

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Work Session

MINUTES

June 6, 2016

President Haas called the work session to order at 6:48 p.m. in the boardroom of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue. The work session was called to discuss the Boreal Sun Charter School request and K-8 options.

President Haas read the district's mission statement: *"Our mission is to provide an excellent, equitable education in a safe, supportive environment so all students will succeed and contribute to a diverse and changing society."*

Present:

Heidi Haas, President  
Michael O'Brien, Vice President  
Allyson Lambert, Treasurer  
Thomas Bartels, Clerk  
Wendy Dominique, Member  
Sue Hull, Member  
Sean Rice, Member

Absent:

None

Staff Present:

Dr. Karen Gaborik, Superintendent  
Lisa Pearce, Chief Financial Officer  
Sandra Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Instruction  
Dan Schmidt, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Instruction  
Traci Gatewood, Executive Director of Human Resources  
Wendy Tisland, Executive Director of Human Resources (Incoming)  
Melanie Hadaway, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction  
Janet Cobb, Executive Director of Technology  
Dave Norum, Executive Director of Facilities Management  
Helen Clark, Director of Federal Programs  
Sharice Walker, Director of Public Relations  
Holly Cervin, Director of Alternative Programs  
Sharon Tuttle, Executive Assistant to the Board of Education

Boreal Sun Charter School Representatives:

Tal Harlan  
Deborah Bennett  
Stephanie Graf  
Karl Hough

**Boreal Sun Charter School Request** [0:00:37]

Superintendent Dr. Karen Gaborik and Melanie Hadaway, executive director of curriculum, reviewed the administration's charter school information included in the agenda packet. Boreal Sun Charter School representatives Tal Harlan, Deb Bennett, Stephanie Graf, and Karl Hough reviewed the charter school application, provided information on the Waldorf education model, and answered questions regarding the charter school's application. The charter school hoped to open in the fall of 2017.

## **Boreal Sun Charter School Request (continued)**

The purpose of the Boreal Sun Charter School (BSCS), according to its charter application, was to provide Fairbanks with an alternative educational option that utilized the philosophy of Waldorf Education. Waldorf Education strived to meet students' readiness at each age and stage of development, and the curriculum was designed to reflect that. Movement, experiential, and artistic elements were incorporated into every subject, so children had a hands-on experience of learning. Teachers aimed to teach the whole child – the head, as well as the heart and hands.

Some of the methods long employed by Waldorf Schools were found to now be sound practices in education, such as arts-integrated subjects and play-based kindergarten. A great emphasis would be placed on penetrating subjects deeply and thoroughly from many different perspectives. The charter school wanted children to see, smell, taste, feel, think, and live in the world as fully as possible.

Points that would set the new charter school apart from others:

- Lessons would be cross-curricular and arts-integrated to provide in depth study of each subject.
- Introduction of subject matter would correspond with the developmental age of students, meeting state standards at their own pace.
- The daily routine would be structured with recognition of a child's natural learning rhythms.
- Kindergarten would be play-based.
- Children would keep the same teacher and class group (also known as looping) for grades 1-5 and 6-8.
- Students would make their own text books.
- Technology use would be limited, particularly in the elementary years.
- Foreign language instruction would begin in first grade.

The charter was confident a significant number of families would likely take advantage of the charter school. The charter's Academic Policy Committee consisted of nine members – three parents, one parent/teacher, three teachers, and two community members. The charter planned to start initially with kindergarten through seventh grades. They anticipated capping kindergarten at 20 students and the other grades at 24. If the school was full, it would have an enrollment of 188 in its first year. In its second year, the charter anticipated growing one additional grade – 8<sup>th</sup> grade and hiring one additional teacher. The charter would deliver special education services that complied with district policy and state and federal laws.

A location had not yet been finalized for the charter school, but the group had a few options under consideration. The charter school was committed to offering transportation in at least a limited form by collaborating with the district to combine busing needs with any current bus routes once the school location was finalized. Having the school site close to public transportation was a high priority for the group.

Boreal Sun Charter School's enrollment period and lottery would take place in the spring of the year of enrollment. All prospective students in grades K-5 the first year of the school's opening, and growing to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, would be given the opportunity to enroll. The following groups would be given preference for admission to the charter school:

- children of founding families (as determined by the APC);
- students of Waldorf homeschool families (first preference for the first year);
- students enrolled in BSCS (after the first year);
- siblings of students currently enrolled in the school (after the first year; siblings are defined as any two or more students who share a legal parent/guardian);

## **Boreal Sun Charter School Request (continued)**

- children of employees of the school;
- six (6) percent of enrollment would be reserved for “neighborhood” students as determined by the APC; and
- all other applicants not listed in the above categories.

During the first year of operation, the charter recognized the need to start with a strong seventh grade class to be fiscally responsible. For that reason, the charter might decide to begin the first year with only K-6 if they did not have full enrollment for their seventh grade class. That decision would be made by the APC after the enrollment process was completed for 2017.

### **Board Member Comments/Questions**

Board discussion ensued. Item for discussion only; no action required. Board members had questions and comments regarding the diversity of the charter school; class sizes; and building and location options. There could be a strong correlation between the location of the charter school and the diversity of the school. Board members also asked about the lottery process and the limited number of vacancies outside the priority preference slots, as well as, budget, salaries, and the possible financial impact of the charter school on the district if it pulled students from the regular brick and mortar schools.

Other topics of discussion included the transition of new students who might come to the school in the upper grades; the offering of an Athabaskan language; meeting the needs of students with disabilities; determination of looping bands; and transportation options.

The charter school would continue work on their charter application, location options, and aligning policies to the district’s policies as needed. A location could not be finalized until the charter was approved. The administration anticipated the charter school request would come before the board for action at the August 2 Regular Meeting. The charter application was due to the state by September 1 for consideration.

President Haas asked board members if another work session on the charter school request was needed prior to the request coming before the board in August. Board members did not express a need for another work session. President Haas requested the charter application be supplied to board members well in advance of the August 2 meeting in order to give them enough time to thoroughly review it. Ms. Harlan thought the application would be completed by the end of June.

Board members appreciated the work of the charter group; it was good to offer options as outlined in the district’s strategic plan. They thanked the charter school representatives for attending the meeting and addressing the board’s questions. It took a tremendous amount of work to develop and start a charter school.

The board took a break at 8:22 p.m. and reconvened at 8:32 p.m. [1:33:10]

### **K-8 Options** [1:33:26]

Dr. Gaborik explained the agenda packet included the research results from the K-8 Workgroup and school tabletop groups. The groups consisted of administrators, staff, and parents. Dr. Gaborik reviewed the administration’s K-8 options for the board’s consideration:

- Status Quo: Continuation of current schools and structures.
- Self-selection to K-8: Option for any current elementary school to shift to a K-8 structure. One year of planning was recommended with a tentative opening date of fall 2017.

## **K-8 Options (continued)**

- Tanana Feeder System: Re-configuration of the current Tanana elementary feeder schools to K-8. It would include options for parents to select either a K-8 or a middle school setting for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. One year of planning and administrator support were recommended, with a tentative opening date of fall 2017.
- K-8 Magnet: Development of a new K-8 magnet school at a location to be determined. Two years of planning and administrator and secretary support were recommended, with an opening date of fall 2018.

## **District Recommendation**

The administration recommended both the Tanana feeder system and the self-selection to K-8 options.

## **Rationale**

Re-configuring the Tanana feeder system to a K-8 model had the potential to fulfill multiple aspects of the Personalized Learning goal and related objectives in the school district strategic plan. This option would re-direct students in the Tanana Middle School feeder system to Ryan Middle School or Randy Smith Middle School (boundaries to be determined) and allow the Tanana Middle School building to be re-envisioned for programs such as an Innovation High School and/or Independent Learning Center, BEST, Teen Options, and/or career technical education programming expansion. A minimum of one year for planning and communication, as well as additional administrator support was recommended, with a transition occurring in fall 2017. Re-visioning of programs for the Tanana Middle School building would take place over the next two years. It would be important to keep in mind there would be costs associated with starting new personalized learning programs as well as with restructuring current programs in a new location.

Self-selection to K-8 would allow elementary schools across the district the opportunity to consider the shift to a K-8 model. One year for planning and communication were recommended, with initial implementation beginning in fall 2017. This approach could continue beyond 2017, as the district implemented initial programs and developed a successful transition template for school communities to consider.

Sandra Kowalski, assistant superintendent and K8 workgroup facilitator, walked the board through the K-8 Options Report, including:

- past information from the Barnette Magnet School process;
- research about grade configuration in schools;
- program and facility capacity information;
- K-8 survey results gathered by the K-8 Workgroup;
- K-8 Workgroup considerations;
- feedback from PTSA meetings at each middle school;
- district 9<sup>th</sup> grade student data;
- cost projections and potential impacts developed by departments;
- transportation snapshots for scenarios;
- middle school and magnet school staffing costs;
- Title 1 considerations (by Helen Clark, director of federal programs); and
- boundaries.

Ms. Kowalski also provided an update on the district's full-day kindergarten pilot at Hunter, Joy, and Ladd Elementary Schools.

## **K-8 Options (continued)**

### **Board Member Comments/Questions**

Board discussion ensued. Item for discussion only; no action required. Board members had questions and comments regarding class size as it related to full-day kindergarten; professional development; offering other possible options such as a 7-12 school; the administration's recommendations based on the district's strategic plan; reutilization of the Tanana Middle School building; the efficiency of opening a second magnet school rather than a K-8 option; the issue of redoing boundaries versus feeder school attendance; sports programs; transportation; diversity; personalized learning options for all students; curriculum concerns such as science labs; and the option of allowing schools to make individual grade offerings to meet the needs of their community.

A majority of board members expressed support for a K-8 model and the administration's recommendations. There was some support expressed for another magnet school, perhaps offering a four-day school week, as well as allowing individual schools to explore grade offerings to meet the needs of their community. President Haas summarized the board's input – continue work on the K-8 Tanana feeder schools, allow other elementary schools to be innovative and explore individual options, and don't lose sight of a possible magnet school in the future, including a possible 7-12 model. She also summarized the board's direction for the administration to continue working on the K-8 Tanana feeder schools and with self-identifying schools that were interested.

The administration recommended the K-8 Option be included as an agenda topic at two Regular Meetings in the fall to allow for additional public input and formal board action. The topic could be a report on the September 6 meeting and an action item at the September 20 meeting.

Board members expressed their appreciation to the administration for their work on the K-8 and magnet school options.

### **Board Comments/Announcements** [3:16:28]

Dr. Gaborik reminded everyone of the Personalized Learning conversations on Thursday, June 9 and Thursday, June 23. Schools needed to work for students. Dr. Gaborik applauded the board for their vision and willingness to explore new options.

The meeting adjourned at 10:18 p.m.

Submitted by Sharon Tuttle, executive assistant to the Board of Education