

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

Work Session

MINUTES

October 20, 2014

President Haas called the work session to order at 6:02 p.m. in the board room of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue. The work session was called to meet with the Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) regarding the Revised Implementation Agreement to the Mediation Agreement of February 1987 and to discuss the Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School Renewal Application.

Present:

Heidi Haas, President
Wendy Dominique, Vice President
Allyson Lambert, Clerk
Sue Hull, Member
Sean Rice, Member

Absent:

John Thies, Treasurer
Lisa Gentry, Member

Staff Present:

Dr. Karen Gaborik, Interim Superintendent of Schools
Mike Fisher, Chief Financial Officer
Sandra Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Instruction
Shaun Kraska, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Instruction
Kathy Hughes, Executive Director of Research and Accountability
Janet Cobb, Executive Director of Technology
Johanna Carson, Director of Community and Public Relations
Katie Sanders, Director of Library Media
Sharon Tuttle, Executive Assistant to the Board of Education

Revised Implementation Agreement to the Mediation Agreement of February 1987 [0:00:01]

The administration noted no major changes to the agreement, only minor editorial revisions. Steve Ginnis, Fairbanks Native Association executive director, stated the Revised Implementation Agreement to the Mediation Agreement of February 1987 was fine as presented. He felt FNA had a wonderful relationship with the district as it related to the agreement. FNA and the district had collaborated together on each of the points of the agreement.

BOARD QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Board discussion ensued. Item for discussion only. There was board consensus to have the agreement signed for the record by the presidents of the Fairbanks Native Association and the school board.

Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School Renewal Application [00:06:35]

Josh Snow, Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School head teacher, along with other school staff and Academic Policy Committee members reviewed the charter school's renewal application. The charter renewal application provided an analysis of the school's performance and outlined changes made to the school's education programs, curriculum, and goals over the first nine years of operation. Changes included:

Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School Renewal Application (continued)

School Calendar

Original Charter: Non-traditional school calendar with six-week sessions year-round.

Charter Renewal Application: Traditional school calendar with the addition of a week-long fall hunting break made up by starting one week early.

Curriculum

Original Charter: Spiral Curriculum based on three-week thematic modules integrating all core content areas (math, reading, writing).

Charter Renewal Application: In the high school, implementation of FNSBSD curriculum guided by the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools (with the exception of math) incorporated themes that followed the revised Curriculum Spiral.

Education Programs

Original Charter: No discussion of Early College Program

Charter Renewal Application: Students in 11th and 12th grades earn dual high school/college credit in classes that fulfill Core Requirements for bachelor, associate, and certificate programs.

Grading Criteria

Original Charter: Comprehensive and cumulative portfolio documenting work in each curriculum module. Academic evaluation not based on a letter grade policy (Waiver #979.1, 981.1).

Charter Renewal Application: For all coursework completed at Effie Kokrine, a minimum-passing grade of 70 percent is required. Graduation progress and eligibility for activities would be determined using the criterion (Waiver 973.1, 974.1).

Charter School Overview

The charter school's enrollment was presently at approximately 160 students in grades 7-12. The school was proud of its broad diversity of Alaska Native students, students of other ethnicities, and at-risk students. The school's structure and approach to schooling appealed to a broad range of students. The school also offered special education services.

The college course work offered through Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School was offered to students at no cost, funded through Native associations, scholarships, offerings at reduced tuitions rates, donations, etc. The school would be working on finding ways to stabilize the funding sources for college tuition fees. The school's goal was to help all students move from high school to some training to prepare them for life after high school. The school was still learning how to meet the needs of all students.

Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) Review

Steve Ginnis, Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) executive director, was mindful of the respected Elders for which the campus was named. He expressed FNA's support and appreciation for the charter school, but the FNA board had some concerns and questions about the charter school.

Mr. Ginnis asked for an explanation of the connection between the charter school and school district. Kathy Hughes, executive director of alternative education and research, explained charter schools were public schools under the governing body of the school district and abided by the district's negotiated agreements and policies, unless specifically waived. The day-to-day operations of the school were left to the charter school and their Academic Policy Committee (APC). The APC determined the school's leadership and specific line items of the budget.

Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School Renewal Application (continued)

Mr. Ginnis spoke to the grading policy, which was a concern with the FNA board. The board felt it was set up for failure. The FNA board was also concerned with the approximately 28 percent special needs students in the school and how the school would meet the special needs of students. They were concerned there was not sufficient staff at the school to meet the needs of students.

Mr. Ginnis appreciated the explanation surrounding the college portion of the school. FNA was mindful not every student was geared to going on to higher education. With that in mind, he felt there should be a balance. Some young people were more geared to vocational education. The charter school needed a balanced approach in the curriculum.

Mr. Ginnis stated another issue the FNA board was concerned about was the composition of the school's academic board – the Academic Policy Committee (APC). FNA did not believe it made sense to have staff on the board, especially when it came to initiating change. The FNA board thought having staff on the board would bring challenges to initiating changes.

Mr. Ginnis appreciated the school's goal of a 90 percent success rate, but cautioned about it being realistic or achievable. He liked the idea the school would work with each student to develop an improvement plan regarding improved attendance, but did not know if the school had a plan in place to meet that objective.

Mr. Ginnis was very concerned about the low proficiency rates in math, reading, and writing. He wanted to know who would be responsible for students having a clearly defined high school transition plan.

Mr. Ginnis spoke to the school getting away from the mentality of "it is our school and we'll run it however we want." The charter school needed to work more in collaboration with the school district. He saw areas where more collaboration was needed, especially in regards to special education needs. Mr. Ginnis also encouraged the charter school to reach out and collaborate more with FNA, the Doyon Education Foundation, and other Native corporations; it would benefit the school.

Mr. Ginnis did not want to be too critical, but had concerns that needed to be expressed. He reiterated FNA's full support of the school; the association thought the charter school had the potential to be a model school. FNA wanted the school to succeed and would do all it could to make it successful.

Kathy Hughes, executive director of alternative instruction and research, explained the composition of the Academic Policy Committee (APC) was guided by state regulation and required the inclusion of teachers, support staff, parents, etc. Mr. Ginnis understood there were state regulations regarding the APC, but as a 501C organization, wondered if the by-laws would trump the state regulation.

Mrs. Hughes explained district special education staff had been involved in the review of the charter application, specifically as it related to special education staffing and providing student services. She assured Mr. Ginnis the administration monitored special education staffing, services, and delivery throughout the school year.

Dr. Karen Gaborik, interim superintendent, stated the administration's concerns were with the charter school's grading policies, the early college focus, and student achievement. Dr. Gaborik stated the administration mirrored Mr. Ginnis and FNA in wanting the charter school to succeed. She appreciated the work of the charter school staff.

BOARD QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Board discussion ensued.

Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School Renewal Application (continued)

Board member questions included high school/middle school enrollments; how ANSEP might be integrated into the school; proficiency levels in math, writing, and reading; the school's transient population and its affect on student performance; attendance rates; provisional charter approval and yearly contract approvals; the state board approval process; increasing career-technical education offerings; and partnering with other Native associations and labor unions for increased student options and offerings. There was extensive discussion around the academic performance of students and grading.

The board was asked to consider three questions:

1. What recommendations does the board have regarding grading criteria?

Mr. Snow stated the charter school would convene a workgroup to provide input regarding the grading criteria.

Dr. Gaborik thought convening the workgroup might prolong the grading issue. She applauded the idea of the higher threshold of a 70 percent for passing, but voiced concern it may be setting some students up for failure. Dr. Gaborik's recommendation was to change the grading policy.

The board did not have a clear consensus on the school's grading criteria. It was interested to hear the APC recommendations.

2. What questions does the school board have regarding the early college focus?

The board questioned the college course completion rates; funding for college courses; and the difference between offering college courses and a college prep school.

3. What other questions does the school board have regarding the charter renewal?

The board questioned if there were options for a provisional approval or renewal for a specific number of years. Concern was expressed regarding the level of student achievement and proficiency. Board members also asked about the plan for connecting students to the school.

Dr. Gaborik expressed concern not all students were represented in the charter. She believed the charter should be expanded to account for the full diversity of the student body, for which the school was so proud. She did not want to see the early college focus diminished, but rather the charter expanded to be certain the needs of all students were being addressed.

Board members expressed their appreciation for the charter school and the work of the staff, the Academic Policy Committee, and Mr. Ginnis and the Fairbanks Native Association. The application renewal would come before the board at its November 18 Regular Meeting.

Board Comments/Announcements

None

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

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