KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education
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M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: May 27, 2008

TO: Members, Board of Education

FROM: Sammy Crawford, President
Board of Education

RE: Board of Education Planning Session

In preparation for the Board of Education Planning Session on June 3, please find the following:

1. Planning Session Agenda (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. at Soldotna City Hall)

2. Long Range Plan (short version)
Full version is found at http://www.kpbsd.k12.ak.us/superintendent.aspx?id=9898)
Facilitator John Holst has asked each Board member to review the Long Range Plan and chose three priorities as the beginning discussion points for determining the School Board's goals.

3. Article titled *Team Leadership for Student Achievement*
As the former Superintendent of Sitka School District, Superintendent Holst's work was featured with the National School Boards Association. This article provides some background on who John is and what he potentially brings to the table as the facilitator of the planning session

I look forward to a positive and productive planning session.

Board Planning Session

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

Tuesday, June 3, 2008
9:00 A.M. – 5:00 p.m.
Soldotna City Council Chambers

----- Agenda Topics -----

9:00 a.m. **Long Range Plan Prioritization** *(to be facilitated by Mr. John Holst, former Superintendent of Sitka City School District)*

- ✓ Board members are to choose three items from the Long Range Plan for discussion

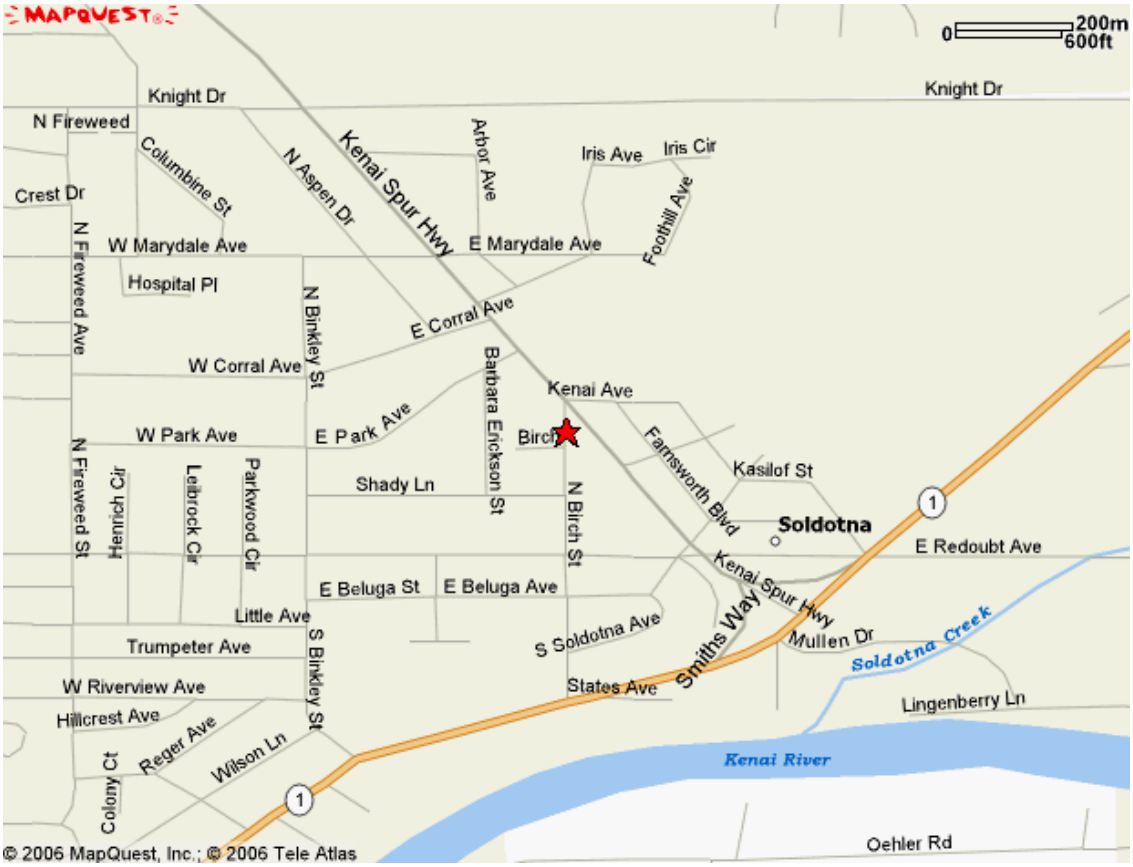
Goal Setting for Board

12:00 p.m. **Lunch** *(to be provided)*

1:00 p.m. **Goal Setting for Board** *(Continued)*

5:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

Map to City of Soldotna Offices - 177 N Birch St – Soldotna – Alaska

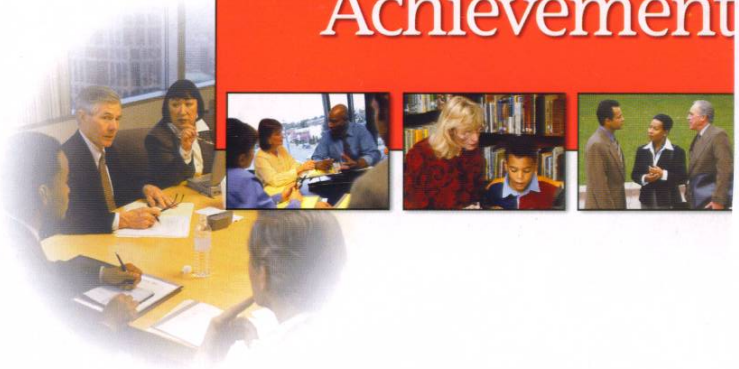


Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Plan on a Page 2007-2012

The mission of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, in partnership with its richly diverse communities, is to develop creative, productive learners who demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to meet life's challenges, by providing stimulating, integrated learning opportunities in a safe, supportive environment.

GOAL	FOCUS	ACTION AREAS
Organizational Excellence Prepare students to thrive in 21st Century global economy and security	Rigorous and comprehensive curriculum	• 21st Century skills
	Collaborative use of assessments	• Data warehouse • Proficiency or plan for improvement • Formative and substantive assessment • Response to Intervention • Graduation rate • Standards based report cards
	Accountability	• Standards of evaluation • Time for staff interpretation of data • Professional development • Systems to empower all levels
	Class sizes and instructional strategies	• Co-teaching • Class sizes • Similar offerings at similar schools • Staff understanding of literacy and learning
	Community involvement	• Expand interactions with public • Public service projects • Career partnerships • Talent bank • Cultural awareness • Community learning hub
Organizational Improvement Enhance value and quality of personnel and services	Staff capacity	• Job/responsibilities study • Professional development plan • Effective practices list • Counselor/student ratio • Staffing for interventionists
	Involvement of families	• Workshops for parents • Understanding parent responsibilities • Transitions between schools • Regular communication • Increase role of input
	Communication	• Employees as ambassadors • User friendly, timely information • Public engagement activities • Solicit ideas from employees • Site councils • Website as main communication • Sharing between schools
Organizational Responsiveness Flexible organization	Choices for students	• IEPs and accommodations for many • Standards based options within high schools • Menu of options available to all • Flexible offerings, facilities use
	Future needs	• Long range consolidation plan • Review building utilization • Environmental conservation plan
	Technology	• Expand integration and implementation • Instructional technology support • Adopt emerging technologies
	Healthy life habits	• Wellness plan • Student nutrition
Organizational Sustainability Viable vibrant focused regardless of personnel changes	Monetary resources	• Assembly – sources/levels • New revenue streams • Development/grant office • State forward funding • Positive state and federal relationships
	Attracting and retaining quality personnel	• Diverse ethic/cultural recruitment • Review honors, recognition • Comparable salaries/benefits • Rewards for innovation

Team Leadership for Student Achievement



Ellen Henderson
Jeannie Henry
Judith Brody Saks
Anne Wright

National School Boards Association
American Association of School Administrators

When Alaska was under Russian control, Sitka was established in 1799 as the headquarters of the first Russian governor. Today, Sitka is a community of some 8,500 people—28 percent of whom are of Alaska Native descent. Located on Baranof Island in the heart of the Tongass National Forest, Sitka offers natural beauty and history, attracting visitors who come to view wildlife or to learn about Russian and Tlingit cultures.

In 1993, however, the area was suffering economically from the closure of a pulp mill, which cost the community 20 percent of its jobs and 25 percent of its income. As people left in search of new opportunities, school district enrollment declined, while, at the same time, the percentage of students with severe disabilities climbed. The school board and superintendent accomplished little: They were locked in a dysfunctional relationship, not trusting each other nor respecting each other's roles. As a result, board members met eight or nine times a month in attempts to deal with a myriad of details—most of which should have been handled by administrators.

Transforming a Troubled District

The Sitka school board realized that the school district had to change and improve, lest the community lose complete faith in its public schools. The board decided to take the steps necessary to ensure a high-functioning district that was focused on student achievement. First, the school board hired a new superintendent. Then, by clarifying roles, reducing the frequency and duration of board meetings in order to focus on essentials, and putting into effect a strategic plan based on broad-based community involvement and support, the leadership began to transform the district.

"The focus on students that has resulted from this approach has been the foundation for the board/superintendent relationship and the stability in leadership and staffing the district has enjoyed, in spite of unanticipated hardships the community has suffered," says Carl Rose, executive director of the Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB). "We believe this unwavering focus has allowed the board and superintendent to stand strong at times when outside forces might have eroded their resolve, and has allowed them to handle inevitable disagreements agreeably, without damaging the integrity of their purpose."

A flashback to 1993 reveals how far the district has come. When former Superintendent John Holst arrived eight years ago, the board was meeting frequently and spending most of its time micromanaging. As Holst and the board began to develop a relationship of trust, the board quickly agreed to meet once a month—a decision that allowed it to focus on board business rather than on administrative details. Holst, who retired as superintendent in July 2001, says he

built the board's trust by being honest, sometimes even "brutally honest," and by adhering to two guidelines: "The first rule is, 'The board is always right.' The second rule is, 'When it appears that the board is going the wrong way, refer to rule number one.'" Holst says his job is to give the board all the information necessary to make good decisions and to make recommendations as well. "I must trust that the board members will collectively make the best decision, even if it differs from my own," he says, adding that he implements every board decision—whether he agrees with it or not—with the "same vigorous support as the decision that does follow my recommendation."

Still, the monthly meetings sometimes lasted until midnight. Rather than add another meeting, the board and superintendent pared down the agenda, eliminating administrative issues that were not necessary for the board to decide. To clearly define their roles, the board and superintendent sought and received guidance from AASB. The board jealously guarded policy making and decisions that affected the direction of the district, while the superintendent and his administrative team remained clearly focused on implementation.

The board and superintendent also agreed to call areas where overlap might normally occur the "gray zone." Holst recalls that 150 angry parents once attended a board meeting to voice concern over an issue, and board members tried to resolve the problem right then and there. Holst says he told the board, "We are probably operating in the gray zone on this item." Understanding what Holst meant, a board member moved to direct the superintendent to investigate the issue and make recommendations to the board. Holst reported back at the next meeting, and the issue was resolved. "It was a great example of 'role definition' and how to keep it clear," he says. "No one in the room except the board members had any idea of what the 'gray zone' reference meant."

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

When the superintendent introduced the idea of strategic planning, the leadership team began to collaborate with all segments of the staff and community, including civic organizations and political entities such as the City Assembly and the Sitka Tribe of Alaska. The planning groups developed the district's first strategic plan, which continues to serve as the guiding force for all decision making by the board and the superintendent. "The plan has provided a blueprint for student achievement that focused on total alignment of curriculum, assessments, and resources with established student performance standards," notes the AASB's Rose. "The board and superintendent have kept the plan alive by annual reviews

that provide accountability to the community and an opportunity for everyone to continue shaping it to serve students."

To hone their skills as board members, the board travels to Anchorage for training on a variety of issues affecting school boards—including budgeting, student performance, standards and assessments, board-superintendent relationships, insurance, and legal issues. In addition to the yearly training, the board typically has training on the local level at least once a year, and more as issues present themselves.

Board members also use self-evaluations to help them deal effectively with each other, the superintendent, and the general public. "By doing self-evaluations, the board can look at how we are doing and whether all the members see themselves in the same light," says Board President Fred Reeder. In analyzing its strengths and weaknesses, the board realized that communications with the community needed improvement. The board has tried a variety of techniques—such as surveys, open forums, letters home to parents, and newspaper articles—to obtain meaningful community input, says Reeder.

ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS

Early in his tenure, Holst became especially concerned about the number of 10th-grade students who had lost at least one credit during their freshman year. Interviews with each student and with some dropouts revealed that school failure had a high correlation to poor reading skills. The students could not read well enough to be successful in content areas, such as social studies, that required large amounts of reading. The leadership team realized that the inability to read was leading to students' frustration, their lack of academic progress, and eventually to the decision to drop out of school.

A committee reviewed the district's reading programs, concluding that significant numbers of students were not learning to read in the primary grades. Resolving to put a major emphasis on reading, the district adopted two nationally known reading programs—Reading Recovery and Lindamood-Bell—and supported additional training for teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators. Reviewing student scores and needs became the basis of a Goals 2000 grant to support reading efforts, assessment, and teacher training and resources. Since that original grant, the district has obtained five others, broadened to support writing and mathematics.

The attention to reading is having a positive impact on achievement. Previously, a typical third-grade teacher had six or eight students who were reading significantly below grade level. That number is now down to one or two, and these are generally students with major language deficiencies or other special

needs. Before, more than 25 percent of students performed in the lowest quartile in primary grades; with interventions, the district has reduced that percentage to 6-11 percent.

Academically, another key initiative was developing and aligning standards, which the board made a priority very early on, notes Holst. The district had been collecting and analyzing longitudinal data about student performance in all content areas for six years, giving the board and superintendent a solid base of information. The leadership team brought an internationally known standards consultant to Sitka to work directly with the staff. In addition, the district created a full-time position for a classroom teacher to help align curriculum with state standards and develop assessment tools that can be used districtwide as well as in individual classrooms. The board has protected this position in times of budget reductions. "The board members are so strongly committed to keeping this effort moving along that they were willing to make other sacrifices in favor of becoming a standards-based district," says Holst. A new student reporting system, based on standards, is being piloted districtwide in the fall of 2001.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Building a better relationship with the Alaska Native population was also very important to the leadership team. Although the school population is about 30 percent Alaska Native, the district, by its own admission, had done very little to make members of that group a real part of its activities. Now, after a concerted effort to change, the district makes sure there is at least one member of the Native community on every hiring committee and a representative number of Native community members on every board-appointed committee or task force. The board holds its regular March meeting in the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) Hall and has developed a partnership with ANB and its sisterhood for a "Welcome Back to School" dinner and program each September. In the past eight years, the percent of certificated staff has gone from 2.2 percent Native to 9 percent. Although no Native community member is currently on the school board, in the past the board has had a Native member, who raised board members' awareness of Native society and culture, notes Reeder.

To increase community participation, the school board learned to listen to the views of advocacy groups through a process that emphasizes fairness. "If the question is about a schedule change, we always have a motion of the floor adopting the proposed change, then giving each person an equal opportunity to speak for or against the change," explains Reeder. "In all ideas or proposed changes, there will be one group or another who will try to have their way. If you make sure that

each group is heard, then the board can better evaluate the merits of the proposed change."

The board also meets quarterly with the City Assembly, the local source of funding—but money matters are not the only issues raised, Reeder says. By discussing the school district's problems and successes, the board has helped members of local government understand the workings of the school system. "Some of the topics discussed have been, of course, budgets, but others have been sports teams, the high school qualifying exam, standards and assessments, technology as it pertains to the district, and student learning," says Reeder. "We have found that now when we talk with them, they understand our problems better and we understand theirs." The dialogue has led to increased tax support at the local level for Sitka schools.

MEETING CHALLENGES

Funding continues to be a key issue in the district, however—in large part because the district already had one of the lowest per-pupil expenditures in the state and because it had fallen on hard times economically. During the last significant change in the state's funding formula, in 1997, Holst and Reeder spent a considerable amount of time lobbying state legislators to make changes in a funding bill that would benefit not only Sitka but the state as a whole. The bill moved through the legislature carrying many of the provisions suggested by the Sitka leadership. Ultimately, Sitka received the second highest percentage increase in state funding in Alaska.

Other industries have taken up some of the slack left by the closing of the pulp mill, and more fishing families are relocating to Sitka thanks to an expanded harbor. Even so, the district's enrollment has declined by approximately 23 percent since fall 1993. At the same time, there has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of students with severe special needs in Sitka—about double the increases seen elsewhere. The district has coped by adding special education teachers and by reassigning paraprofessionals to work directly with students who need one-to-one supervision, under the guidance of a special educator. Sitka also partnered with a local health-care provider, which placed 12 employees in the schools to work directly with students who are under the provider's care outside the school day. Because the district believes in full inclusion, a large adult staff is a necessity. "One of the unfortunate benefits of our programs is that we are attracting students from other communities, thus exacerbating an already difficult situation," explains Holst. "And since Alaska school districts operate under a flat percent adjustment to meet special education needs, resources are constantly being drained from regular education programs to meet those needs."

Yet because of the trust and good will built up between the superintendent and board and between the leadership and the community, economic woes proved to be the "ties that bind" rather than the ones that divide. "Our schools continue to improve in spite of declining enrollments and declining funding," says Holst. "It is a true measure of the tenacity of the board to keep the district on track toward program improvement in the 'worst of times.'"

To keep the budget process as fair as possible, the board holds a public budget hearing at each school building, a process that allows parents and staff to voice their needs and concerns. The board never allows the discussion to center on "what to cut in someone else's building," says Holst, but insists that patrons deal with their own building's programs and priorities. "We have always been very conscious of not pitting buildings and programs against each other," he adds. In addition, because the board works from the list of priorities developed in the budget hearings, the budget belongs to the community and not to the board.

Although Holst has retired, the district as a whole enjoys stability in its leadership and staff. "When we hire someone, we expect that it is a decision that will last 20 years," he says. The district invests in its staff by offering a variety of capacity-building opportunities, as well as encouraging direct involvement in the decision-making process where it affects teaching and learning. Each year, the board president gives tokens of recognition to employees who have reached 15, 20, or 25 years of service. The employees truly appreciate being honored for their many years of service," says Holst. "The recipients of these awards cherish them like nothing I have ever seen."

ADVICE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Sitka school board and its former superintendent, John Holst, have a few suggestions for other districts that want to work as a team to foster student achievement. The suggestions include:

- Choose a superintendent you trust and hand over the operations of the district to that person.
- Work to develop mutual and reciprocal trust.
- Keep the issue of student achievement at the forefront of every board meeting—as an agenda item, status report, program review, or action item.
- Encourage board members to get the training they need to be effective, and urge them to become actively involved in their state school board association.
- Make sure board members remember that their power lies in their actions as a board, not their actions as individuals.

By focusing on student achievement, Sitka's educational leaders have been responsible for many improvements in the district. Accomplishments include the following:

- Student achievement has improved in a sustained and consistent manner, especially in reading—the first area of focus. For example, about 66 percent of Sitka's third-grade students who took a state test in March 2000 read on a "proficient" level, compared with about 58 percent of other Alaskan third-graders. Sitka's six-graders and eighth-graders did better at "advanced" levels of reading than did other students in the state.
- More Native students are receiving high school diplomas than in the past.
- Compared with other neighboring districts in Southeast Alaska, Sitka enjoys positive press coverage and parental support.
- The district has attracted hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants. Its grant monies support areas that are the most difficult to protect in the budget process—such as staff development, technology purchases and training, and efforts to become a standards-based district.
- The district has won the respect of the State Department of Education for the quality of its education and the stability of its leadership and staff.

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