association of School Psychologists. Other awards include citing Dale Kephart as the Best High School Physical Education Teacher in the United States; Susan Stuart-Kuelper of Hanshew Middle School as the best Middle School Physical Education Teacher in the Northwest, and Linda Masterson of Goldenview Middle School as the Best Librarian in Alaska by the Alaska Association of School Librarians.

Anchorage reading and language arts teacher, Rhonda Gardner of Chugiak High School was awarded a 2001 Milken Family Foundation National Educator award. She was also one of four finalists for Alaska Teacher of the Year.

Anchorage School District has similarly encouraged Business Partnerships in the larger community. Currently there are more than 480 such partnerships, involving more than 49,000 students, 900 district staff, and 1,200 business employees. In the 1997-98 academic year, contributions from these partnerships totaled \$1,750,000 in the form of employee time, services, and direct financial gifts. Anchorage School District also operates community schools which offer residents of all ages over 3,776 programs and activities at 16 elementary and two secondary schools. These community schools were served by 9,501 volunteers during the 1997-98 academic year alone.

## *Background Purpose and Scope of the Work*

The Curriculum Management Audit is a process which was developed by Dr. Fenwick W. English and first implemented in 1979 in the Columbus Public Schools, Ohio. The audit is based upon generally-accepted concepts pertaining to effective instruction and curricular design and delivery, some of which have been popularly referred to as the “effective schools research.”

A curriculum management audit is an independent examination of three data sources: documents, interviews, and site visits. These are gathered and triangulated, or corroborated, to reveal the extent to which a school district is meeting its goals and objectives, whether they are internally or externally developed or imposed. A public report is issued as the final phase of the auditing process.

The audit’s scope is centered on curriculum and instruction, and any aspect of operations of a school system that enhances or hinders its design and/or delivery. The audit is an intensive, focused, “postholed” look at how well a school system such as Anchorage School District has been able to set valid directions for pupil accomplishment and well being, concentrate its resources to accomplish those directions, and improve its performance, however contextually defined or measured, over time.

The Curriculum Management Audit does not examine any aspect of school system operations unless it pertains to the design and delivery of curriculum. For example, auditors would not examine the cafeteria function unless students were going hungry and therefore were not learning. It would not examine vehicle maintenance charts, unless buses continually broke down and children could not get to school to engage in the learning process. It would not be concerned with custodial matters, unless schools were observed to be unclean and unsafe for children to be taught.

The Curriculum Management Audit centers its focus on the main business of schools: teaching, curriculum, and learning. Its contingency focus is based upon data gathered during the audit which impinges negatively or positively on its primary focus. These data are reported along with the main findings of the audit.

In some cases, ancillary findings in a curriculum management audit are so interconnected with the capability of a school system to attain its central objectives, that they become major, interactive forces which, if not addressed, will severely compromise the ability of the school system to be successful with its students.

Curriculum management audits have been performed in hundreds of school systems in more than twenty-five states, the District of Columbia, and several other countries, including Canada, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Bermuda.

The methodology and assumptions of the Curriculum Management Audit have been reported in the national professional literature in the past decade, and at a broad spectrum of national education association conventions and seminars, including the American Association of School Administrators (AASA); Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD); National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP); Association for the Advancement of International Education (AAIE); American Educational Research Association (AERA); National School Boards Association (NSBA); and the National Governors Association (NGA).

Phi Delta Kappa’s International Curriculum Management Audit Center has an exclusive contractual agreement with Curriculum Management Systems, Inc. (CMSi - a public corporation incorporated in the State of Delaware, and owner of the copyrights to the intellectual property of the audit process), for the purpose of conducting audits for educational institutions, providing training for auditors and others interested in the audit process, and officially assisting in the certification of PDK-CMSi curriculum auditors.

This audit was conducted in accordance with a contract with Anchorage School District and Phi Delta Kappa International. All members of the team were certified by the International Curriculum Management Center, Inc.

The names of the curriculum auditors in this audit included the following professional individuals:

- Fenwick W. English, Ph.D., Senior Lead Auditor, *R. Wendell Eaves Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership* School of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Ricki Price-Baugh, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instructional Development, Houston Independent School District, Texas
- Curtis A. Cain, Ph.D., Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, Park Hill School District, Kansas City, Missouri
- Ms. Beverly Freedman, Superintendent of Educational Programs, Durham District School Board, Ontario, Canada
- Joe Gasper, Assistant Superintendent, Newaygo County Intermediate Unit, Michigan
- Kendra Johnson, Ed.D., Associate Superintendent, Curriculum, Instruction, and Staff Development, North Kansas City School District, Kansas
- Penny Kowal, Ed.D., Associate Superintendent for Educational Services, Millard, Nebraska
- Norma Maldonado, Instructional Director, San Antonio Independent School District, Texas
- John Rouse, Superintendent of Schools, Port Aransas Independent School District, Texas
- Socorro Shiels, Coordinator of Curriculum, Grant Union High School District, Sacramento, California
- Betty Steffy, Ed.D., Senior Lead Auditor, Chapel Hill Associates, North Carolina
- Rosanne Stripling, Ed.D., Professor of Educational Administration, Texas A&M University, Texarkana, Texas
- Rosalie Gardner, Curriculum Coordinator and Reading Specialist, Columbia Community School District, Illinois
- Kathryn LeRoy, Leadership Specialist, Region IV Education Service Center, Houston, Texas
- Elizabeth Hammerman, Ed.D., Math/Science Consultant, Seven Counties, North Carolina
- Rebecca Shore, Ed.D., Lecturer, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Biographical information about the auditors is found in the appendix.

### **Approach of the Audit**

The Curriculum Management Audit has established itself as a process of integrity and candor in assessing public school districts. It has been presented as evidence in state and federal litigation concerning matters of school finance, general resource managerial effectiveness, and school desegregation efforts in Kansas, Kentucky, New Jersey, and South Carolina. The audit served as an important data source in state-directed takeovers of school systems in New Jersey and Kentucky. The curriculum management audit has become recognized internationally as an important, viable, and valid tool for the improvement of educational institutions and for the improvement of curriculum design and delivery.

The curriculum management audit represents a “systems” approach to educational improvement, that is, it considers the system as a whole rather than a collection of separate, discrete parts. The interrelationships of system components and their impact on overall quality of the organization in accomplishing its purposes are examined in order to “close the loop” in curriculum and instructional improvement.