

Year End Report 2004/2005



Aquarian Charter
School

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Year End Report
2004-2005**

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Program Overview

AQUARIAN CHARTER SCHOOL FY 2004 - 2005

MISSION & PROGRAM

The Aquarian Charter School is dedicated to providing Anchorage children freedom and skills to achieve their human potential by:

- Celebrating each child's uniqueness and diversity;
- Providing a stimulating academic program with high expectations;
- Assuring there is a safe and nurturing environment to instill well-being in all students;
- Empowering thinking and understanding individuals to communicate and live successfully in a challenging and changing world;
- Creating interest, awareness and involvement in the neighborhood and global community;
- Facilitating creative expression through language, drama, art, music, and sports; and
- Stimulating whole family interaction with children and their educational development

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION: Aquarian Charter School uses several innovations in education that make Aquarian unique, primarily is the belief that each child has the ability to perform at his/her highest potential. A child's ability is based on a belief system between teacher and student – for the potential of high achievement in all students. Integrated cross curriculum instruction differentiated for student needs, foreign language, accelerated learning and brain-compatible learning are methodologies used to achieve this high expectation. Additionally, parents actively involved in the child's education make Aquarian a vital community, rather than an institution for the child to attend during the day.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: The program at Aquarian Charter School is designed for bright, motivated elementary students in grades K-6. The children have an engaging learning environment, filled with a high interest curriculum, technology, Spanish, music and art, all designed to enhance the educational program and boost achievement.

ACCELERATED LEARNING: Instructors at Aquarian teach using methods of accelerated learning and differentiation based on the latest in brain research showing that children have their highest potential when they are in an ideal learning state. This is accomplished by having a classroom environment that is interesting, organized, and uncluttered. The differentiated classroom allows the teacher to adjust content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests, and learning profile. The total environment is positive, including the teachers, who have a sincere belief that every child has the potential to learn at an accelerated level. Every learning situation involves

challenge and feedback for the learner. Phonics is a partner with a literature based language arts; mental math and solid computation skills are partners with conceptual math; science, social studies, technology, art, and music are integrated into the challenging curriculum.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: This hands-on instruction has components of the multiple intelligences, so that all children can learn using their strongest modality. Homework activities take the concepts learned during school into real-life situations. Parents are expected to work with their child on these integrated projects and assignments. Application and connections to all content areas are woven into the standard curriculum in order to excite and challenge all learners while creating a dynamic learning environment.

MODELING: Teachers are role models for the students. They participate in many areas of the school outside their classrooms. They use technology and participate in activities right along with the students. They have on-going training on differentiation and gifted instruction across the curriculum. Full time teaching assistants in each class provide the integration of Spanish along with a structured Spanish lesson.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION: Both gifted and learning-disabled students within the regular classroom may have accommodations for individual abilities. This is one of the main philosophies of our school. Though all types of students are enrolled at Aquarian, those students not certified as "gifted" or "special education" benefit greatly from this unique and effective teaching method. Highly motivated students at any ability level progress further and at a faster rate with this methodology without diminishing instruction time for learners that require more instruction.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: Students at Aquarian are taught to give back to their community with their time, as well as to become involved in community issues. Students are taught that this is their responsibility. As a citizen, they can learn productive ways in which they can make a difference in their world. This years service projects have been raising finches for community adoption and donating contributions to Bird Teaching & Learning Center. Holiday food and toy drive sponsored by Toys for Tots and The Anchorage Food Bank. We have adopted a beautification program, and have planted flowers and purchased picnic tables for neighborhood use. This summer, and neighborhood group will oversee the vegetables planed on school grounds, and maintain a community greenhouse throughout the fall months. Several classrooms visited the elderly and ill in the hospital, making small gifts for each individual.

Academic tutoring for children struggling in core content areas are assisted two to three times per week at lunch time and/or after school by teachers and teaching assistants free of charge.

CORE CURRICULUM OF THE SCHOOL

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS: Meeting the **Content and Performance Standards** for Alaska Students is a primary goal for Aquarian. The integrated curriculum is planned each year to see that **Alaska Content Standards** are met. This is being accomplished for all students by using differentiated instruction within the core curriculum for all students. Many of Aquarian students are performing at a higher level than their grade level.

INTEGRATED CURRICULUM: The main thread of the Aquarian philosophy is the use of Integrated Curriculum. Teachers combine content area curriculum to provide a learning experience relevant and current to their students. Educational goals and objectives are met through the integration of several subjects into the core Language Arts program.

SCHEDULING: incorporating block scheduling for mathematics, Spanish, and Language Arts enhances our accelerated curriculum. For example, kindergarten through second grade use block scheduling for language arts in the morning. All grades are assessed for mathematics skill level, and all children are required to go to their proper level of instruction for math blocking from 10 to 11:15 Monday through Friday. This is not a punitive placement- but simply a prescriptive model so all children gain appropriate skills based on individual needs. All specialists are trained in how to teach Saxon Mathematics, and lead a math class during this time, as no pullouts are scheduled during blocking. This also accommodates our remedial plan and allows for better use of specialists into our integrated curriculum schedule during the remainder of the school day.

HEALTH/PHYSICAL EDUCATION: The whole, healthy body is emphasized. A healthy lifestyle, including healthy foods is modeled and experienced. Health instruction is delivered on a weekly schedule to meet parental concerns regarding comprehensive health topics. Physical Education instruction is offered three times a week to meet our school philosophy of wellness through activity. The Great Body Shop is taught in all grades.

TECHNOLOGY: With the addition of three portable word processing labs, students have improved basic keyboarding skills. Most writing projects in fourth through sixth grade are being done on computers. Increased use of our computer labs has provided additional technology training in word processing, spreadsheet, database, and graphics software programs. Mini-computer labs in primary grade classrooms provide computer-assisted instruction on basic skills. Thirty minutes of instruction followed by thirty minutes of practice is scheduled for grades K-6.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE: Bilingual Spanish teaching assistants provide Spanish instruction at least 30 minutes per day. These teaching assistants also remain with students in the lunchroom and on the playground using conversational Spanish in everyday activities. Aquarian has a full time Spanish coordinator that sets 1st -6th curriculum, and oversees ordering and special multicultural programs.

SCHOOL DAY: Aquarian Charter School follows the schedule of the Anchorage School District. School hours are 8:30 to 3:30 to allow for additional time for students to enjoy a relaxed lunch and a quality recess break.

ENRICHMENT CLASSES: Each quarter a variety of classes are made available to students after the regular school day. Teachers are encouraged to provide classes that reflect their personal hobbies or skills such as chess, knitting and crocheting, art, drama, band, sports, advanced technology and Spanish. Additionally "study hall" was provided to students as a quiet place to do homework after school and receive additional academic help. A remedial reading class was also provided second quarter to support struggling readers. This program provided support to the identified students and allowed staff to field test a remedial reading program. Each subject is offered two days a week from 3:30 to 4:30 Monday through Friday. **APPENDIX: A**

SCHOOL BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS 2004 - 2005

The community has strongly supported Aquarian Charter School and we appreciate their ongoing support to the success of our school. Aquarian would like to thank the following business partners. These are informal partnerships, and next year Aquarian will have a staff and community member organizing the formal registration so we are connected with the Anchorage School District's program:

- ❖ Cellular One
- ❖ Hale Boys Coffee
- ❖ Crazy Croissant
- ❖ Shred Alaska
- ❖ Nana Corporation
- ❖ REI
- ❖ Office Depot
- ❖ Spenard Builders
- ❖ Title Wave Books

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES 2004 - 2005

Robotics- Future Lego League: The sixth grade class with teacher Robert Stagg participated in the state's Lego Robotics competition at Hanshew Middle School. The theme of this year's theme was assisting people with disabilities/assistive technology. Aquarian placed 8th out of 42 participating school this first year! We look forward to increasing participation to 5th and 6th grades next fall.

HOLIDAY PROGRAM: The Holiday Program is always a success and this year was no exception. The production brought together the music and art teachers for planning, set design, and presentation. The technology and art teachers worked jointly preparing the event program for the attendees of the performance. This year's performance attracted over 800 people to the West High School Theater.

All School Field Trips: Three all school trips were planned this school year. We attended West High's Dance Team's production of "NUTCRACKER- ALL JAZZEDUP!" The opening day of "THE POLAR EXPRESS" as a culmination experience following our Chris Van Allsberg author study. A Daily News editorial commented on how well behaved our staff and students were at the Century Theater.

We will soon be enjoying our trip to H2Oasis- for a second year in a row. We make sure to include all of our staff members in these trips- including the day and evening custodial, cafeteria manager, office support staff, and specialists. Over eighty adults participated in this fun event.

BATTLE OF THE BOOKS: This year, thanks to the hard work of two parents, our school greatly improved our participation and placement. Our 3rd & 4th grade team placed in this year's competition. We look forward to continued participation and success in this program in the future.

SCIENCE FAIR: During the month of March and April we celebrated science. Over two hundred students presented varied and exciting projects. Several students participated in the citywide science fair and were recognized highly for their individual achievements. Fifteen students went on to participate at the state level, with five taking grand prize and financial awards. Way to go!

ART SHOW: AQUARIAN WAS INVITED TO DISPLAY TWO 3-D ART PIECES AT THE ANCHORAGE MUSEUM OF HISTORY & ART DURING THE ANNUAL ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT.

MATH & SCIENCE NIGHTS: Sponsored with a grant from ASD Math and Science Departments, Aquarian held two separate events focused on fun activities in the subjects of math and science. Students and their parents enjoyed various hands-on, activities in physics, math computation and results experimentation. All activities were designed to enhance lessons currently being taught in the classroom setting. The program focused on how parents can become more involved with hands-on activities with their children. In addition to the program nights at the school, handouts for future activities to take place at home during the summer were provided.

Math Derby: Students in grades 4-6 participated in the ASD Math Derby at Turnagain Elementary School . Our team placed third in this difficult competition!

5th Grade Trip to Seward Sea Life Center: In April, our two 5th grade classes took a trip to the Sea Life Center. The experience was awesome, and many lessons learned about our natural habitats in Alaska. Excellent parent participation was present during the trip-, which made it a huge success.

SIXTH GRADE TRIP: The combined sixth grade classes enjoyed an overnight trip to the Challenger Learning Center in Kenai. The Challenger experience consisted of a simulated rendezvous with a comet and additional classes on robotics and magnetism. Students also enjoyed a visit to the Ancient Kenai River Indian ruins, a 4-mile mountain hike, and a swimming party at the high school pool. As a class the sixth graders sold root beer floats and popcorn on Fridays during lunch. A t-shirt design contest was also held in the class with creative designs being submitted by nearly the entire class as another fundraising project. A winning design was selected and t-shirts were ordered and were sold to all students and family members of the school community. The class was hired to man booths for two school events: Third Annual Trick or Treat Alley (our own version of Trick or Treat Town) and the Aquarian Winter Carnival. Taking over this responsibility allowed parents of our school to thoroughly enjoy each of these activities with their younger children. The profit from all of these ventures was used specifically for their Kenai trip.

Spanish Culture Program: An all school Spanish cultural celebration will be shared with families on May 31st. This is sure to be an annual festivity in the future! Sixth grade students will be treated to a farewell Mexican dinner following their performance.

SCHOOL GOALS 2004 - 2005

TEACHER TRAINING: Teachers returned to the 2004-2005 school year and were trained in the Six-Traits Writing Process. This was due to our evaluation of the writing scores from the previous school year. Both writing and Spelling were addressed intensively. Aquarian adopted and trained teachers in Scholastic Spelling Program for grades 1st - 6th. Review of the differentiated curriculum approach was conducted, as was inclusionary gifted instruction methods.

The APC had determined that the priorities of building a solid team and developing good communication between teachers, teaching assistants and support staff were imperative to beginning the new school year.

STRATEGIES & REMEDIATION: This year we focused on spelling and writing. We also expanded our primary reading program to include more emphasis on reading comprehension and fluency. The upper grade program expanded with additional reading in the content areas. Teachers used more class time for vocabulary development, reading and discussing newspapers, magazines, and other nonfiction material. In the primary grades, an additional language arts grouping was also organized to meet the needs of struggling readers and students with special education certification. All students in the target group increased their reading skill by one or more levels in six months.

As previously mentioned grades k through 6th utilized "**Six-Traits Writing**". In grades 1st through 3rd teachers included a variety of phonics strategies and materials to develop primary writing skills. Preliminary results indicate students showed significant progress in sentence fluency and organization. Continued training will be provided to teachers next year in methods of adjusting instruction based on assessments. The new spelling materials were introduced to improve instruction in these grade levels.

A final project of our writing focus this school year was for each student in the school to publish a hard-back book they have written and illustrated. The school purchased these, and families were overjoyed with the results!

A pilot program was implemented with funds received through the Learning Opportunity Grant (LOG). An after-school program was designed and developed by Aquarian teachers in order to provide additional instruction to struggling readers. These students were identified through a series of assessments over the first quarter. During the second quarter six weeks of additional instruction was given to students in kindergarten through sixth grade for two hours per week. This successful program will be instituted again next year with or without receiving a second LOG as the APC has set aside funds for this program.

CHARACTER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS: Respect, honesty, responsibility, and effort are at the core of Aquarian's skill building curriculum. Project Achieve develops students' skills in problem solving, resolving conflicts, and communicating in difficult situations. Students develop strategies they can use anywhere with anyone at any time. Students build self-esteem along with compassion and a deeper appreciation for others. In addition, Aquarian was supplied with the primary and intermediate **Anti-Bullying** kits to assist teachers in pro-social behavior instruction. The ASD elementary education department purchased these kits for our school at no additional charge to the school- and we very much appreciate it.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING STAFF: In July, a teacher was sent to Las Vegas attended a **Differentiation Conference**, which covered the management, strategies and materials needed for this type of instruction, which is at the core of Aquarian's teaching philosophy. This conference was also timely in meeting criteria suitable for requirements stipulated in the "No Child Left Behind" legislation. The APC has committed to setting aside funds for development of its staff in areas that meet the school's teaching mission and goals. The principal attended the International Reading Conference in San Antonio, Texas to better learn how to focus on instructional leadership in literacy.

TEST SCORES & ASSESSMENTS 2004 - 2005

BENCHMARK Aquarian students continue to perform well on the Alaska Benchmark Examinations. The overall comparison of the total school district scores was not available to evaluate our students' performance against other 6th and 3rd grade students in the district. Data will be released in early June. Data evaluation will be done during pre-service school year 2005-2006. The 2004

Benchmark 1 showed the following performance levels:

(45 students tested)	Reading	Writing	Math
Advanced	8.6%	5.7%	34.3%
Proficient	62.9%	51.4%	42.9%
Below Proficient	11.4%	40.0%	14.3%
Not Proficient	17.1%	2.9%	8.6%

Most alarming in the past Benchmark trends are the comparative lower writing scored in grade three. Professional development and instructional methods have been revised to zero in on this area of concern. Spelling and Vocabulary /usage was also lower than expected- and program was adopted to address this. I expect to see growth in both of these content areas. In addition, Aquarian's student population has increased in diversity and socio-economic groups. This has required us to strategize new ways to assist the students that are achieving below average. We have added free tutoring and Slingerland trained teachers as one part of this plan. It is clear our Saxon Math Program and blocking is working well, as test scores continue to be very high. However; it is clear our very high scores are offsetting our lows- and more attempts are remediation is necessary to help all learners grow.

The **Benchmark 2** showed the following performance levels:

(30 students tested)	Reading	Writing	Math
Advanced	50.0%	33.3%	45.8%
Proficient	41.7%	45.8%	16.7%
Below Proficient	4.2%	20.8%	25.0%
Not Proficient	4.2%	0%	12.5%

2004-2005: TERRANOVA/CAT/6 The California Achievement Tests scores showed our students in the mid to upper average range on the National Percentage Scale. The best area of performance was in reading and language at the 5th grade level and language mechanics at the 4th grade level (39 students tested).

The table below indicates MDNP. Noted is the relative equal abilities measured in both classrooms. High mathematics levels are demonstrated. More focus on the language arts need to be implemented.

Scores in Median National Percentile: Grade 5/ Wentzel-Walle Class
Reading Composite: 69.5
Language Composite: 58.0
Math Composite: 70.0
Total Score: 67.5
Scores in Median National Percentile: Grade 5/ Anderson Class
Reading Composite: 63.0
Language Composite: 74.3
Math Composite: 71.0
Total Score: 75.0

SURVEYS AND FEEDBACK 2004 - 2005

STAFF EVALUATION SURVEYS: This survey is completed by parents as a mail-in to the school district headquarters and forwarded on to each school

- Good Homework policies/class work returned in a timely manner, better organized class schedule
- Pleased with Thursday weekly newsletter
- Liked that reading was emphasized at our school
- Loved the math blocking and multi-levels
- Praise for the positive school climate
- Excellent volunteerism
- Superior teacher quality
- Gifted inclusion
- Student projects with active exploration tied to curriculum (gardening, raising birds, student-peer-mentoring, and artist/scientist of the week programs)

AQUARIAN CHARTER SCHOOL PARENT SURVEY: During the 2004-2005 Aquarian distributed consistent with the ASD survey.

Parent Comments/Concerns that occurred more than once under recommendations for school improvements were:

- Spanish Program
- New Playground Equipment
- Discipline and attendance policy review
- Waitlist concerns- not being able to get siblings into program due to large numbers
- Permanent Facility/Sprinkler system installed
- Better Ice/Snow removal

AFTER SCHOOL CHILDCARE: As a way to understand the importance of the school's on-site child care a survey was put out to all Aquarian families regarding the Boys and Girls Club program. Parents overwhelmingly responded that this program was key in their being at Aquarian, and that they were more than satisfied with the program. The program is continuously full with a waitlist.

AQUARIAN ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

The Academic Policy Committee (APC) meets once a month January through December (including the summer months of June, July and August). Meeting notices and agendas are posted at least two weeks prior to meeting date, and meetings are open to the public. The main objectives for the 2004-2005 school year were:

- To have a full and active board made up of a cross-section of parents, teachers, and teaching assistants
- Revise student handbook
- Policy changes applicable to school operation
- Regular semester evaluations of the contracted principal
- Through the charter school liaison learn and understand the relationship between school district management and charter school operation to streamline process and other issues that effect the running of the school
- Participate in formal board training to better understand the roles and responsibilities

Issues being considered for the 2005-2006 school year:

- Create and distribute new handbook
- Continued upgrade of the Spanish program and curriculum materials
- School calendar
- Changes in the Gifted program –additional documentation if autonomous learner projects and activities. Friday enrichment school wide to address gifted goals
- Continued building concerns
- High enrollment issues (scheduling, safety, teacher/TA training)
- Marketing program – continue to connect to the community in a positive way

AQUARIAN TEACHERS & STAFF

At Aquarian we are fortunate to have a quality teaching staff with diverse talents and experiences. The staff of Aquarian has grown remarkably due to program growth. We have fourteen regular education classroom teachers, full-time Art/Technology teacher, Full-time Music/Math teacher, and Full-time P.E./Health/Math teacher. We have one teacher leaving for an overseas assignment to Morocco for a year- but she wishes to return after this is completed. We have no regular education teachers seeking a transfer at this time. We do however have many teachers seeking a transfer into our program- which shows a shift in trends. We will be hiring an additional 6th grade teacher for our added classroom due to student population growth for school year 2005-2006.

For the 2004 – 2005 school year we cut teaching assistant to half-day for grades 1-6. Kindergarten continues to enjoy a full time aide for support and preparation of young students for life-long learning.

Aquarian has 8 teaching assistants assigned to shared classroom.

One full-time Spanish/SPED support TA.

Specialist are: one half-time special education teacher, one .8 school psychologist, one .5 speech and language teacher, and contracted hours with ASD gifted department as needed.

Office support staff is as follows: One school administrator, one full-time administrative assistant, one full-time secretary, one .8 school nurse, one .25 certified accountant.

Aquarian has a very busy school lunch program- serving over 120 lunches per day by our half-time cafeteria manager.

Aquarian has two full-time custodial staff members, one for day and evening shift.

PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION

The Parent Teacher Organization has been integral to Aquarian's success. During this last year, the PTO sponsored many activities for student enjoyment as well as fundraising activities. One of the most successful was the Winter Carnival. Other activities included refreshments for the Holiday Program, parent help with the Art Show, and End-of-the-Year Picnic. The PTO publishes the Aquarian Yearbook, coordinates Teacher and Secretary Appreciation weeks, and facilitates the Aquarian T-shirt drive and school potluck lunches. Operation of a school store every Tuesday afternoon from October thru May. Tax ID Number PTO: 91-1755186

Additionally, the PTO has taken over responsibility for the school library. Volunteers have received training in using the school district's checkout system, assist students in using the library resources, teaching students the library system (i.e. checking out and returning books, logging books, etc.). Volunteers also take on the arduous task of processing new books that are provided to the school through book fair events. This includes building shelving, laminating, covering paperback books, and assisting teachers with classroom resources. This summer a core group of volunteers will completely overhaul the library system to include inventory, data entry, and reorganization of the library's physical space.

From the fundraising events this year, as well as funds reserved from previous years, the following contributions were made to Aquarian:

- Purchase of books for Battle of the Books
- Materials & labor for computer lab renovations
- Additional library books
- Laminator
- Fund for support of Drug Awareness Week (supplies)
- Fund 6th grade and kindergarten graduation
- Greenhouse Project
- Purchase of Aquarian dolphin mats for entry
- Purchase of acoustical guitars for 6th grade music instruction
- Purchase of snow shoes and cross country skis for classroom use
- Purchase of computer and DVD/CD burner for 6th grade multimedia projects
- Purchase of SMART BOARD for all grades and staff development

PLANNING AHEAD 2005-2006

PERSONNEL: The teaching staff currently has two teachers seeking transfers, however with the current hold on all transfers district wide this may become a moot issue. All of the 2002-2003 staff will return for the 2003-2004 school year. We will retain our .5 special education teacher and will add a special education Teaching Assistant to help with the IEP load.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Teaching staff is strongly encouraged to receive their gifted credentials next year as part of the schools mission and charter language. The APC has set aside funds to cover the cost of instruction.

STRATEGIES & REMEDIATION: We will again focus in areas of reading and writing to include more emphasis on reading comprehension and writing fluency. An additional primary language arts program will be organized based on assessments reviewed in the first quarter of the new school year for struggling readers and students with special education certification.

ENROLLMENT: For the 2004-2005 school year Aquarian mobility rate remained stable with an increased enrollment from 240 students to 288.

Only 17 students may not return for school year 2005-2006 (most documented as moving out of Anchorage area and transportation issues)

Building Issues: We are currently housed at the 1705 West 32nd Ave location. The building and playground need major renovations for health and safety requirements as well as current ADA guidelines. The Aquarian community, with the Spenard Community Council, are most interested in keeping our school at the current location. We are hoping that The Anchorage School District is able to assist us in this endeavor using capitol improvement assets. We are ready to assist financially or with volunteers to make this a reality.

As the current administrator, I cannot recommend attempting to purchase or lease a high price facility. I have informed my building committee, APC board, and charter school liaison of this, due to my belief that it would lead to fiscal demise (based on current research on how and why charter school's succeed or fail). If upgrades were done, I would advocate a lease with the Anchorage School District to compensate for the use of land and building.

Finally, as state law now stands, the option to request a bond to support a new building is not allowed. I do not expect this to change within the timeline that Aquarian has to finalize a facility. We have invite Pamela Jennings out to the school to tour and discuss this with our community and school staff in hopes of gaining support for our prospering school program.