

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #321 (2004-2005)

June 13, 2005

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW/END OF YEAR REPORT FOR FY 2004-2005:
AQUARIAN 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 Aquarian 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.

Aquarian Charter School has had a very successful school year. The school has a strong and viable academic program that is well supported by the parents and staff. There is a long waiting list of students wanting to attend Aquarian, with

very little turnover in the existing student population. The building remains the biggest challenge for the school in terms of age and repair/renovation needs. Connie Bensler, the District's Liaison to Aquarian Charter School, has attended the monthly meetings of their Academic Policy Committee, made up of parents and staff. There is a good working relationship between Ms. Bensler and the APC.

This charter school has a full-time type B certificated principal, Susan Forbes, who is completing her second year as principal of the school. She has had a tremendously successful second year with wide parent and staff support. There is a strong commitment to a high academic focus and integrated, thematic curricula which are enhanced by outdoor education, community service learning, Spanish, and technology infused throughout the day. The professional staff remains stable with a number of other teachers in the District requesting a transfer to Aquarian. The energy and enthusiasm of Mrs. Forbes has created a positive atmosphere among the Aquarian community that is contagious and obvious as soon as you enter the building. The emphasis on staff development has been a major effort on Ms. Forbes' part this school year. She discusses monthly issues with staff and the APC relating to math, literacy and the arts. She provides classes, literacy groups and discussions for all adults in the Aquarian Community to help in the team effort to make Aquarian students successful in all ways. Aquarian has done well in high stakes testing with resources being directed toward those students who need remediation.

Aquarian Charter School has been challenged in several ways this year. The current campus is known as the Charter School Center and is the former Northern Lights School Campus. It has multiple code problems and needs major renovations in order to remain open. The Academic Policy Committee, the PTO and District officials have met on several occasions to discuss the problem and possible solutions. At this time, a number of possibilities are being explored. The Aquarian community is ready to lend financial as well as other support and partner with the District to solve the issues related to the condition of the building.

Another challenge met by Aquarian was the closing of Village Charter School and the subsequent absorption of over one third of its students and staff. In addition, the classrooms at the Charter School Center used by Village were taken over by Aquarian after a significant amount of work by parents and staff at Aquarian to upgrade and redo the interior of these rooms. The welcoming attitude on the part of the Aquarian Community to the former Village children, parents and staff was heart warming. The transition in the middle of the year could have been much more traumatic had it not been for a major effort put forth by the Aquarian Community.

In the coming year, the school will increase its numbers to 336 students. The Anchorage School Board approved this increase during the 2004-2005 school year. With this increase, the number of classrooms at each grade will increase slightly, with more at the primary level. The school will continue to enjoy fulltime art, technology, and music teachers as well as an infusion of Spanish through lessons and Spanish speaking teacher assistants. Gifted education will continue to be an integral part of the school with over one third of the students identified by the gifted department of the ASD as certified gifted. The school is a vibrant, positive place for students. Its parents feel welcomed and empowered. The staff continues to thrive and develop into a school of excellent teaching and support staff. Aquarian Charter School is looking forward to another successful year in 2005-2006.

CC/JC/CB

Attachments

Prepared by: Connie Bensler, Charter School Liaison

Approved by: Jan Christensen, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction