

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

Work Session

MINUTES

December 1, 2014

President Haas called the work session to order at 6:00 p.m. in the board room of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue. The work session was called to provide the board with information on magnet schools and the elemiddle K-8 concept.

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

Present:

Heidi Haas, President
Wendy Dominique, Vice President
Allyson Lambert, Treasurer
Sue Hull, Member
Michael O'Brien, Member

Absent:

Lisa Gentry, Clerk
Sean Rice, Member

Staff Present:

Dr. Karen Gaborik, Superintendent
Mike Fisher, Chief Financial Officer
Lisa Pearce, Chief Financial Officer (incoming)
Sandra Kowalski, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Instruction
Shaun Kraska, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Instruction
Janet Cobb, Executive Director of Technology
Johanna Carson, Director of Community and Public Relations
Elizabeth Schaffhauser, Director of Employment and Educational Opportunity
Daniel Domke, Director of Career and Technical Education
Katie Sanders, Director of Library Media
Sharon Tuttle, Executive Assistant to the Board of Education

Magnet Schools & Elemiddle Concept [0:00:30]

The school board expressed an interest in expanded learning opportunities for students and asked to learn more about magnet schools and the elemiddle concept as possible options for providing families with additional educational options. Sandy Kowalski, assistant superintendent of elementary instruction, and Superintendent Dr. Karen Gaborik, provided the board with a brief overview of magnet schools and the elemiddle concept.

A magnet school was a free public school of choice operated by the school district. The district currently had one magnet school – Barnette Magnet School, which opened in 2005. Magnet schools typically had a focused theme and aligned curricula. Magnet schools were typically "hands-on – minds-on" and used an approach to learning that was inquiry or performance/project based. Magnet schools used state and district standards in all subject areas, however, the standards were taught within the overall theme of the school.

The concept of an elemiddle school was to combine elementary and middle school into one K-8 school. Two Rivers was currently operating as a K-8 school. The district also had two charter schools offering K-8 – Chinook Montessori Charter School and Watershed Charter School. There were benefits to combining K-6 and middle school grades 7-8 together, especially for middle school students as it would help support students with fewer transitions. The school could also offer smaller communities within the school that would focus on specific learning and developmental needs.

Magnet Schools & Elemiddle Concept (continued)

BOARD QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Board member and administration discussion included questions regarding building capacities and possible magnet school and elemiddle sites. Ms. Kowalski reviewed a couple of possible staffing scenarios. Barnette Magnet School was staffed at a slightly lower student-teacher ratio to meet the school's mission.

Other topics of discussion included student achievement as it related to magnet and other specialty schools; the importance of making decisions regarding educational opportunities based on community need and data; surveying the community regarding different educational options; providing the public with definitions, information, and possible town-hall meetings regarding the difference between magnet and charter schools and other possible learning options; how class sizes would be impacted at other schools if a magnet or elemiddle school was opened; several scenarios of alternative transitioning of grade levels; the possibility of piloting full-day kindergarten at one of the new concept schools; and the difficulty of the middle school years for some students.

The board agreed to include questions in their upcoming strategic plan community survey seeking interest in educational options such as magnet and elemiddle schools and full-day kindergarten. Once the board determined the community's interest in specific programs, they would like the costs associated with each program to help prioritize programs at budget time. The board was also interested in staffing considerations and human resources implications regarding new magnet or elemiddle schools.

There was extensive discussion on magnet schools including staffing and professional development; diversity and equity; parent engagement; costs; location and timelines; and the idea of magnet schools receiving start up funds from the legislature, similar to charter schools. The board agreed to add a legislative priority seeking to have magnet schools included in the legislature's recent legislation providing one-time start up funding for charter schools.

Board members asked about the timelines for opening either a magnet or elemiddle concept school. Dr. Gaborik stated it would depend upon the outcome of the strategic plan survey, but estimated that once a decision was made, the administration would need to gather a team, hire an administrator and support person to get started working on it, and would anticipate an opening in two years.

Board members were interested in community support for either a magnet or elemiddle concept school and implementation strategies for supportive community buy-in for the concepts. President Haas asked for and received board consensus to seek community input and interest in the educational opportunities through the strategic plan community survey. Board members voiced their support for including questions regarding educational options in the strategic plan's community survey which would hopefully be accessed through multiple venues including PowerSchool, the district's mobile app, email, the website, and by hard copy.

Board members appreciated the administration's recommendations regarding magnet and elemiddle schools.

1. As part of the strategic planning process, include questions in the community survey to determine the level of need and potential support for a new elemiddle or a K-8 magnet school in the community.
 - The board agreed to include questions in the strategic plan community survey.

Magnet Schools & Elemiddle Concept (continued)

2. Depending upon results from the strategic planning community input, consider Ryan Middle School or Hunter Elementary School as potential sites for a new K-8 magnet school.
 - After board discussion, it was determined the administration would work up costs and timelines for both schools for the board's review and consideration.
3. Approve 2014 – 2015 funding to support a study team for magnet school development and planning.
 - The board did not reach any consensus specific to funding a study team at the present time, but did agree funding to implement the strategic plan should be included in next year's budget.

Board Comments/Announcements

None

The meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

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