

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #318 (2004-2005)

June 13, 2005

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW/END OF YEAR REPORT FOR FY 2004-2005:
HIGHLAND TECH CHARTER SCHOOL

PERTINENT FACTS:

School Board Policy 333.10 on Charter Schools requires an Annual Review of each Charter School. To be specific, the Policy states:

“The charter school will be subject to review of its operations and finances by the School Board. Annually, the Academic Policy Committee will submit a concise 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, but is not limited to information on the attainment of student performance expectations, including copies of the Terra Nova and Benchmark reports; recommendations for remediation of poor student performance; school goal attainment; trends in student/staff enrollment and mobility; an end of year preliminary financial statement showing revenues and expenditures; minutes of the meetings of the governing body 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; a list of the Academic Policy Committee for the past and coming school year, including officers, and staff members by position; a list of employees and job titles; and other information requested by the School Board.

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.

This is the second year of operation for Highland. It has been an extremely challenging one for the administration, staff and Academic Policy Committee. Because of its unique nature in the ASD, parents continue to need additional help in understanding the methodologies of the school, especially in the area of assessment. As the school becomes better known, students who opt to attend Highland will know before they begin that certain assumptions should be left at the door when attending Highland, but that the experience will be one of challenge and achievement in the end.

Fiscal solvency continues to be a problem at Highland with a very large lease and other debt obligations taking funds from the operating budget at a disproportionate rate. Working through this and other challenges at Highland for the school year 2005-2006 will take an enormous amount of energy on the part of the Highland staff. 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.

The staff at Highland continues to experience stress and burnout from the long hours and readjustments that have taken place during the year. In an effort to work out problems for students not doing well academically and behind in credits, the schedule was redone at the start of second semester. Teachers found it difficult to start over once again with a new group of students, and, in some cases, new teaching assignments for the second time this year. The result, however, proved to be beneficial to kids and will likely be the model used in the future. Schools that are unique do not necessarily work seamlessly from the onset. The Highland staff continues to find the middle ground between its philosophy and methodology and the success rate of students. Maintaining a working environment that allowed teachers to accomplish all that and maintain high morale has been a major effort on the part of the support staff at Highland. There is some staff turnover, but many staff members are becoming more comfortable with the model and are opting to stay at Highland.

Student numbers have been a problem this past year. The budget was based on higher enrollment projections than were realized causing the budget shortfall to become a significant factor in the running of the school. Highland was identified as a school of choice for students coming from Clark Middle School. These students were allowed to select Highland as an alternative site because of its success in the area of high stakes testing. These students helped enrollment

figures for Highland, but adjustment problems resulted in many of them returning to Clark during the second semester. Those returning students at Highland from its first year are finding that their success is increasing steadily in academics and would be surprised that everyone wasn't as excited about attending Highland as they are. Many students enjoy Highland's curricular choices daily schedule and flourish in its environment. As the school grows, the number of students remaining at Highland for their entire secondary experience will grow dramatically

Special needs students continue to be a significant part of the student population at Highland. The model is conducive to providing a successful experience to these students as a group, but some remain challenged by the open environment and need to be self-paced. Staffing has increased in special education this year thanks to the Special Education department of the ASD. There is a dedication of funds for staff next year in the Highland budget that should help to meet the needs of those students who attend Highland and require special education services.

Student decorum is an area of continuing concern for the staff of Highland and of the Administration of the ASD. Due to a high number of student incidents, there are now measures in place that are more proactive in nature for students who may be headed for significant problems. The practice of lunch-time meetings with students with problems, as well as schoolwide discussions of decorum issues are making an inroad in lessening the amount of out-of-school suspensions and recommendations for expulsion. The open campus continues to be a point of discussion where student decorum issues are concerned, with some possible changes in this policy coming in the future.

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 and APC are working with the landlords to make the delay payment of the note for two years, while the school has a chance to become more financially stable. This note, however, continues to be part of the fiscal responsibility of the school and will eventually have to be addressed. Grants continue to be a large part of the other funding sources that help provide staff training, equipment and technical support for the school.

The excitement that greets you when you visit Highland is as all-pervasive as it was last year and probably even more obvious this year. There are many projects in the making, community outings and contacts, school business partnerships creating opportunities for students to practice their knowledge in

the real world, and techies everywhere. The students and staff continue to explore new worlds of learning and education. They are on the cutting edge of educational innovation. The students are being prepared to be what many business leaders are asking for, members of the 21st century who know how to compete in the world for jobs of the next generation. With help, guidance and work, Highland will grow to be one of our showcase schools in the Anchorage School District.

CC/JC/CB

Attachment

Prepared by: Connie Bensler, Charter School Liaison

Approved by: Jan Christensen, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction