

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #99 (2004-2005)

November 10, 2004

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES UPDATE

PERTINENT FACTS:

The main goals of Smaller Learning Communities are to personalize education for all students, increase opportunities and academic achievement for all students, and create a safe and welcoming environment at school. Anchorage 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. We are attempting to provide the best of both worlds.

There are some key characteristics each high school is working with in the move toward Smaller Learning Communities within the Anchorage School District.

- Ninth grade transition: The seven comprehensive high schools have developed plans with engaging activities and programs to assist freshman students the minute they step foot on the high school campuses. The goal is to provide support to make the transition into high school a smooth and enjoyable experience. The outcome is expected to be fewer failing grades, less suspensions and a more rigorous curriculum.
- 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, meeting with eighth grade students, and student government discussions.
- Coordination with Curriculum Specialists: High schools are coordinating with curriculum specialists to adhere to the requirements of the Alaska State Standards, No Child Left Behind, and the Curriculum Audit.

- 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.

Professional development time and opportunities continue to be the major efforts in this grant. The High School Division appreciates the School Board's resolution in support of a restructured day in order to assist the professional development of our teachers. We are interested in continuing to work with the Board to help make this happen.

Expenditures this year are mostly for a .4 FTE building coordinator in each high school, added duty addenda for teachers working on professional development, expenses for teacher representatives at each high school to attend an Effective Schools conference, substitute teachers for in-school trainings, and contracted services for outside experts to work with teachers.

To maximize the professional development opportunities, the Administration is currently in negotiation with Learning 24/7 to bring another national educational conference to Anchorage during April 2005. This would allow all high school teachers to attend a conference with national and local educational experts for a fraction of the cost of sending them out of state for the same benefit.

For more information on Smaller Learning Communities, the following websites offer general to very specific information.

The Federal Smaller Learning Communities Website

www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SLCP/

The Small Schools Workshop - This site contains a wealth of information including general information, current articles on schools moving to this model, and conferences.

www.smallschoolsworkshop.org

This is the Northwest Regional Laboratory site. They are our evaluating agency, but they also offer assistance for implementation on this site.

www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/index.shtml

This site addresses what the SLC idea is and why we're doing it. It's a fairly cogent discussion of the reasons and benefits.

www.ntlf.com/html/lib/suppmat/74tinto.htm

CC/JC/MH

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