

The Anchorage School District is honored to be a nominee for the 2007 Broad Prize. Our students are benefiting from the targeted efforts of educators and support staff across the district. Students in all groups are making steady progress while the achievement gap narrows.

Student success begins with strong board and administrative leadership and is realized through the dedication of all staff. Programs and instruction are guided by measurable school board goals. Our Six-Year Instructional Plan provides the road map for improving student achievement and reaching board goals. Individual school and classroom plans detail the daily efforts that meet the needs of each learner.

This brief overview outlines the successes and initiatives of our district. Our efforts continue with the expansion of successful programs and the elimination or modification of ineffective ones. We expect to show improvement year after year and welcome feedback and questions from educators and others.

Sincerely,



Carol Comeau,  
Superintendent

### **Highlights of Student Achievement**

The Anchorage School District (ASD) demonstrated student achievement gains as evidenced by the publicly available data collected and analyzed by MPR Associates, Inc. Among the reasons that ASD stood out among large urban school districts:

#### **Greater overall performance:**

In 2006, ASD outperformed the State average in *overall reading and math proficiency* at all grade levels: elementary, middle and high schools, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

#### **Greater subgroup performance:**

In 2006, ASD's white students achieved higher reading proficiency than the state average at all grade levels: elementary, middle and high schools, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

In 2006, ASD's low-income students achieved higher reading proficiency than the state average in elementary and middle school reading, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

In 2006, ASD's white and low-income students achieved higher math proficiency than the state average at all grade levels: elementary, middle and high schools, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

**Greater overall improvement:**

Between 2005 and 2006, ASD showed greater improvement than the state average in middle school in overall reading and math proficiency, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

**Greater subgroup improvement:**

Between 2005 and 2006, ASD's African American, Hispanic, White and Low-income students showed greater improvement than the state average in middle school reading proficiency, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

Between 2005 and 2006, ASD's African American, Asian, Hispanic, White and Low-income students showed greater improvement than the state average in middle school math proficiency, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

Between 2003 and 2006, SAT mean total scores rose for overall, African American, Asian, Hispanic and White students in high schools, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

**Reducing the achievement gap:**

Between 2005 and 2006, ASD's African American, Asian and Hispanic students in middle schools reduced their achievement gap with the white students in reading proficiency, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

Between 2005 and 2006, ASD's African American, Asian and Hispanic students in middle schools reduced their achievement gap with the white students in math proficiency, according to the Broad Prize methodology.

**Initiatives to Improve Student Achievement:**

**ELEMENTARY READING INITIATIVE**

- The elementary reading initiative has been in place since 1999. As a result of this initiative, the school board has focused on the importance of all children learning to read with proficiency by the end of the third grade.

**Comprehensive Elementary Staff Development Efforts**

- Because of the reading initiative the following focused efforts have occurred, resulting in increased achievement in all grade levels as measured by the standards-based assessment:
  - Reading specialists provide staff development in comprehensive literacy to all teachers in the elementary division. All teachers who are new to the district or new to their grade level are trained in the first quarter of the

school year. Regular training for all teachers occurs yearly. This has provided the foundation for the successful implementation of a core curriculum in 51 of our 60 schools.

- Reading specialists provide on-site coaching support of implementation of the district adopted core literacy curriculum, including support for on-going progress monitoring via grade level meetings throughout the school year.
- Implementation of our reading curriculum has occurred on a staggered basis (14 schools per year), allowing the school district to allocate resources of time and training to the schools with the highest need first.
- Demonstration classrooms across the school district provide the opportunity for teachers to observe best practices in literacy instruction in all research-based areas (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and motivation).
- Reading specialists offer graduate level university level classes based on needs identified by each school site.

### **Comprehensive Elementary Assessment System**

- Through the reading initiative, a district-wide standard for what is considered proficiency in reading at each grade level, kindergarten through sixth grade, has been created and used in all elementary schools. All students are assessed at the end of kindergarten, at the beginning and end of first grade, and thereafter, all students identified as not proficient are assessed at the beginning and end of the school year. This assessment gives teachers current information that is necessary to work with students to meet their learning needs.
- Assessment information is recorded in a reading database that was created as part of the reading initiative so that current assessment information follows each child, beginning in kindergarten

### **READING FIRST INITIATIVE**

- Six elementary schools are identified Reading First schools. This project has entailed implementation with fidelity of a core curriculum, on-going progress monitoring of all students, team problem-solving to identify interventions for below and not proficient students and intensive staff development. Reading First schools have shown great increases in student achievement in reading, and in total serve over 2,000 students.
- Successes from Reading First implementation were recognized and used as the framework for the implementation of the adopted core literacy curriculum.

### **Targeted Interventions for Elementary Students In Need Of Additional Instruction**

- School level instruction
  - All elementary schools design intervention plans for students who are below or fall below proficient in reading, writing and/or math. Schools

identify students, targeted interventions, and pre-test and post-test assessment information. In addition to providing targeted instruction for students in need of additional learning assistance, this is a means of engaging in “action research” at the school site level as the efficacy of the interventions is assessed regularly.

- Title I intervention
  - Ten schools in addition to the Reading First Schools were identified for additional assistance in implementation of the adopted core curriculum. This effort entails a research-based effort to ascertain the learning need of students, K-6, and intervention in the learning curve of these students as necessary to assist all students to attain proficiency. Student achievement gains in these schools were higher than in previous years at the end of the first year of this intervention.

## **MIDDLE SCHOOL INITIATIVES**

- Middle Schools place a heavy emphasis on initiatives that support social and emotional learning and positive school climates. These initiatives include training teachers on student-led conference techniques, implementation of Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders (an anti-bullying curriculum), team building and the infusion of social and emotional learning into the content areas. This emphasis stems from the belief that students will achieve at a higher level if they feel safe and are respected and cared about by school staff and their peers. This in turn leads to greater attachment, engagement and commitment to school, which in turn leads to better academic performance and success in school and in life.

### **Comprehensive Middle School Staff Development Efforts**

- All teachers who are new to the district or new to their grade level are trained prior to the start of school or within the first month of school in all middle school initiatives including: reading and writing instructional strategies applicable across the content areas; student-led conferences; social and emotional learning; and Aggressors, Victims and Bystanders (the anti-bullying curriculum).
- In addition to the district-wide new teacher training, curriculum support teachers in language arts and math conduct on-site visits with each new staff member to clarify curriculum expectations and to develop relationships for future mentoring.
- The math curriculum support teacher for middle schools meets monthly with school-based math departments to first model and then to train teachers on how to facilitate department meetings that are focused on instruction and student achievement.
- The math curriculum department collaborates with the assessment department to offer training on using data to target instruction. These trainings are offered at each middle school.

### **Targeted Interventions for Middle School Students In Need of Additional Instruction**

- All middle school teachers utilize assessment data to identify students who are below or not proficient in reading, writing and math. They also identify the gaps

- in proficient students' achievement by drilling down to the GLE level of performance and then aligning instruction in order to address the gaps.
- An increasing number of below or far below proficient students are provided targeted instruction through a math or reading support class in addition to their “regular” language arts or math course. Explicit, sequenced instruction is used in the reading support classes focusing on phonics, oral fluency, comprehension strategies and vocabulary acquisition.
  - Students who are proficient in math but who need additional assistance in order to be successful for pre-algebra or algebra are also able to enroll in support courses designed specifically for this purpose.
  - As a middle school division, all teachers are expected to use research-based reading and writing strategies across the curriculum. Five specific “before, during and after” reading strategies have been identified and on-going training is provided. With standardized strategies in place, instructional time is being used more efficiently and students are receiving repeated practice in all subject areas.

### **Technology/Software Integration into Instruction for Middle School Students**

- Middle Schools continue to increase the integration of research-based instructional software into daily lessons. Skills Alaska, ELLIS (English Language Learning Integrated Systems), SIMS (Strategic Instruction Model, Fast ForWord, Read 180 and Achieve 3000 are just a few of the software programs currently being utilized within middle schools. These programs enable teachers to differentiate their instruction, remediate through enrichment, as well as increase student engagement.

### **HIGH SCHOOL TARGETED INTERVENTIONS**

- Each of the ASD high schools has developed open-entry remediation labs. With the use of various software programs, teachers are able to specifically identify student needs and provide prescriptive remediation to each. The remediation programs are self paced and allow students to catch-up. Software used in the high schools includes Plato, Read 180, Fast ForWord, Carnegie Math and APEX.