

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOARD OF EDUCATION

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Regular Meeting

MINUTES

December 16, 2008

President Hajdukovich called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Board Room of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue. Woodriver Elementary School's Choir led the Pledge of Allegiance and then performed for the Board under the guidance of Lucile Hackett, music teacher.

Present:

Leslie Hajdukovich, President  
Wendy Dominique, Vice President  
Sue Hull, Treasurer  
Patrick Lee, Clerk  
Kristina Brophy, Member  
Sean Rice, Member  
Howard Thies, Member  
Michael Fitzgerald, Base Representative  
Ken Sample, Student Representative

Absent:

Timothy A. Jones, Post Representative

Staff Present:

Nancy Wagner, Superintendent  
Wayne Gerke, Assistant Superintendent – Secondary  
Dave Ferree, Assistant Superintendent – Facilities Management  
Mike Fisher, Chief Financial Officer  
Kathy Hughes, Executive Director of Alternative Instruction & Accountability  
Peggy Carlson, Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction  
Bob Hadaway, Executive Director of Special Education  
Clarence Bolden, Executive Director of Human Resources  
Jim Cobb, Executive Director of Technology & Information Systems  
Bill Bailey, Director of Public Relations  
Gayle Pierce, Director of Labor Relations  
Elizabeth Schaffhauser, Director of Employment & Educational Opportunity  
Louise Anderl, Director of Federal Programs  
Traci Gatewood, Director of Grants & Special Projects  
Sharon Tuttle, Executive Assistant to the Board

Others:

Cynthia Klepaski, Assistant Borough Attorney

**PRELIMINARY ITEMS**

**Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities**

Lathrop Principal Karen Gaborik and Grants and Special Projects Director Traci Gatewood presented achievement data, a broad description of Smaller Learning Communities, and the structures specifically proposed for Lathrop High School.

Mrs. Gatewood provided a brief overview of the Smaller Learning Communities, the potential funding for Smaller Learning Communities, and the requirements that had to be met if the district was to pursue federal funding for the implementation of Smaller Learning Communities at Lathrop High School.

## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

Smaller Learning Communities were a group of structures, strategies, and activities designed to improve student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students. Structures, strategies, and activities were designed to challenge all students with high expectations, help students connect what they learned in high school to the real world and foster supportive relationships between students and adults.

The overarching expectation was that all students and teachers would perform at a higher level. While all students might not choose to attend a four year college upon graduation, the goal was to ensure all students had the choice to attend. Over the last few weeks, there had been a lot of discussion about freshmen teams and career academies, which were two examples of specific structures within Smaller Learning Communities.

The district did not currently have a grant to plan or implement the Smaller Learning Communities. However, federal funding was available through the Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program. The program provided grants to school districts to support the implementation of Smaller Learning Communities. The application process for the grants was very rigorous and usually required a year or more of planning. The grant amount was up to \$1.25 million over 60 months.

The district began exploring the possibility of applying for the federal grant in the summer of 2006. Recognizing that the turnaround time was too short for a 2006 and even possibly a 2007 grant application submission, a planning team that consisted of Lathrop teachers, counselors, support staff, and Mrs. Gatewood began fleshing out the feasibility of implementing Smaller Learning Communities at Lathrop. Guided by a desire to improve the educational experience for all students at Lathrop, the district initiative to improve secondary education, best practices, and federal grant requirements, the team worked to take a nebulous idea and transform it into workable structures and strategies.

While opportunities for input were provided at each stage of the process and changes were made based on that input, it was clear that the administration could have done a better job of communicating with parents throughout the process. The good news was, it was not too late. What had been proposed so far was just that, a proposal, a basic framework, a place to start. The district was by no means at the end of the planning process. Many decisions still had to be made and there was still ample time for parent input. No grant had been submitted to the federal government and without Board approval, no grant would be submitted.

While decisions regarding the Smaller Learning Communities should not be driven by the potential of a federal grant, should the district pursue federal funding for the implementation of the Smaller Learning Communities at Lathrop, funds had to be used in the following manner:

1. To provide intensive interventions to assist students, who entered high school with reading/language arts or mathematics skills that were significantly below grade level, to “catch up” quickly and attain proficiency by the end of 10th grade;
2. To enroll students in a coherent sequence of rigorous English language arts, mathematics, and science courses that would equip them with the skills and content knowledge needed to succeed in postsecondary education and careers without need for remediation;
3. To provide tutoring and other academic supports to help students succeed in rigorous academic courses;

## Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)

4. To increase opportunities for students to earn postsecondary credit through Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, or dual credit programs;
5. To deliver comprehensive guidance and academic advising to students and their parents that included assistance in selecting courses and planning a program of study that would provide the academic preparation needed to succeed in postsecondary education, early and ongoing college awareness and planning activities, and help in identifying and applying for financial aid for postsecondary education.

In addition, the district must provide an assurance that students would not be placed in structures, such as career academies, according to ability or any other measure, but would be placed at random or by student/parent choice and not pursuant to testing or other judgments.

Finally, the funders expected that the district would have carried out sufficient planning and preparatory activities to enable the administration to implement the proposed project during the school year in which the grant award was made and that there was sufficient support from teachers, school administrators, parents, and community stakeholders to implement the project.

Ms. Gaborik outlined the most recent draft of proposed structures, strategies and activities. The reform efforts were in response to Lathrop's demographics and data. Ms. Gaborik quoted a parent comment from last year's parent opinion poll, "Lathrop needs to stop looking at the data and address its issues" – which was what they were trying to do.

Ms. Gaborik reviewed some of Lathrop's demographics and the proposed Smaller Learning Communities were in response to those demographics.

- 45% of students failed to graduate within a four year period.
- 55% of graduating seniors did not have the required 3.0 GPA necessary to enroll in the University of Alaska Fairbanks as non-probationary, degree seeking students.
- Only 12% of students completed one or more AP courses in 2007-08.
- Lathrop's dropout rate was one of the highest in the district.

The first structure was the **Freshman Teams**. Lathrop currently had two Freshman Teams with approximately 50% of all freshmen. The goal was to expand it to four teams next year to include all freshmen. In the Freshman Teams, three teachers worked closely with students where half the freshman student day (3 classes) would be spent on the Freshman Team and the other half of the day students would mix with other students in the rest of their classes.

The second structure was the **academies**. In developing the academies, Lathrop had looked at what they had done well and had a history of doing well, and focused on those areas. Ms. Gaborik listed the proposed academies:

- Fine Arts and Communications
- Business and Information Technology
- Engineering and Technical Careers
- Natural and Social Sciences
- Suggested addition from parent meetings: General Studies Academy

## Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)

Within each academy, pathways and possible electives had been identified that students could pursue. As students explored electives in the earlier grades and grabbed onto something they were very interested in, they could talk about what their post secondary interests were and how they could get there, whether by training, a job, or college. The idea was to also increase the relevancy so students could connect what they were doing in high school to their post secondary interests. As well as help focus on what they were doing in high school to help reach their post secondary goals. A big part of the academies, once in place, would be to establish the business partnerships so that post secondary bridge opportunities could take place, such as job shadowing and internships. Some of that was happening already, but it needed to be expanded and make it much more available to many more students.

One idea of the academies was a Senior Capstone Project. Each academy would develop Senior Capstone Project options for their academy. Elective credit would be offered through Senior Seminar for students who wished to complete capstone projects. Capstone projects could include internships, job shadow experiences, senior research for a particular course, mentoring for 9<sup>th</sup> graders through the freshman transition/orientation program, subject-specific projects such as creating an elementary school yearbook or newspaper, community service project, successful completion of an AP course, etc. Senior Seminar would be submitted as a pilot course proposal by December 15, 2008. Through these options, it was hoped seniors would take more classes and have fewer excused periods.

The third structure was the ***Academic Intervention and Credit Recovery and Skills Development***. Under this structure, there would be two options – an Academic Intervention Center which would definitely require funding. The idea would be to provide intensive individualized tutoring for students who needed it during the school day. It could include remediation for students who had very low reading levels, specifically focusing on helping students raise their reading scores. Referrals would come from counselors, parents, and teachers, to catch students who were starting to fall behind in class before it became too late.

The Credit Recovery and Skills Development option was a focus for the older students to provide for credit recovery during the school day. Students could choose to recover credit through outside credit sources, retaking, or taking additional classes. Another option was through the after school programs which was sometimes difficult for students to access so the idea was to offer support during the school day to students trying to recover credit. English and math were key areas – English 9 and English 10, Integrated Algebra, and Algebra I – if students failed those classes or any other classes in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they were at an extremely high risk for dropping out. The Credit Recovery and Skills Development structure would start with two teachers whose goal would be to help students who had lost credit to recover that credit and achieve their high school diploma.

All schools were being asked by the administration to take a close look at their bell schedules. The district had brought up a bell-scheduling consultant in October to work with teams from each of the high schools and middle schools in day-long workshops to assess building priorities and ways to meet those priorities. High schools had come up with the following priorities districtwide: teaming with common planning time, flexible scheduling that included time for shorter and longer periods, expanding elective and other course offerings, reducing the number of failures, providing more opportunity for academic intervention, providing structures to help failing students, and time for meaningful personalization with students

Lathrop's proposed bell schedule was very similar to what North Pole High School was currently using. The proposed schedule would eliminate the rotating cycle and allow for common staff collaboration time with a late start day on Tuesdays. On the late start days, the busses would

## Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)

still run their normal schedule, but the school would provide academic options at school, such as library and computer lab access and tutoring, for students who rode the bus. Students whom did not ride the bus would have the option to arrive later at 8:30 a.m. Monday and Friday would be anchor days when every class period met. Dimond High School in Anchorage had the same schedule and had been utilizing it for the past four years. Ms. Gaborik would be visiting Dimond High to look at their high school and engineering programs in January.

The student advisory period would be built into the schedule for thirty minutes every Thursday. The student advisory period was the opportunity for teachers to work and keep track of a small group of students to help develop the personalization aspect of the student's academic career. Each teacher would have approximately 16-20 students and all teachers would be involved; there would be no preps during the Advisory period. Academy teachers, administrators, and counselors throughout the school year would respond to specific student learning needs and develop advisory topics and groupings. Teachers could choose to collaborate with their colleagues for advisories. Different groupings could be used for different activities. The goal of advisories was to meet a variety of student needs while developing a relationship with a teacher in the building.

Ms. Gaborik listed some advisory period activities:

- Grade level topics
- Subject-specific tutoring
- Advisory teacher makes personal contacts – grade and attendance checks, home contacts
- Interest assessments
- Career exploration
- Counseling curriculum
- AP Courses – extra time with AP teacher
- Senior Capstone Projects
- Academy-wide activities (guest speakers, presentations, etc.)
- School business – planners, school and district rules, health screening, school pictures, Monday Morning Lathrop, student forums, assemblies)
- Monthly themes (related to school/community events)
- Group-building activities (academy-wide)
- Special topics such as financial planning
- Resumes and applications
- How to Read My Transcript: Graduation Credit Check
- How to use Premier and FILE

Teacher Professional Learning Communities would allow for 70 minutes of teacher collaboration time one day per week on Tuesdays. This would not be individual teacher prep time but collaboration time for teachers to take a critical look at curriculum and instruction and analyze student data to assess what they were teaching was what students were learning. If students were not learning, they could collaborate to determine what they could do to respond. The collaboration would be a very structured time with a high level of accountability.

The last piece of the structure would be classroom assignments. There would be a specific area of the building for each academy, but classes with specific facility needs would remain status quo (science, art, music, business, drafting, engineering).

## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

Lockers for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders would have their lockers together and be located in the Freshman Team/academy areas. Currently the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Freshman Teams already had their lockers together and close to their team teachers so they could support the students during their transition time to high school. Lockers for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders would be throughout the rest of the building.

Ms. Gaborik stated information on the proposals was available on the school's website at <http://www.northstar.k12.ak.us/schools/lth/index.html>. She also announced the upcoming focus groups and other upcoming events.

- ◆ Tuesday, January 6, 2009 – Focus Group  
**Academic Intervention Center and Credit Recovery & Skills Development Option**  
(Lathrop Library at 6:00 p.m.)
- ◆ Wednesday, January 7, 2009 – Focus Group  
**Advisories, Teacher Professional Learning Communities, and Bell Schedule**  
(Lathrop Library at 6:00 p.m.)
- ◆ Thursday, January 8, 2009 – Focus Group  
**Freshman Teams**  
(Lathrop Library at 6:00 p.m.)
- ◆ Tuesday, January 13, 2009 – Focus Group  
**Academies**  
(Lathrop Library at 6:00 p.m.)
- ◆ Wednesday, January 14, 2009  
**General Information, Update, & Input**  
(Hering Auditorium at 6:00 p.m.)

### BOARD QUESTIONS

Mrs. Dominique thought the proposed Smaller Learning Communities were wonderful programs and a long time in the coming. She wished her children were still in school so they could participate in the program. She could see a lot of benefit from the program. Mrs. Dominique was very happy to see “financial planning” as one of the advisory topics. She asked if it would be available for all students. Ms. Gaborik stated it had been determined that financial planning was something all students needed. There was currently a segment of the Freshman Team where budgets and other things were discussed, but it was something all students needed, especially seniors. Mrs. Dominique thought it would be good to start it around 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Her children had participated in consumer economics in their senior year and agreed it was needed for all students.

Mrs. Hull asked how many students currently rode the bus to school. Ms. Gaborik said on paper there were approximately 300 students that rode the bus, but when they had counted the students, it could be as low as 200 students on some days. Mrs. Hull noted 200-300 students out of approximately 1,200 students. Ms. Gaborik agreed and noted it was more the younger students that rode the bus.

Mrs. Hull asked how student contact time would be impacted with the new proposed schedule. She had noticed on the bell schedule the total number of instruction time per week was 1,499 minutes, but asked how it compared to the current schedule. Ms. Gaborik did not have the specific information with her, but could get it. Mrs. Hull wanted to be sure student contact time was not being reduced.

## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

Mrs. Hull asked if they were looking at ways to have students earn college credit, other than through AP courses, through UAF similar to the Early College Program at Effie Kokrine Charter School. Ms. Gaborik stated TVCC and UAF were interested in providing the option of college credit and it was something that would be looked at.

Mrs. Hull noted the 60-month grant and asked if there was a sense of how much of the proposed academies would be implemented by the 2009-2010 school year. Ms. Gaborik thought the skeleton structure would be in place and then build upon that. It would take significant amounts time to build the advisory boards and community partnerships. In terms of teachers working together in the academies and building the post secondary bridge options, it would also take time. In Ms. Gaborik's mind, the proposed plans presented were the basics and the details would be built over the next five years.

Mrs. Hull asked how the plan had changed over the past couple of weeks with all the parent input that had been received. Ms. Gaborik said there had been three key suggestions – add the general studies academy; allow students to select a different academy at the end of each year during the registration period if their choices changed; and keep academy enrollments open and work staffing and space accordingly. She noted it had been decided fairly early in the planning process not to tie the Freshman Teams to any specific academy. Mrs. Hull clarified the administration was considering allowing students to change academies at the end of each year. Ms. Gaborik stated Mrs. Hull was correct; all students could change academies during spring registration each year.

Mr. Lee asked about students who wanted an elective that was not offered in their particular pathway. Ms. Gaborik stated many of the electives were already being offered and there was room to build more specific electives for each pathway.

Mr. Lee asked what was being done to ensure cohesiveness amongst the different academies. He would hate to see something that was suppose to better students do the opposite by dividing them. Ms. Gaborik thought there might be a bit of misconception about the academies because of what Hutchison High School did. There students decided on a pathway and focused on it. She wanted to be sure the electives were left open to all students. As an example she noted was there could be one teacher that taught AP English, but students would come from all the academies to take the course. There could be one journalism teacher and journalism might be an interest to students in more than one academy. Ms. Gaborik wanted to keep the electives open, but if a student really became interested in broadcast journalism, then they could focus down to specific classes they should take or consider possible job shadow opportunities to reach that post secondary goal. Ms. Gaborik thought the academies would allow them to focus energy and personalize education for the students. The personalization was a large piece of the academies.

In regards to the grant funding, Mr. Lee asked if it was required to have the program implemented prior to receiving the grant and if there was enough time to obtain the grant before the next school term. Mrs. Gatewood stated the grant application had not been released for the current year. The district was hedging their bet that funds would be available should the district decide to pursue it. The expectation with the grant was the district would be ready to implement some part of the plan in year one and not just planning in year one. Mrs. Gatewood stated that in previous years, the federal government had awarded grants just for planning, but they no longer awarded those grants; planning was expected to be done with the district's own funds. Mrs. Gatewood noted that was one reason the process had been in development for over a year. If the district decided to apply for grant funding, the plan would need to be flushed out enough that some part of it would be ready to implement some of the structures and strategies in year one.

## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

Mr. Rice asked about students that transferred in to the district and how they would be placed in the academies. Ms. Gaborik noted the process would be similar to what was currently happening. Counselors reviewed the students' transcripts and grades and advised students on courses and credits required for graduation. It would work very similar with the academies; counselors would work very closely with the students in determining their academy placement.

Mr. Rice asked if students could take classes from a different academy. Ms. Gaborik stated yes, they were trying to keep classes open so students could take classes from different academies.

Mr. Rice asked about Lathrop's current passing time. Ms. Gaborik stated Lathrop currently had a ten minute passing time. With the new schedule, the passing time would probably be seven minutes, very similar to what North Pole High School currently did.

Mr. Rice said he had heard from some parents who were very head strong about the academies not happening. Ms. Gaborik said from her experience so far, it was very clear the administration had to ensure that the options for the most successful students, the honor and AP students, remained intact. Those students could not be negatively impacted. As parents read through the information, the feedback had been generally positive. People understood what the school was trying to do; especially when they looked at the demographics and statistics. Ms. Gaborik stated the general comments had been the realization that something had to be done and they had questions about the Smaller Learning Communities. Ms. Gaborik felt as long as the school could ensure the students who were successful right now continued to be successful and had the options they currently had, it would work. There were students who were not successful at Lathrop High School and they needed to be addressed, along with the widening achievement gap and a rising dropout rate and decreasing graduation rate. Ms. Gaborik had to be responsive to all students.

Colonel Fitzgerald thought it was a great program and applauded the creativity and risk taking. He asked if the grant money would be spent primarily on additional tutors and teachers. Mrs. Gatewood said that would not necessarily be the case. The expectation of the federal government was that whatever was put into place would need to be sustained, so all the funding could not go into funding staff. The administration recognized that the academic intervention center was a key component to address some of the criteria that needed to be addressed. Some of the funding would be used to fund the positions for that structure, but in terms of other staffing, the grant money would not be used.

Mrs. Gatewood explained the grant expected a large part of the funding would be used for professional development because the program was new and they recognized that just because something was created that teachers wouldn't necessarily know how to do it all – like work with advisories or personalize the environment. Also, the government wanted to be certain the teachers had the time necessary to do the things that were needed for the program's success. Mrs. Gatewood stated a budget had not yet been drafted. The preliminary thought was to use the grant funding for the staff for the academic intervention center, professional development, and time for teachers to work with each other and the students.

Colonel Fitzgerald asked why the academic intervention center wouldn't be enough in itself to catch students up academically and keep them in school. Ms. Gaborik stated that there were a couple of additional pieces to the success of the program – the personalization of the environment and the idea of smaller learning communities was to take a large high school over 1,000 students and personalize that environment. Personalizing was not only having smaller class sizes, but more personalized teacher and student interaction. Increasing the relevancy of courses and increasing the focus on the post secondary piece was also very critical to the students' success.



## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

Colonel Fitzgerald asked about other schools that had used similar models and their success. Ms. Gaborik said a great deal of research had been done on the concept. The U.S. Department of Education had just published their 2008 report and when looking at the body of research, some schools had implemented the structures more successfully than others and in different areas had seen various degrees of success. Mrs. Gatewood said part of the planning process had been the selection of school districts with similar demographics that had successfully implemented Smaller Learning Communities and they had teleconferenced with them about lessons learned, successes, failures, etc. In the initial proposal quite a bit of those districts' best practices were rolled into Lathrop's initial proposal. Committee members had talked directly to the schools and from the grant perspective, had looked at grants that were awarded the funding and been successful in reducing dropout rates, increasing graduation rates, and reducing the achievement gap while ensuring that students that were already doing well continued to do well.

Mrs. Dominique asked about the grant not paying for academies, and the fact that Lathrop was proposing academies. Mrs. Gatewood stated the grant would pay for Lathrop to implement Smaller Learning Communities. The academies were part of the structure. What the grant did not want to happen was to take all the funding to fund staff, because at the end of the five year period, the district would not have funding to keep the staff onboard. The district needed to have a plan that allowed Lathrop to build its infrastructure and allowed teachers to be brought up to speed. It was like seed money and the district had to be sure that whatever was proposed could be sustained. What they didn't want to see happen was a successful program that had to be dropped in five years.

Mrs. Hajdukovich had heard comments that perhaps Lathrop was not big enough for the Smaller Learning Communities. She asked about the populations of the schools the administration had worked with. Ms. Gaborik stated the requirement was over 1,000 students and the schools they had contacted were 2,000 and 1,600.

Mrs. Hajdukovich had spoke to many people and two main concerns she had heard were keeping parents informed and whatever was making the current successful students successful would not be changed. Mrs. Hajdukovich thought Ms. Gaborik had done a great job responding to those concerns. Ms. Gaborik reiterated the dates and times for the upcoming information meetings, as listed earlier.

Mrs. Hajdukovich clarified that no part of the proposed plans were set in stone at this time and everything being discussed was still open for input and change and were simply proposals at the current time. Ms. Gaborik reiterated that no part of the proposal was set in stone and input and questions were always welcome. Mrs. Hajdukovich felt it was the perfect time in the process to give input and have questions answered. Ms. Gaborik completely agreed.

Mr. Thies mentioned regional student council members had voiced concerns during their recent luncheon with the Board and he asked if students had been attending the informational meetings and asking questions or providing input. Ms. Gaborik said there had been a student forum where the proposed academies were presented and input was solicited. She would conduct another student forum presenting a bigger picture during the school day in January to solicit more input. Mr. Thies thought that was a good idea and it was important to have students involved.

Mr. Sample agreed that student involvement was extremely important. He had attended the regional student council luncheon and had also heard a lot of negative feedback from students. He asked what kind of feedback had been received from the students overall. Ms. Gaborik thought some of the students' initial concern was about not knowing what academy they might

## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

want to select. Students were concerned they would be stuck in one academy or with specific electives. Ms. Gaborik said some students who had asked questions and understood the concept and had already gone to their counselors wanting to sign up for an academy.

Mr. Sample asked about current juniors who would be seniors next year and what process would be used for determining their academies. Ms. Gaborik said they would have the same opportunity to select their academy as any other student. She thought some seniors would have a clear idea of which academy they wanted, while others would not. She said many of the juniors becoming seniors knew what they needed to graduate and she did not see it changing much for seniors next year. Mr. Sample thought it was important to continue to get the information out to students.

Dr. Wagner commended Ms. Gaborik, her staff, the planning committee, and Mrs. Gatewood for their hard work on the project. She encouraged parents and students to become involved and engaged in the process. There was a lot of potential to address test scores and the dropout and graduation rates at Lathrop. Dr. Wagner was excited about the opportunities and she realized the project would look different in the end, but thought there were some great opportunities for the students and school.

Mr. Lee asked about the implementation timeline. Mrs. Gatewood stated there were two potential timelines. If the district was going to pursue funding, the grant application was expected to be out in late January to early February with a due date of late March to early April. If the district planned to apply for the grant then the district needed to have the plan flushed out by that time. If the district determined it was not the year to apply for the grant, then the planning could continue and implementation could slow down depending on the will of the Board and the administration. Mrs. Gatewood reiterated the grant application had not yet been released for the current year. All indications were the funding would be available for the upcoming school year. The grant was very competitive with hundreds of school districts applying, with usually 40-50 being awarded. Mrs. Gatewood cautioned that even if the district applied for the grant, there was no guarantee of an award. She thought the thorough planning process the district had undertaken and would continue to work on made the district very competitive. Because the district's need would be significant, it would weigh in the district's favor.

Mrs. Dominique asked about the pros and cons of going forward or waiting to apply for funding. Mrs. Gatewood stated if the district waited to apply, it would be certain there would be no additional funding to work with. If the district went ahead and applied, there would be the possibility of having \$1.25 million over 60 months to help implement the program. Mrs. Gatewood thought it was a very careful balancing act. That was why the application process was not rushed because even with still receiving input and making changes, there might come a point where the changes made would not allow the district to apply for the grant because there was something the district needed or did not need that was a requirement of the grant, making it impossible to meet the requirements and apply for the grant. Mrs. Gatewood agreed with Mrs. Hajdukovich it was the perfect time. If the goal was to continue to improve secondary education in the district, now was the time to have the discussions – to determine, as a district, where they stood and where they were trying to go. Mrs. Gatewood said even with all the parents that had attended the December 9 meeting, there still were not enough parents. She would like to see even more parents, more diverse parents to participate and submit input. It was a significant change, not only for Lathrop, but for the entire district.

Ms. Gaborik added the idea was sustainability and it couldn't be about the money. Many of the proposed changes did not cost money on the face of it; it was getting the basic structures in

## **Spotlight: Lathrop Smaller Learning Communities (continued)**

place. There was a lot of work to be done once the basic structure was determined. While the money would certainly help and would limit certain things if the district did not receive it, there were other things built into the program that were very valuable and should be looked at. Ms. Gaborik felt a decision had to be made soon on whether to go forward with the proposals so they could be prepared for spring registration, which was approaching soon.

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked Ms. Gaborik what the plan for Lathrop would be if the grant did not happen or the district decided they were not ready. Ms. Gaborik said they would look to see what they still wanted to put into place.

### **AGENDA**

BROPHY MOVED, DOMINIQUE SECONDED, TO ADOPT THE AGENDA WITH CONSENT ITEMS.

The following consent items were moved:

accepted accept the Alaska Railroad Youth Summer Employment Program grant in the amount of \$29,000, per Fiscal Note 2009-31.

accepted the Monthly Management Reports for November 2008.

approved the minutes from the regular meeting November 18 and the work session on December 1, 2008, as submitted.

approved Denali and Nordale Elementary Schools' request to raise funds to send students to Homer, Alaska, May 2-4, 2009, to explore coastal ecosystems and Alaska Native culture, at no cost to the district.

approved West Valley High School's request to raise funds to send students to Washington, D.C., January 17-22, 2009, to attend the Presidential Inauguration Ceremonies, with West Valley using professional development leave to cover substitute costs.

accepted the gift of \$1,450 from University Park PTA to University Park Elementary School for the purchase of Raven-proof trash can lids.

accepted the gift of twenty DVD players, valued at \$1,799.80, from the Woodriver Elementary School PTA to Woodriver Elementary School for classroom instructional use.

accepted the gift of \$4,125 from Alyeska Pipeline Service Company to Lathrop High School to be used for the school's first Tech Challenge.

approved the Personnel Action Report for the period November 24-December 10, 2008.

acknowledged the Personnel Information Report the period November 25-December 10, 2008 has been provided.

acknowledged the Superintendent's Budget Transfer Report for November 2008.

acknowledged the Expulsion Report for the 2008-2009 school year, as of December 11, 2008.

acknowledged the Board's Reading File.

acknowledged Coming Events and Meeting Announcements.

ADVISORY VOTE. 2 AYES

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE. 7 AYES

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS**

Kathleen Meckel, 3035 Riverview Drive, an educator at Effie Kokrine Charter School, was speaking on behalf of the school, her students, and their families whom she served. The middle school had been very successful with the students at Effie Kokrine Charter School. She had a student, with a discipline file, who had transferred to Effie Kokrine at the end of the count period. Ms. Meckel believed the student had been bullied at other schools. He had been an ideal student and was doing wonderfully at Effie Kokrine Charter School. She was appreciative that students could transfer around the district. The students were experiencing success in gaining their cultural knowledge, not only Alaska Native, but Pilipino, Dutch, and German – the cultures she had in her classroom. Blended along with the Western, students were receiving a stronger grounding in their identity and validating who they were. They were working as a community creating a family within her classroom and the junior high wing.

Ms. Meckel said it had been a long struggle in the community for Alaska Native adults. She said she knew that to be true because she was an Alaska Native adult. She said it was even more of a struggle for the children once they went to school. The Native children in the district, in the schools, experienced racism in the fourth grade and she knew that because she had taught fourth grade. Both her children had attended fourth grade in the district. Ms. Meckel said Effie Kokrine Charter School had been a pleasant answer to some of the harsh realities the students dealt with. Effie Kokrine Charter School provided a safe place for students where they were cared for.

Parents were welcome at the charter school and for too long, working in Fairbanks, Ms. Meckel had heard from colleagues who had asked why Alaska Native parents didn't visit the classrooms. Ms. Meckel said it was because of certain attitudes. At Effie Kokrine Charter School not only did parents come in, but so did aunties, uncles, grandmas, and grandpas. Ms. Meckel felt it was a pleasure to work at Effie Kokrine Charter School. Ms. Meckel genuinely loved the students she served as well as their families and she was glad they had adopted her. Many of her students, although not relatives, referred to her as their auntie. Ms. Meckel would take any student in and she adopted them all. She appreciated the support people in the community were showing the charter school, even those that did not have a student at the school, but who felt strongly about the educational structure at Effie Kokrine Charter School.

Ms. Meckel shared some Effie Kokrine Charter School facts – 96% of the charter school's students learned through kinesthetic activities – using their muscles and their fingers, and 30% of the charter school students learned by reading and listening. Ms. Meckel wondered where the 30% of students would go if Effie Kokrine Charter School did not exist. She thought 30% was too low for the students to have any kind of success anywhere else where they had to be lectured to, when they did not know how or had a difficult time reading.

Margaret Wilson, 520 Aquila St., a long time community member, had been involved with Effie Kokrine even before there was a school. Ms. Wilson was very supportive of what was going on at the school. In talking with Effie Kokrine Charter School Principal Linda Evans, she had found 86% of the students attending the charter school were Native students. She felt very strongly that the community needed a place where Native students felt comfortable and where there was a good learning environment, and as Ms. Meckel had stated, not picked on. Students who came from villages with small populations often had a hard time adjusting to large schools. At Effie Kokrine, time was taken with each student to place them in the right classes and make their transition easier. Ms. Wilson recognized the budget concerns facing the charter school and urged the district not to cut the charter school's budget. If the budget was reduced the enrollment would need to be cut to 140 students. Ms. Wilson was certain the school could keep their enrollment at 150 and asked the district to reconsider keeping the budget level at its current level, rather than cutting it. She noted the school was only in its first few years of operation and had had two principals in that time. Ms. Evans was in her first year as principal. Ms. Wilson thought she was doing a good job and had many ideas to help with enrollment.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

Mandy Sullivan, 1161 Sunset Drive, an Effie Kokrine Charter School teacher, spoke about the definition of student success at the school. When she looked at the students at the charter school she asked how they would be doing at a different school and would the student continue the year, much less their education. She was before the Board to remind them that the students at Effie Kokrine Charter School were a population that was very emotional because they carried a lot of baggage.

Ms. Sullivan was born and raised in Fairbanks, having gone through the Fairbanks school system. She tells her students about her experiences while in school, not to say they would have the same experiences, but many of the families still experienced some of the same things she had in school. Ms. Sullivan shared her experiences; she had graduated but school had been a struggle for her. Her struggle was impounded by watching her last friend drop out of school during the first week of December of her junior year. She thought it was hard to be in a large school like Lathrop, and to be a junior and alone.

At Effie Kokrine Charter School, students were not alone. There were many students that came and went at the charter school, but there were still students that took the time to come to school and took the time to listen, even when they were having a hard time. They dealt with large obstacles such as sexual abuse, neglect, racism, and other things no one wanted their children to experience. Effie Kokrine staff took the time to meet with the students and listen to them. They allowed them to focus on being a student and their education, something they didn't get the opportunity to do at a school like West Valley, Lathrop, or Monroe. Ms. Sullivan had friends and family that had attended those schools and they were being herded. It was very difficult to be someone that was very emotional and carried a lot of baggage and deal with that baggage and try to be a student. They didn't like the feeling of being ignored, talked down to, or being condescended in any way. Ms. Sullivan thought a lot of people did it without acknowledging they did it, so it made it harder to acknowledge someone could feel that way.

Ms. Sullivan said at the charter school, they allowed the students validation. Students were allowed to feel like students. Ms. Sullivan reminded the Board that success to her was students coming to school and finishing the year. They took it one day at a time and reminded students that they had to take it one day at a time because it was the only way they were going to help them get through it to become very functioning self-sufficient adults in the community.

Beverly Weis, 1080 Woodview Drive, a CPA and Lathrop parent, commented on the proposed changes at Lathrop High School. Both of Ms. Weis' parents had graduated from Lathrop, along with herself, and her two eldest children and she currently had a junior at the school.

Ms. Weis had attended a meeting a couple of weeks earlier introducing the proposed changes at Lathrop to Fairbanks business members. The proposed effort to have a better connection between Lathrop and the business community was met with many positive thoughts and questions. Ms. Weis' perception was the business community had many enthusiastic and supportive members that would like to help students through their academic process.

Ms. Weis was particularly interested and enthusiastic about the Freshman Teams. She had noticed a growing trend in colleges to offer freshman programs to entering students in an effort to improve success rates. Ms. Weis' daughter applied and participated in a program similar to the one Lathrop had proposed when she was a freshman in college in 2005. In speaking with her daughter, she agreed the proposed changes would be a valuable addition to Lathrop. She believed that the Freshman Team program could help bring a sense of community and belonging to incoming freshmen, particularly those that were not already involved in sports or clubs. There were numerous variations on these types of programs at the college level, but a universal theme that was well stated on the Santa Ana College website regarding their

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

programs stated, “studies suggest that students who participate in this type of program tend to graduate and exceed their predicted GPAs at higher levels compared to a similar group of students who did not participate.” Ms. Weis believed the same could be applied at the high school level, as so many colleges were doing.

Ms. Weis also had the opportunity to speak to some Lathrop teachers at the parent meeting regarding the proposed changes. She found it refreshing to hear their enthusiasm for getting to know and work with students on a more consistent level, as would be found in the Smaller Learning Communities. The teachers were excited to be able to work together and collaborate with each other as they worked with the same students. It would also allow them to coordinate projects and papers to avoid some of the overload and duplication of work that students might incur currently. The Lathrop administration had been very open to comments and suggestions and they had made adjustments to their proposals based on parental concerns. Ms. Weis believed the administration was working hard to come up with some concrete actions to address the education and graduation issues faced at Lathrop. She thought the school had to adopt some changes because different results could not be expected without change. Ms. Weis believed Lathrop offered a superior education to all those that wanted to take the opportunity. The challenge was getting more kids to want to make use of the opportunities available to them. Ms. Weis thought the Lathrop administration was working towards that goal with the proposed changes.

LaVern Demientieff, 409 Cindy Drive, a parent of a ninth grader and a member of the parent committee at Effie Kokrine Charter School, couldn't have been more proud of the school and its unique characteristics. Ms. Demientieff thought Effie Kokrine Charter School was a strength and asset not only to her son and the Native community, but to the entire Fairbanks community and the State of Alaska.

Ms. Demientieff felt it was essential to support and nurture assets such as Effie Kokrine Charter School. The school built stronger students, stronger families, and stronger communities. The school had helped to shape and confirm her son's identity at a time in his development where it was essential to shaping the rest of his life. She was very grateful for that.

Since Ms. Demientieff's son had started at Effie Kokrine Charter School he had increased his pride and knowledge in his culture. He had participated in the World Eskimo Indian Olympics, as a form of athletics in the school. He had participated in community service activities such as serving elders at the Tanana Valley State Fair. He had cut up moose meat and participated in putting together a potlatch for the community. He had played guitar with other charter school students at the Native Fiddler's Festival and danced the two-step with fellow students and community members. He had taken on early college classes and flown to Seattle with another student and staff to represent Effie Kokrine at the Early College Conference. The events and activities were examples of opportunities students had at the unique charter school.

Effie Kokrine Charter School promoted diversity and awareness. The relationship building and community connections were undeniable. The school had only been in existence for four years. As with anything positive and preventative, it took time to show results. The urge to want immediate results needed to be resisted and to have patience and look at the larger picture and long term ramifications of what the charter school offered the community.

As a member of the parent committee, Ms. Demientieff knew parents were committed to the charter school. She was committed to the school. The current year alone, the parent committee in collaboration with the school and teachers had raised money for the Battle-of-the-Books, the sports program, the Halloween carnival, dances, and much more. Ms. Demientieff had seen

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

first hand how hard the teachers and principal worked in collaboration with parents to organize all the different events and to make school a fun and safe learning environment. The charter school was working; it took time. The charter school was an asset. Ms. Demientieff encouraged all Board members to visit the school and show support and understanding for the school by providing full funding for the school next year.

Jenny Bell-Jones, 308 Noyes Street, a member of the Fairbanks Native community since 1996, she had volunteered a lot at Effie Kokrine Charter School. Ms. Bell-Jones volunteered because she loved the kids, but also because as a child of mixed race, her own failure to connect with the mainstream school that had not valued her culture or recognized her different ways of learning could have been very different had there been an Effie Kokrine Charter School. Unfortunately, there wasn't. Ms. Bell-Jones felt the sense of disconnection with education fueled alcoholism and addiction. By the age of 14, Ms. Bell-Jones had dropped out of school completely. The sense of disconnectedness that had started in school followed her through her life. For twenty-two years of chronic addiction and alcoholism, reconnecting to her community took years of hard work and a lot of help from friends. Many years of active citizenship had been lost because of it.

With schools like Effie Kokrine Charter School, Ms. Bell-Jones said it did not have to be that way for students today. Students did not learn the same way and students needed to see their cultures valued. A school like Effie Kokrine Charter School allowed for differences, while at the same time fostering strong community ties, which was badly needed. Ms. Bell-Jones respectively asked the Board provide the funding the charter school needed to expand its services and outreach so that the young people in the community who did not quite fit in the mainstream schools stayed connected to education and never had to go the places she had went. She could guarantee that most of those places were places most Board members had not been.

Ms. Bell-Jones suggested the Board look at the school as a growing business. Businesses took at least five years to establish. During that period of time, they needed investment, energy, and commitment. Ms. Bell-Jones asked the Board to give that investment, energy, and commitment to Effie Kokrine Charter School.

Anne Hanley, 1469 Goshawk Lane, a community member, spoke about a great program she had been involved in at Effie Kokrine Charter School. Ms. Hanley was a playwright and screen writer and a former Alaska Poet Laureate. She had been asked by Denakkanaaga to write a play about Athabascan Elder Sidney Huntington, which she had been honored to do. Mr. Huntington's book, *Shadows in the Koyukuk*, had been one of her very favorite Alaska books. The reason Ms. Hanley had received the commission was the Denakkanaaga received a grant from First Alaskans Institute to have a program at Effie Kokrine Charter School where by the students at the school would learn about all aspects of theatrical production, including acting, technical aspects, directing, and all other parts of theater. The students did it by performing a play, hence Ms. Hanley's play about Sidney Huntington. The students received early college credit for their acting and learning. The rehearsals began last January and the play was performed in May at Salisbury Theater at UAF, to packed audiences during all four performances. Thirty Effie Kokrine Charter School students received early college credit for their participation. With the help of UAF, the show was webcast for Mr. Huntington, who was 93 years old, in Galena; it had been very thrilling for everyone involved.

Ms. Hanley had seen a tremendous grow in the students from January to May. When they had started out, many of them had never been to a play. Many students had been to movies, but not a real play. In the beginning, students didn't know what was involved or how to act, but by May, they were a top-notch team, and Ms. Hanley was extremely proud of them.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

Ms. Hanley felt she had learned much more from the students than they had from her. She learned the kids had a tremendous ability to act together to make something happen. She felt working with the students had been tremendously empowering. It took many people to make the play happen – Kathleen Meckel, Amelia Ruerup, every teacher in the charter school, as well as many parents. Ms. Hanley encouraged the Board to take a good look at Effie Kokrine Charter School. As a community member, she thought there was something wonderful happening at the charter school and she hoped there would be more programs like it in the future.

Linda Evans, Effie Kokrine Charter School Principal, thanked the Board for their support and continued funding through the year. Ms. Evans recognized the burden on the district for the second time and was very appreciative of the funding. She requested the Board consider fully funding the charter school next year. The school had not met the 150 enrollment requirement by the official count day, but by October 17, the school had 150 and since then had between 150-160 students. Ms. Evans knew of at least eight more students that would be transferring to the school next semester. She believed people were finding out about the program and parents wanted their students enrolled at the charter school.

Ms. Evans said Effie Kokrine Charter School was a good small school with 86% Alaska Native population. She was very humbled to hear the people who had testified before her in support of the charter school. As her first year as principal, she recognized all the hard work and troubles before her tenure. Ms. Evans was appreciative of the continued funding for the rest of the year and requested that the school be allowed to hire a behavior intervention specialist for the rest of the year to help with some of the problems. As the only administrator in the building, she had to take care of the discipline issues, as well as be an instructional leader for the staff. It was very difficult doing both by herself. The staff was small, with only ten teachers and a couple office staff and one registrar. Ms. Evans asked the Board's permission to hire a behavior intervention specialist for the rest of the year.

Mrs. Dominique had visited the school and supported the school. She wanted to know if there was more that could be done to get the word out to the community and increase the school's enrollment. Ms. Evans said the school was developing and implementing a recruitment plan. With their Early College Grant, the school had been able to hire a full-time early college coordinator and part of her job was to help with recruitment.

Mrs. Dominique asked if the recruiting effort would be started earlier in the year next year. Ms. Evans stated yes, the school had open enrollment as students came. Information meetings had already been set up with the elementary feeder schools.

Mr. Rice asked if the school had contacted any of the Native corporations to get the word out in their newsletters. Ms. Evans said contact had been made with the regional corporations and Native organizations in Fairbanks to help get the word out. They also planned to attend their meetings to continue to get the word out.

Daisy Stephens, 1841 Hilton Avenue, thought there needed to be a school like Effie Kokrine. She wished there had been one when she attended Lathrop, then she wouldn't have been a dropout. Ms. Stephens knew prejudice was alive and well in the schools. She knew when students came in from the village there was a lot of cultural shock for them. Ms. Stephens was aware of the official enrollment count in October and the other schools did not talk about their students failing until after the enrollment count. When school administrators noticed that, it would be the time to transfer students to Effie Kokrine Charter School so the charter school's enrollment would make the cutoff count. Ms. Stephens knew for a fact it wasn't done until the count was complete.



## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

On another topic, Ms. Stephens was very concerned about a recent article in the paper regarding the district and federal grants. To her, the article was misleading. The way she had read it, it sounded like the Natives did not know how to fill out applications. But it was her feeling that if the district had done their job correctly, the situation wouldn't have existed. Ms. Stephens felt a program was run and successful if the person running it was successful, not ignoring things and missing deadlines. According to the article, it made it look like the Natives were at fault and Ms. Stephens did not believe that was correct.

Ms. Stephens had wondered why the district never acknowledged anything about Natives doing anything. She said they acknowledged them, but there was a NAACP Month and Cinco De Mayo in May. Ms. Stephens would like the Board to know there was a Chief's Day in March and she would like to see the Board acknowledge Natives in the community. Ms. Stephens felt it would help in breaking the barriers. Ms. Stephens thanked the Board and wished them luck. She felt Effie Kokrine Charter School was very important and hoped it continued.

Bob Marok, 735 Hobbit Hill Drive, although he had not come to speak on Effie Kokrine Charter School, was encouraged by the support of the people who testified. The story that Ms. Bell-Jones shared was unfortunately, more common than most would care to acknowledge. Mr. Marok applauded Ms. Bell-Jones for sharing her story. He hoped there was a way to keep the charter school going.

Mr. Marok wanted to speak about the Lathrop academy proposals. Although there had been a lot of discussions on the pros and cons of the program, he had failed to see anything but positive outcomes using the concept. He did not claim to be an expert on the Smaller Learning Communities concept and there might be some negatives he was not yet aware of, but he had not seen them. After attending a couple of the Lathrop meetings and reading the proposed implementation strategies, he hadn't been able to identify any negatives, just positives.

From what Mr. Marok had seen, most things remained the same – class choices, curriculum, graduation requirements, etc. In fact, the only thing he had been able to decipher from the plan was two positives – the smaller number of teachers each academy would have, which would allow the teachers and students in the academy to better understand and know each other. Teachers would be able to better assess the strengths and weaknesses of individual students when spending more than one year together. It took time for teachers to do it all, and after teaching for twenty-nine years, Mr. Marok recognized that fact. As a parent of a child that had been fortunate to have some great teachers two and three years in a row at Lathrop, Mr. Marok knew it first hand. Yesterday, they had received a phone call that had sent them over the top. It was awesome news about a recent test his daughter had taken. His daughter's response was it had to do with the connections she had made with the teachers that had made the difference. Mr. Marok noted lightly that she hadn't given any credit to her family.

The other positive Mr. Marok saw in the plan was the ability for students who knew what career path they wanted and to be able to study in depth along those interest levels. He recognized there were some educational concerns at Lathrop in regards to graduation rates and student achievement in certain areas, but he was impressed the Lathrop staff was acknowledging the concerns. Mr. Marok applauded them for wanting to make positive changes. Status quo was not good enough. For them to be looking at the concept and proposals was great. It didn't mean everything had to change. The academy plan allowed for steps to address the issues of concern without throwing out the positive things that were already happening at the school.

Mrs. Dominique noted Mr. Marok had made a suggestion at the Lathrop parent meeting regarding the suggested general studies academy.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

Mr. Marok had thought that instead of dividing the teachers into five academies, to leave them in the four academies that had been planned. The students that did not have an academy they wished to attend could go into the intended general studies, but not have separate teachers for the general studies academy. That way the students could go into the various academies and take whatever classes they wanted, but it would not water down the staffing. Mrs. Dominique thought Mr. Marok's suggestion would reduce the concern of students being in academies without their friends. Mr. Marok agreed.

Mrs. Dominique noted that Mr. Marok was the reason her son graduated from school and she extended her thanks to him.

Martha White, 509 Wilcox, a parent of a student at Effie Kokrine Charter School, wanted the Board to know her son had taken part in many of the same activities mentioned earlier. He had also gone on some hunting trips with some other parents, although they were not school related, they had been really good activities for him. Her son had gotten a moose and learned a lot. He learned how to cut it up and serve it at Howard Luke's birthday potlatch. Ms. White stated her son had many opportunities at Effie Kokrine Charter School that he would not have had at other schools. Prior to attending Effie Kokrine, her son had been very introverted and did not have many close friends. Since attending the charter school he had become more outspoken and extremely opinionated now, and the learning styles aspect had been amazing for him. It would be very difficult to go back to the traditional school once exposed to the learning styles method. Ms. White noted her son was a kinesthetic learner and even at home he joked with her about not being an auditory learner so he didn't hear her when she asked him to take out the trash. Her son was thriving at Effie Kokrine Charter School and she implored the Board to fund the school. Without it, she felt her son would get lost in a larger school.

Ms. Meckel had asked Ms. White to share that the students at Effie Kokrine Charter School who struggled with various obstacles of racism, sexual abuse, and neglect were allowed to let their defenses down and feel like real students should. Young children could focus on their education and not their troubles. All of it was done without a vice principal, nurse, counselor, behavior specialist, hallway monitor, and other positions traditional schools might have.

Don Shircel, 1130 Eriophorum Drive, director of Client Development Division at Tanana Chiefs Conference, expressed Tanana Chiefs Conference's deepest concern regarding what they understood to be a proposed reduction in the operational budget for Effie Kokrine Charter School. The Tanana Chiefs Conference had been a longtime supporter of the school district's efforts to assure the widest range of learning opportunities and methods available to give every student the best chance to reach their full potential. Tanana Chiefs Conference had joined numerous agencies throughout the years in supporting the district's alternative high school, the Howard Luke Alternative School, and likewise, the Effie Kokrine Charter School. Tanana Chiefs Conference believed the principal and teachers at the charter school offered their students and the entire community a uniquely Alaskan environment in which to learn and grow. It was an environment that deserved to be nurtured and supported by the Board and by the entire community. Mr. Shircel understood what to be a proposed operational budget of \$850,000 amounted to only 60% of the estimated \$1.4 million estimated to be needed to continue the school's operation at its present staffing level. Neither the need for, nor the student enrollment of the Effie Kokrine Charter School had declined by 60%. Its budget and the Board's commitment to learning for the entire community deserved the support of the whole community. That was why the Tanana Chiefs Conference strongly supported restoring the proposed operational budget of the Effie Kokrine Charter School to its full funding level.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON NONAGENDA ITEMS (continued)**

Participants at the recent Tanana Chiefs Conference sponsored Interior Education Summit, which some of the Board members had attended and where Dr. Wagner had presented, voiced support for the type of learning environment provided by Effie Kokrine Charter School. Its graduates and the testimony heard through the evening suggested that it was an environment many students, especially those with family roots in rural Alaska, were able to thrive and achieve. Effie Kokrine Charter School provided an environment that personalized learning, and increased the relevance of education. It was the district's original small learning environment. While other schools in the district were striving to create the very same type of learning environments, Effie Kokrine Charter School was already there. Tanana Chiefs Conference asked the Board to consider fully supporting the charter school.

Eric Galloway, 575 Sprucewood Road, a math teacher at Effie Kokrine Charter School in his second year of teaching, voiced his support of Effie Kokrine Charter School. From the testimony he had heard through the evening, people were in support of the Smaller Learning Communities at Lathrop and he noted they already had that at Effie Kokrine Charter School. The charter school had a personalized environment for all students. Mr. Galloway knew his students at Effie Kokrine better than he ever did at other schools. Effie Kokrine Charter School offered early college credits and by the time some of the juniors or seniors were through school, they would have enough credits to be done with their first semester of college. Mr. Galloway reiterated that what was being strived for at Lathrop was something Effie Kokrine Charter School already had and what was working for the students. Many of the students were from the villages or from troubled families and at the charter school Mr. Galloway had been able to spend way more time with them than he ever did at West Valley. When he had 120 students it was difficult to keep tabs on each individual student's family or what was happening in their life. But at Effie Kokrine, he had been able to do that very well. Mr. Galloway asked the Board to support the charter school.

The Board took a break at 8:54 p.m.

The Board reconvened at 9:03 p.m.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

Included in the Consent Agenda.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Resolution 2009-03: Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

School Board Resolution 2009-03 honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and proclaimed the week of January 19, 2009, for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. activities throughout the district.

DOMINIQUE MOVED, BROPHY SECONDED, TO APPROVE RESOLUTION  
2009-03: HONORING DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AS SUBMITTED.

Mr. Lee read the resolution for the public.

Elizabeth Schaffhauser, director of employment and educational opportunity stated the district would be sponsoring a luncheon that would honor the youth in the community who were volunteers, as well as adult volunteers. Also, the district honored two students who were eligible to win \$1,000 scholarships from the Martin Luther King Foundation in Fairbanks. The community event would also honor Dr. King's legacy of community involvement by encouraging people not to take a day off on the holiday, but participate in community service.

## **Resolution 2009-03: Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (continued)**

### BOARD QUESTIONS

None

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

### BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Rice thought the luncheon was a great event. He had enjoyed previous guest speakers such as Mr. Lee and had also been a past recipient of the Martin Luther King Service Award. Mr. Rice encouraged everyone to attend.

ADVISORY VOTE. 2 AYES

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE. 7 AYES

## **Resolution 2009-04: Approving Restatement and Amendment of Fairbanks North Star Borough School District 403(b) Retirement Plan**

Effective January 1, 2009, tax exempt organizations administering 403(b) Retirement Plans for their employees must, among many other changes, have a written plan document in place authorized by the governing body. Resolution 2009-04 approved the district's 403(b) plan document, an administrative regulation regarding the 403(b) plan, and established a benefits plan committee and authorized that committee to take the necessary actions to implement the plan and administrative regulation. The plan document and administrative regulation were provided under separate cover.

HULL MOVED, DOMINIQUE SECONDED, TO APPROVE SCHOOL BOARD RESOLUTION 2009-04: APPROVING RESTATEMENT AND AMENDMENT OF THE FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 403(B) RETIREMENT PLAN.

Dr. Wagner stated in August 2007 superintendents had been notified that they would be responsible for administrating 403(b) plans, which had not been the case in the past. Since that time the superintendent's association had sent a tool kit out to use to help develop a plan. Chief Financial Officer Mike Fisher, along with others, had been working on selecting a vendor to help the district administer the 403(b) plan.

Mr. Fisher stated the plan and administrative regulation were before the Board to meet compliance requirements of the new 403(b) regulations. The language in the resolution, the administrative regulation, and the plan document was provided and recommended by the district's third party 403(b) administrator to help meet the technical requirements of the new law.

On July 26, 2007, the IRS published final regulations on 403(b) retirement plans. Tax-exempt organizations such as the school district were allowed to sponsor 403(b) plans for their employees.

For those not familiar with the terminology, a 403(b) plan was a retirement savings plan that was funded by employee contributions. They might also have matching employer contributions, but that was neither the district's practice nor intent.

The new regulations would become effective January 1, 2009. The deadline to have a written plan was extended to December 2009, but districts still had to meet all the new compliance requirements of the new law.

## **Resolution 2009-04: Approving Restatement and Amendment of Fairbanks North Star Borough School District 403(b) Retirement Plan (continued)**

The district completed a solicitation process earlier this fall and selected Gatekeeper Administration & Consulting L.L.C., as their independent third party administrator. Gatekeeper would independently handle the administration and management of the 403(b) plan, helping reduce employer liability by handling 403(b) plan design, administration, management, and compliance requirements. They would also audit all existing accounts for any technical deficiencies and monitor all future transactions for compliance issues.

Compliance with the new IRS regulations required official School Board action. The Board was being asked to consider and approve the following resolution: *Resolution Approving Restatement and Amendment of Fairbanks North Star Borough School District 403(b) Retirement Plan.*

The resolution was in a format a little different than the district normally used, but met certain technical and legal requirements, and was the form recommended by Gatekeeper. The resolution approved the *Fairbanks North Star Borough School District 403(b) Retirement Plan* and the *Administrative Regulation Regarding Funding Vehicle(s) / Vendors(s) Selection and Deselection*. The resolution also established a benefits plan committee and authorized the committee to take action as necessary to implement the plan and administrative regulation.

The 403(b) plan itself was about sixty pages long, and covered a number of plan options and technical considerations. The plan complied with new IRS regulations. The regulations, generally effective on January 1, 2009, would fundamentally change the way that section 403(b) plans were administered, with significant implications for plan sponsors, service providers, and participants. Among the many changes, the regulations required that a 403(b) arrangement be maintained pursuant to a written plan, impose important new restrictions on transfers between plan funding vehicles, eliminate some longstanding rules that made it easy for 403(b) plans to meet non-discrimination requirements, and, overall, impose greater compliance obligations on plan sponsors.

The plan document contained a table of contents of the items addressed in the plan. With Gatekeeper's guidance, district administration tried to select plan options that paralleled the exiting plan as much as possible, where advisable, and where permitted by law.

Generally, the district's plan still provided that all employees were eligible for the plan, still had options for plan loans and hardship withdrawals, allowed for catch-up provisions as permitted by law, and allowed frequent change of deferral elections.

With the change in IRS regulations many investment providers had decided to opt out of the 403(b) market. Or continue to offer investment products but use what was called a custody platform vendor. Some companies were not prepared or did not want to go to the expense of modifying their systems to meet the new compliance requirements. Using an approved custody platform vendor was an option.

Because of the employer liability now associated with 403(b) plans, only those investment providers who had agreed to sign Gatekeeper's group investment provider service agreement or use a custody platform vendor who signed the agreement would continue to be district providers.

Gatekeeper already had signed agreements with many of the investment providers that the district had used in the past. But there were a number of employees who would have to change investment providers if they wished to continue their elective deferrals after January 1, 2009.

## **Resolution 2009-04: Approving Restatement and Amendment of Fairbanks North Star Borough School District 403(b) Retirement Plan (continued)**

There was a three dollar per month fee per active participant. The district would be paying for plan set-up fees and the cost of auditing all existing accounts, but participating employees would be paying the monthly fee. In many cases, but depending on which investment was selected by the employee, monthly fees may be paid by the investment provider. Otherwise, the monthly fee would be considered an individual account plan administrative expense by the investment provider and deducted directly from the employee's custodial account or annuity contract.

Through the week the district had been busy getting a list of participating vendors and various forms up on the website. The district was still in the transitioning phase. They were sending letters to all employees through the week, and separate letters to employees who had to select another investment provider.

The administration encouraged employees to talk with their local agents. Those the district knew about had also received some information this week. When all was said and done, employees would be able to go on-line themselves or while they met with their agents, and be able to access all the necessary Gatekeeper forms.

### **BOARD QUESTIONS**

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked about the differences with a 403(b) plan and 401(k) plan. Mr. Fisher stated the new laws made them much more inline with each other. The 403(b) plan was very similar to the 401(k) plan except the 403(b) was for non-profit organizations.

Mr. Lee asked about matching contributions. Mr. Fisher stated there were no matching contributions.

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked if participation was voluntary. Mr. Fisher stated participation was completely voluntary.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

### **BOARD COMMENTS**

None

ADVISORY VOTE. 2 AYES

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE. 7 AYES

## **INFORMATION AND REPORTS**

### **Attendance Achievement Report**

Superintendent Nancy Wagner presented a report that focused on the positive relationship between student attendance and achievement as measured by Alaska's Standards Based Assessments (SBAs), dropout rate, and grade point averages.

There were three A's that contributed greatly to student success: attendance, attitude, and achievement. The research and analysis completed for the report focused on attendance and its relationship to student achievement. Attitude was the other key to student success. Having a good attitude about school was a big step in improving attendance and ultimately achievement. The positive impact of good school attendance on academic achievement was greater than some might think.

## Attendance Achievement Report (continued)

The focus of the report was to determine if there was a significant, positive relationship between student achievement in the district, as measured by Alaska's Standards Based Assessment (SBA) and Grade Point Averages (GPA) and student attendance in grades 3-10. All data used for the study was taken directly from the student management system, PowerSchool Premier, and the district report card from the state. The report was based on the most recent information available for student proficiency scores and attendance averages.

When analyzing reasons for absences from school, it was found that they went beyond illness or a death in the family. Students were absent due to family vacations, athletic events, peer pressure, truancy, good weather or bad weather, hunting, fishing, taking care of siblings, etc. Much research reflected that school attendance was one of the most important factors associated with progress in school. Having highly effective teachers in the classroom was THE most important factor; however, students must be present to benefit.

The report provided graphs that displayed a profile of attendance rates and various educational measures (dropout rate, proficiency rate, Senior HSGQE pass rate, and Continuing Senior rate). Students were grouped as being in the "high" attendance group (90% and above), the "mid" attendance group (80%-89%), or the "low" attendance group (below 80%).

Student achievement was affected in a negative way by absenteeism. Students having an attendance rate below 80% missed over six weeks of school during the year. The low attendance group had a 19% dropout rate as compared to 1.0% in the mid-attendance group and 0.3% in the high attendance group.

Good attendance effected student success. High attendance was those at 90% or above, mid attendance was 80-89%, and low was below 80%. There were 69% in the high, 20% in the mid, and 11% in the low. Low attendance students enrolled had missed more than 6 weeks of school.

Dropout rate and GPA was also affected by attendance rates. Students with higher absenteeism were at greater risk for dropping out and lower GPAs.

Dr. Wagner reviewed the recommendations to address low attendance rates and trancies.

- ❖ Conduct public forums in late January or early February
  - Raise awareness of the importance of good attendance and the relationship to student success by sharing data.
  - Discuss issues impacting attendance and possible solutions.
  - Gain input from stakeholders on what an effective attendance policy should include.
  - Explore possible attendance incentives.
- ❖ Place the survey on the web to receive input from parents, teachers, and students.
- ❖ Review and revise the current attendance policy (based on input from stakeholders).
- ❖ Schedule a work session in late February to discuss a draft of policy revisions and make adjustments desired by the Board.
- ❖ Place a draft copy of the policy on the web for public comment.
- ❖ Adopt the revised policy and develop a communication plan.

## **Attendance Achievement Report (continued)**

Dr. Wagner announced the tentative dates for the public forums, January 27 and January 28. After the forums, the survey would take place for a couple of weeks. After the survey, a team would compose a draft, with a Board work session scheduled around the end of February or the first of March. With the timeline, there would still be time to communicate the new policy to parents before the beginning of the next school year.

### **BOARD QUESTIONS**

Mr. Lee agreed with the concept of low attendance and low achievement. He thought that perhaps something needed to be done to increase the connection piece between students and school during the second semester. Dr. Wagner agreed and it would be one advantage of the Smaller Learning Communities, teachers having more of a connection with students throughout the entire year.

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked about some of the data and was it the disengagement that caused the lack of attendance or was it the students were not doing well because they weren't showing up. In the lower grades, the parents had more of an impact on the student's attendance. If the students were showing up and still weren't doing well, then you knew there was a problem. But they had to show up to determine which it was.

Mr. Lee asked when the majority of low attendance happened. Dr. Wagner did not have the information immediately available but she could ask for it.

Colonel Fitzgerald understood there were no state truancy laws. Dr. Wagner explained there was a compulsory attendance law for ages 7-16. Colonel Fitzgerald did not know how the data corresponded with other states but he thought the best way to combat the problem was to get the parents involved. He really liked the forums and thought they would work best.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

### **BOARD COMMENTS**

Mrs. Hull thanked the administration for the report and recommendations. She liked the idea of the forums and suggested looking at having forums at each school or one big community forum, similar to the one done for math a few years back.

Mrs. Hajdukovich acknowledged the Board was in agreement of going forward with Dr. Wagner's plan.

## **Teacher Recruitment Report & Analysis of Hires for 2008-09**

Clarence Bolden, executive director of human resources, and Elizabeth Schaffhauser, director of employment and education opportunity, presented a report on the teacher applicant pool and provided an analysis of hires that had occurred to date for the 2008-2009 school year.

Mr. Bolden explained the report had been expanded to include classified and exempt employee groups. The district began accepting applications for all positions via the district's new Internet-based system, Applitrack in March 2008.

Due to resignations, leaves of absences, and retirements, the district had hired eighty-four certificated staff members including seventy-four teachers, five assistant principals, and five principals. The number of new teachers represented a turnover rate of 7.8%; which equated to a retention rate of 92.2% of the district's teaching staff.



## Teacher Recruitment Report & Analysis of Hires for 2008-09 (continued)

The report showed that of the seventy-four teacher positions filled to date, 10.8% were filled with known minority applicants. Two of the five assistant principals hired were African American and two of the five principal hires were Alaska Native. Sixty-five of the teachers hired were either from the area (fifty-five) or from within the State of Alaska (ten). The report showed that 16% of all building subs were minorities.

To-date, the district had hired one hundred ninety-five classified employees. Of those hired, 27.2% were of known minority status, with every minority classification represented. Nearly 20% of the total classified staff was identified as minorities. The district continued to attract a diverse applicant pool and as a result had been able to make some increases with diversity within the workforce.

Mr. Bolden updated the Board on the "Growing Our Own" Support Staff to Teacher Program. The program was designed to develop future teachers from within current district staff. Support employees with a degree would have the opportunity to go back to school at UAF to obtain their secondary teaching credential while continuing their employment with the district. The Support Staff to Teacher Program was a vital part of the district's "Grow Our Own" initiative. The district was scheduled to begin a new program cohort this summer with graduation and certification completed in May 2011.

HULL MOVED, THIES SECONDED, TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO EXTEND  
THE MEETING UNTIL 10:15 P.M.

ADVISORY VOTE. 2 AYES

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE. 7 AYES.

The UAA Administrative Cohort continued as another part of "Growing Our Own" initiative. Seven teachers were selected this school year to become FNSBSD-UAA Administrative Cohorts. Three graduates from the program last year had been placed in principal positions and one graduate was serving as a district administrative intern. The district was continuing this program with a brand new class of seven cohort members: Cori Anthony, 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at University Park; Jeffrey Jacobson, math teacher at North Pole Middle; Annie Keep-Barnes, head teacher at North Pole Academy; Belinda Kinn, ITT at Instructional Technology Services; Bruce Merritt, counselor at Ryan; Kathy Port, Curriculum Coordination at Administrative Center; and Barbara Sperl, 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Ticasuk Brown. The administration looked forward to 2010 when this cohort completed the Type B Certification and became eligible for administrative and principal positions in the district.

The Recruiting Roundtable had been a constant during the last three and half years serving a vital role helping the district in general and human resources in particular design a better process to attract and retain great employees. The Recruiting Roundtable was expanding the membership of the committee to include community members beginning in January 2009. The administration was excited about the growth and looked forward to gaining better insight and increased strategies as a result of the change.

During the current school year, the administration would work with the Future Teachers of Alaska (FTA) on a student gathering to promote youth pursuing careers in education and connecting to the statewide FTA Program. The District would sponsor its own job fair again in March 2009 and continue to encourage employees to become involved in the Support Staff to Teacher Program especially in content areas that were hard to fill; they would continue to work with the assistant superintendents' office supporting the UAA Administrative Cohort Program; and would work with the special education department to develop effective ways to recruit more therapists and psychologists.

## **Teacher Recruitment Report & Analysis of Hires for 2008-09 (continued)**

The administration would continue to work with UAF and UAA to develop other programs designed to promote and “grow our own” applicants and would continue to nurture the working relationships with colleges and universities across the country.

The District was in a similar position as other school districts in the country and continued to struggle to locate and hire therapists and psychologists. Mr. Bolden recommended the Board pass a resolution authorizing the reemployment of retired employees as a partial solution to this yearly dilemma to include occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, vision impaired, and hearing/deaf teachers. The administration would draft a resolution to bring before the Board in January.

### **BOARD QUESTIONS**

Mrs. Brophy asked what was being done to encourage military spouse applicants. Mr. Bolden said that last year the district had started meeting with the person responsible for finding jobs for people, but had not really followed up on it, so they would be following up with them this year. Mrs. Brophy thought perhaps military spouses might think the district would not be interested in them because of their rotation.

Mr. Bolden reviewed some upcoming job fairs the district was planning on attending in Minneapolis and the Alaska Teacher Placement job fair in Anchorage.

Mrs. Dominique asked if the connection with the university in Atlanta would continue without having to travel to Atlanta. Mr. Bolden stated yes, the relationship was still in place and would probably continue during years when the district did not conduct its own job fair.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

### **BOARD COMMENTS**

Mrs. Hull said it was discouraging to see the lack of African American teachers and the district had to continue to work on it, either through the district or through the community. There were students in the community that were interested but perhaps did not have the support Alaska Native students had.

Mrs. Dominique thought there needed to be more of a community outreach for African American applicants.

Mrs. Hajdukovich thanked Mr. Bolden and Ms. Schaffhauser for the presentation.

HULL MOVED, THIES SECONDED, TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO EXTEND THE MEETING UNTIL 10:30 P.M.

ADVISORY VOTE. 2 AYES

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY ROLL CALL VOTE. 7 AYES.

### **BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT’S QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS/ COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Colonel Fitzgerald was looking forward to more updates on the Smaller Learning Communities. He thought the Woodriver choir was great. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

Mr. Rice thought the Woodriver Choir was great. He was very interested in the Smaller Learning Communities. He encouraged parents and students to attend the upcoming meetings and forums. .

## **BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT'S QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS/ COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Mrs. Brophy agreed with the other Board members about the Woodriver choir and thanked them for their performance. Their performance helped put everyone in the holiday spirit. Mrs. Brophy appreciated Ms. Gaborik's presentation and all the testimony in support of Effie Kokrine Charter School.

Mr. Lee appreciated the reports and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

Mrs. Dominique thanked the Woodriver Elementary choir. Mrs. Dominique had commented to News-Miner Reporter Amanda Bohman regarding the smaller class sizes. She had been at Woodriver when she was there. She had visited a first grade class and the teacher had done a great job of keeping the class flowing.

In regards to Effie Kokrine Charter School, Mrs. Dominique would like to see a fact sheet so everyone knew the Board and administration was not against the school and supported the charter school. She felt the Native community needed to come together and get the students to school before the cutoff date. Perhaps go on a recruiting trip early in the year. Mrs. Dominique was in full support of Effie Kokrine's learning environments and thought they did a great job of helping students. But the Board needed the help of the school and community.

Mrs. Dominique had enjoyed the work session at Ryan Middle School and the proposed changes for the school. She encouraged everyone to get involved and to continue to get the information out to parents. She wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

Mrs. Hull thought Lathrop's administration had worked hard and there was a lot of promise. She appreciated all the opportunities for parents to participate. Ryan was beginning and the Board was trying to get the public involved and needed to get parents more involved. She thought it was important to have parent representatives on the committees and planning boards as plans were developed.

Mr. Thies appreciated the hard work on the Lathrop proposals. Change had to happen and he felt things were going in the right direction.

Mr. Sample wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

Mrs. Hajdukovich appreciated all the great comments and testimony.

Dr. Wagner commented about the recent article in the paper, referred to in earlier testimony. She apologized that the article had come out the way it had. The forms being completed incorrectly was the fault of no one, but the result of the auditor's interpretation. If the students' eligibility was not determined, funding would be lost, resulting in the possible loss of the ANE program. She thanked Mr. Cobb and Ms. Toohey for their work on helping to correct the problem.

Dr. Wagner wished everyone a Merry Christmas and had several other announcements:

- Race and Healing II Class coming up
- Student early outs on December 17, 18, & 19 for all students
- Schools would be closed December 22, 2008 – January 2, 2009 for Winter Break
- Teacher Work Day on January 5, 2009
- The Administrative Center would be closed December 25 & 26, 2008 and January 1, 2009.

The meeting adjourned at 10:27 p.m.

Submitted by Sharon Tuttle, executive assistant to the Board.