



Charter Schools

APPLICATION

for

Fireweed Academy

Homer, Alaska

FY 06 - 07

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

801 W 10th Street, Suite 200

P.O. Box 110500

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October 2006

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Charter Schools Application

Name of Charter School: Fireweed Academy

Date of Application: October 23, 2006

District: Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

School Contact: Kiki Abrahamson

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1. Academic Policy Committee (APC)

Academic Policy Committee

An eight member Academic Policy Committee (APC) made up of staff, parents, and community members govern Fireweed Academy. The function of this committee is to support and assess the school's progress, as well as make decisions and policies regarding the school's operation. The teaching staff in consultation with the APC makes instructional decisions. Our APC also functions as the "site based council" in terms of the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD). The APC meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month.

Evidence follows:

- Current APC Members including contact and term information.
- Site Based Council reports which are submitted to KPBSD Central Office at the end of the year. They summarize the work of the APC for the year.
- APC Meeting Minutes from September 06, 2006 to August 24th, 2005.

2. Law Provisions

A. Charter School Contract with the District

B. Responsibilities of the Academic Policy Committee

The bylaws were adopted at the July 21, 1999 APC meeting and were amended on January 19, 2000 and April 5, 2000.

C. Compliance with current statutory and regulatory requirements

Fireweed Academy is in compliance with current statutory and regulatory requirements.

Evidence follows:

- Signed Charter School Contract with KPBSD
- Charter School Bylaws

3. Education Programs

A. Meeting Academic Goals

The original Homer Charter School, now renamed Fireweed Academy, was founded on the philosophical premise of education that addresses the whole child. Our Mission Statement reflects our ambition to provide opportunities for growth in six learner outcomes: self-reliance, creativity, cooperation, reasoning ability, personal growth, and academic achievement. We have tailored our program to meet the needs of students in all six learner outcomes, not just academic achievement because we recognized that these five other areas support academic achievement and are necessary to nurture and facilitate life long learning. We embed opportunities and strategies for growth in self-reliance, creativity, cooperation, reasoning ability and personal growth into our curricula and methods. Most of our clients are more interested in how to solve problems, be creative, work in a group, and ask good questions than they are in test scores.

B. Statewide Assessment Results

Fireweed Academy's test scores consistently exceed average KPBSD and State of Alaska scores. Although it is unauthorized to aggregate scores because of the small samples at each grade level, individual student progress is tracked over the years they are at Fireweed Academy. Specific item analysis is then used to help make instructional decisions. Summary reports for the following statewide assessments are included for the period following our reapplication in 2002.

Evidence follows:

- Letter from Roger Sampson, Commissioner
- State Standards Based Assessments results 2002-2006
- Terra Nova results 2002-2006
- KPBSD Analytical Writing Assessment Results 2002-2006

3. Education Programs

C. Other Assessments

We use a variety of authentic assessments to evaluate student achievement and growth.

1. **Individual Learning Plan.** Observable behaviors that are criteria for growth in the initial five learner outcomes are evaluated by student, teacher and then subsequent goals are established.
2. **Teacher Made Performance-based Tests.**
3. **Portfolio pieces** are selected and evaluated using a special cover sheet mapped to the standards. Using this method, students become more aware of the standards they are addressing, how they are progressing, why the activity is important, and how it connects to the standards.
4. **Writing samples.**
5. **Project Rubrics:** Criteria generated by students and teachers. Evaluated by self, peer, and teacher.
6. **Reading tapes**
7. **Video tapes of presentations**

D. Curriculum Development: Test data drives decision-making in curriculum and instruction.

We use test data to drive decision-making in curriculum and instruction in several ways.

1. For the past three years we have used our QSI funds to provide after school math and language arts workshops to provide support for students struggling with proficiency.
2. During the first two years of operation we used test results and parent concerns that indicated weak mathematics computation to revise and build up the skills component of our mathematics program. After our first two years of using the Visual Math program we found that our students did exceptionally well in math concepts, but scored lower in math computation. During our last seven years we have built the math computation component of our program.
3. Students with low literacy skills revealed by Informal Reading Inventory or with low CBM, Cat 5 or Benchmark Reading scores prompted us to explore reading inventories, attend First Steps Reading Workshops, and the Alaska Literacy Conference, and add a reading remediation component .
4. In the Analytic Writing Assessments we found that our students maintained average scores aligned with those of the district as a whole. However we noticed that our scores were higher in content, organization and voice and lower in sentence structure, word choice and conventions. We have balanced that discrepancy by including more mini-lessons on grammar and conventions.
5. Through item analysis of science questions, we found our students lacked some basic science content knowledge. We then mapped our themes very closely to science topics and standards so that we cover the content.
6. Through item analysis of social studies questions, we found our students lacked content knowledge in government and economics. We adjusted our theme study so each quarter taught a concept in each of the four social studies strands.

3. Education Programs

E. Performance Based Assessments

Fireweed Academy maps each quarter's content and process lessons to State of Alaska content and performance standards. We apply state GLE's that have been standardized and include clear criteria. Assessments include Analytic Writing Assessment Rubric; CBM and First Steps Reading Inventory; Problem of the Week Rubrics; and State Benchmark Reading, Writing, and Math Performance Standards.

In assessing progress on theme studies projects and presentations, we frequently create authentic rubrics with the students to assess their performance. Students help generate criteria and indicators for reaching those criteria. We have also created a rubric for Socratic Seminar Participation. These assessments are used to communicate strengths and weaknesses and to generate subsequent goals.

4. Program Achievement

A. Well-conceived plan to ensure equal and bias-free access for all students, for all facilities, courses, programs, activities and services.

Our students are provided with lunch and bus services through the district. In the past we have been fortunate to have nursing services donated by our certified and licensed parent Nurses. However now we contract with the West Homer Elementary (WHE) Nurse for services. We currently also share the WHE gym and playground and have collaborated to provide many science and arts programs. We have collaborated with local organizations to provide science and arts programs including Bunnell Street Gallery, Homer Council on the Arts, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, The Pratt Museum, Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, and Cook Inlet Keeper. Additionally, we have collaborated with the Boys and Girls Club for after school activities.

Our biggest challenge used to be providing our students with band, choir and after school sports. For several years we tried to collaborate with the other local intermediate schools, but logistically things did not work out. Now that we are sharing a facility our students have access to both band and after school sports. We have also implemented our own after school activities. In the past we have offered Computer Club, Geo-caching and Foreign Language. Our most successful after school activity has been cross-country skiing from January until March. We have been very successful in finding equipment and interested parents, so it has been free. Over two thirds of our student population has participated.

B. Address the needs of students who do not perform at acceptable levels of proficiency in the statewide assessment program.

We address the needs of students struggling for proficiency in several ways.

1. Dynamic grouping and cooperative learning to pair students with mentors.
2. Conferences with parents, discuss test results, strengths and weaknesses, and provide specific goals and activities to facilitate progress.
3. Utilize QSI funds for after school workshops.
4. Provide additional skills building and practice materials.
5. Provide extra assistance with test taking.
6. Implement activities to build motivation... i.e. Geo-caching.
7. Collaborate with the intervention teams and Special Education Staff of WHE to assess and monitor all students.

4. Program Achievement

C. Systematically inform parents of student's performance and progress.

We follow the KPBSD calendar for quarter dates and parent teacher conferences. We use student led conferences that are scheduled at the end of the first quarter and the middle of the third quarter. Parents are effectively informed of conferences and we generally have 90 percent participation in conferences.

We have been working to create and implement standards based report cards to communicate student progress toward meeting state standards as well as student progress in the six learner outcomes addressed in our mission statement. We continuously receive positive comments from parents who appreciate the type and depth of information these progress reports provide as compared to traditional report cards.

Refining our Student Progress Reports has been a school goal for the past two years. Although the narrative reports that we initially provided to parents were detailed and well received, they required an excess of teacher time to complete. We have made several adaptations and now have standards based report cards that give authentic and meaningful information to students and parents. Our intent was to use these to teach both students and parents about the standards and how our philosophy, methods and materials were providing opportunities for students to meet state standards.

D. Did the charter school provide student assessment participation rates?

Documented in test results included in the previous section 3.

E. Has the charter school made a comparison between their assessment scores and the district's assessment data?

Documented in test results included in the previous section 3.

F. Has the charter school made a comparison between their assessment scores and the state's assessment data?

Documented in test results included in the previous section 3.

G. Has the charter school shown disaggregated scores across all categories?

By law, our sample sizes are so small they are not disaggregated.

H. Professional development that is goal-based and driven, in large part by student assessment data.

We follow the district School Development Plan, which is goal based and driven by student assessment data.

I. Well-conceived plan to demonstrate progress over time.

Assessment results, parent and student satisfaction indicated in surveys, and growth are indicators that Fireweed Academy is demonstrating progress over time. During our first ten years of operation the APC was more focused on survival. Now that we have demonstrated long-term academic excellence and fiscal responsibility, the APC is working to expand our program to include students in grades K-12.

Evidence follows:

- School Development Plans years 2001-2006
- Narrative End of the Year program reports to KPBSD Central Office 2001-2006
- Sample Achievement Reports
- Student/Parent Handbook

5. Admission Procedures

A . Admissions/Enrollment Policies and Procedures

Eligible students: Any student residing in the Homer School Bus District may attend Fireweed Academy.

Calendar of Registration and Admission Dates:

Spring Enrollment Period

Enrollment	Opens the first Monday in April and closes the 2 nd Friday of May for the following year's enrollment.
Notification	Parents/Guardians will be notified of acceptance by the 3 rd Friday of May and they will have three days to confirm their intention to enroll.
Registration	Parents/Guardians will have until the Thursday before school starts in August to register their child and provide proof of immunization.

Summer Enrollment Period

Enrollment	To allow the school to reach its targeted population and/or compile a waiting list, a second application period will open after the spring enrollment deadline and end at noon one week before school opens.
Notification	Will be made that afternoon.
Registration	Parents will have until the first day of school to register and provide proof of immunization.

If the number of applications exceeds the targeted school population during an application period, a random lottery will be used to fill openings and compile a waiting list. To ensure balance and equal opportunity, a separate lottery will be held for the following grade groups: K-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12.

The lottery will be weighted as following.

- *First priority* will be given to current Fireweed students who have submitted an application by the 2nd Friday of May deadline.
- *Second priority* will be given to siblings of families that have had a child selected.
- *Third priority* will be given to children of Fireweed Academy employees.

Applicants not selected to fill an opening in a lottery, will be placed on a compiled waiting list retaining the order of their selection during the lottery. This waiting list will be used to fill openings as they occur. Any spring enrollment applicants left on the waiting list will be forwarded to the pool of applicants of the summer enrollment period.

Waiting lists will not be carried over to the following year.

5. Admission Procedures

C. Admissions during the school year

If during the school year the waiting list is empty, enrollment applications will be accepted until the end of the First Quarter. Since our program relies so much on initial assimilation into an alternative program, students requesting enrollment after first quarter will be limited. Prior to submitting an application the parent/guardian and child will be requested to spend a full day visiting the school to ascertain the flavor and character of the school. After the visit a meeting will be requested with parent/guardian, teachers, and an APC member to discuss the suitability of the school for the prospective student.

Statement of Nondiscrimination:

All students who apply for admissions to the Fireweed Academy will be eligible, regardless of gender, race, color, religion, national origin, ethnic group, marital or parental status, physical or mental disability, and sexual orientation. The Academic Policy Committee shall ensure equal opportunities for all students in admission and access to academic courses, guidance, and counseling programs, athletic programs, testing procedures, vocational education, and other activities.

(CFR. 0410-Nondiscrimination)

(CFR. 1312.3-Uniform Compliant Procedure)

(CFR. 5145.7-Sexual Harassment)

Separate arrangements may be made for students according to gender during sexual education programs and physical education activities involving bodily contact.

(AS 14.18.050)

School staff and volunteers must be especially careful to guard against gender discrimination and stereotyping in instruction, guidance, and supervision.

(CFR. Guidance Services)

Statement that no conditions on parents that prevents equal access to Fireweed Academy.

No conditions will be imposed on parents that would prevent equal access to Fireweed Academy's program.

D. Exit Interviews/Surveys

If a student leaves the school during the school year an exit interview is held. The interview is conducted by one or more APC member/s depending on the situation. The interview is conducted in person or by phone depending on the wishes of exiting parent. The purpose of the interview is to learn why the student has left the program. The interviews are used to assist in evaluating our program.

Evidence follows:

- Most recent Exit interview letter

6. Alternative Option

Alternative Choices for Students in the Homer Area

There are many alternatives for students in the Homer Area. Listed below are seven public school options and three private school options.

- McNeil Canyon Elementary (K-6)
- West Homer Elementary (3-6)
- Chapman Elementary (K-8)
- Connections Program (KPBSD home school program K-12)
- Otter Beach Learning Center (private)
- Home School-other districts (K-12)
- Homer Middle School (7-8)
- Homer High School (9-12)
- Nikolaevsk (K-12)

7. Administrative Policies

Administrative Policy Regarding Charter School Law

Fireweed Academy follows the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's administrative policies and procedures. We receive all administrative memos and packets and attend administrator meetings. The KPBSD Policy Manual is available on-line and a copy is located in the Administrative Specialist's office and is used as a reference for staff and Academic Policy Committee members.

Our Academic Policy Committee handles control and supervision of the charter school according to Charter School Law.

Strong school leadership is evident in the fact that members of the original founders and teaching staff are still currently working to monitor and improve our school. Each year, our APC is composed of veteran and new members. We have created binders to help new members get on board.

As we have expanded our program, the APC has supported our Lead Teacher as she takes on more and more administrative roles. This past year she served on the Charter School Study team that made recommendations to the School Board for adopting new policy regarding Charter schools in our district. Every year she attends the Alaska State Charter School Conference.

Conflict/Parental Concerns Resolution Procedure

In the first year of operation, the Academic Policy Committee (APC) generated a procedure to respond to and resolve complaints. A Parent Liaison is appointed every school year to assist students and parents in the resolution process. In the past five years this procedure has never been used because parent concerns are minimal and have all been resolved informally.

Evidence follows:

- Conflict Resolution Procedure

8. Funding Allocation

Narrative Statement Regarding Financial Management

Fireweed Academy follows the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District's procedures for financial management. As a charter school we have the responsibility to budget all the funds allocated to us from the KPBSD including payroll, utilities, instructional expenses, and administrative expenses. Our recommended Operating Budget is prepared by the staff and is presented to the Academic Policy Committee for their approval. After APC approval, the recommended Operating Budget is sent to the KPBSD administration.

If the budget needs to be amended during the fiscal year, the staff of Fireweed Academy works with the APC to ensure the integrity of the academic program remains intact. All budget transfers are done according to KPBSD procedures.

Fireweed Academy has competently and effectively managed its finances over the past ten years. Throughout the school year staff works closely with KPBSD administration to ensure compliance with all budgeting and spending regulations. The APC strives to ensure adequate funding is available throughout the year. During the past four years we have had a positive balance that we have been able to rollover into the next fiscal year.

Evidence includes:

- Estimated Funding 2006-2007
- Estimated Operating Budgets 2006/2007
- Financial reports 2002, 2003
- End of the Year Expenditure Report

9. Fiscal Solvency

Financial Audits/Statements

To the best of our knowledge we have implemented a well-conceived plan for financial solvency of the school and met our obligation to ensure the fiscal integrity of the school's financial operation. Throughout the school year the Fireweed Academy staff works closely with KPBSD administration to ensure compliance with all budgeting and spending regulations.

Over the course of our initial charter we have achieved efficiencies in our staffing and building operations. Our parents raise funds to supplement mentors, purchase materials and for student activities.

For further evidence of fiscal solvency (i.e. financial audits and financial statements) please contact the KPBSD Chief Financial Officer.

10. Facility Plan

Charter School Facility Plan

Fireweed Academy is currently housed in a shared facility with West Homer Elementary. As we plan to increase in enrollment and grade levels over the next five years, we plan to expand our facility use to include two additional rooms in West Homer Elementary and also request additional space to house students in grades 7-12. Fireweed Academy will be housed on more than one campus.

According to new KPBSD policy, a Charter school may share a facility with another school if the combined student population does not exceed 90% of the rated capacity of the facility. This is an effective use of space and taxpayer dollars. Each year a new Memorandum of Agreement is negotiated between Fireweed and the district.

We also built a storage shed that is located next to West Homer Elementary.

Evidence follows:

- Memorandum of Agreement regarding shared facility use: 06-07 school year
- Recent newspaper article (Homer News 9/14/06)
- Floor Plan

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

Sharing a Facility

2006-2007

Fireweed Academy-West Homer Elementary

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and Fireweed Academy Charter School Academic Policy Committee agree to this Memorandum of Agreement regarding sharing facility space in order to assist the Fireweed Academy in preparing a comprehensive, multi-year contract proposal by October 31, 2006. This temporary agreement is intended to allow Fireweed Academy time to meet the requirements of the new charter school policy while continuing their ability to deliver an academic program to 68 students for the 2006-2007 school year.

1. Room Usage and Operational Costs

- A. The District will provide 4 classrooms at West Homer Elementary School.
- B. The District will provide Room 214 for an office area at West Homer Elementary School for the 2006-2007 school year.
- C. Fireweed Academy will pay the District approximately \$50,100 to cover the pro-rated operational cost associated with sharing a district facility for the 2006-2007 school year (utilities, shared staff, shared supplies, etc.).

4330 Nursing	\$12,700
4600 Custodial	13,000
4600 Building	<u>25,400</u>
	\$50,100

- D. Common Areas: Use and scheduling of the gym and music room will be pro-rated according to the percentage of students attending Fireweed Academy compared to the West Homer Elementary School population. The enrollment projections for 2006-2007 indicate the pro-rated amount is West Homer -77% and Fireweed -23%.

- I. Gym- ten 30 minute periods per week (5 hours)
- II. Music Room- ten 30 minute periods per week (5 hours)
- III. Art- the equivalent of ten 30 minute periods per week or 8 weeks per year
- IV. Other – Fireweed and West Homer will work cooperatively to accommodate special events by either program in these shared spaces

2. Fireweed Academy Administrator

- A. Administrator responsibilities involve the management of all daily operations of Fireweed Academy. Student achievement will match or exceed District goals and State standards.
- B. The administrator shall maintain fiscal management according to District guidelines and State Statutes. This includes the preparation and oversight of the school's budget, with regular accountability to, and approval of, the APC.

- C. The administrator will be the official liaison between the District administration, the APC and the charter school. Frequent open and regular communication will be maintained with the neighborhood school administrator to insure a successful relationship.
- D. The APC agrees to compensate the current district Administrator \$1500 for completion of tasks associated with shared facilities including employee evaluations, Critical Incident and other required in-service training, scheduling of duties and shared space, and conflict resolution.

3. Shared Services

Fireweed Academy agrees to budget a pro-rated amount for the following shared positions, programs, and associated costs, and to be available during the necessary trainings and events:

- A. Custodial services: Fireweed Academy agrees to hire a 3.5 hour per day custodian who will be under the direction and supervision of the head custodian and principal at West Homer Elementary. The West Homer Elementary principal will seek input from the charter school administrator.
- B. Specialists: Fireweed Academy APC may consider supporting a shared librarian once our budget has been confirmed by the district. The librarian will be under the direction and supervision of the principal at West Homer Elementary. The West Homer Elementary principal will seek input from the charter school administrator. The supplies and equipment needed for each of these programs may be shared with all students of both schools.
- C. Repair costs will be shared at a rate agreed upon by both schools at the time of needed repair.
- D. Emergency and safety plans: The building principal will be responsible for emergency and safety training; the charter school is responsible to be present during training.

4. Equipment and Supplies

Fireweed Academy will purchase their own supplies and equipment needed for operation of their program, or will share in rental costs on an as-needed basis. Staff from Fireweed Academy will share in the responsibility of care and maintenance of shared equipment, supplies and common spaces.

5. District Policy, State Statute, and Federal Requirement Accountability

Fireweed Academy Charter School will comply with District Charter School policies, State statutes and Federal requirements during the duration of the charter. The charter school will meet all educational achievement goals and State standards as measured by the benchmark tests, CBM, DIBELS and the other prescribed or required assessments.

This Memorandum of Agreement is for a one-year period, beginning July 1, 2006 and ending June 30, 2007.

11. Teacher to Student Ratio

Staffing Ratio Approval in Charter

Although the founders of Fireweed Academy stated in the original charter application that the ideal teacher to student ratio is 1:14; we realize after ten years of successful operation, that the ratio is unreasonable to maintain fiscal solvency. We have been operating the last few years on a ratio of 1:17. Although we will always strive to keep our PTR close to this ratio, we will also do our best to accommodate all students who submit their applications in a timely fashion.

Enrollment Projection Procedures

Our APC has recently revised our plan for growth and enrollment projection due to requests from community members for Fireweed to expand. The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District requires a projected enrollment for the following school year October 1st. Although we have projected our five year enrollment plan in the following table, we will be able to adjust that enrollment projection to reflect demand and available facility space up until October 1st of each previous year.

Recruitment plan for the next five years.

<i>Grade level</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-2010</i>	<i>2010-2011</i>	<i>2011-2012</i>
<i>K-2</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>3-4</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>5-6</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>7-9</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>10-12</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Totals</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>154</i>

To generate this number, the staff at Fireweed Academy assumes that all current year students will attend the following year except for those who graduate. Then we count and add siblings. We anticipate that an average of fifteen new students will enroll at our current entry level 3rd grade. However in the upcoming school year 2007-08, we will be offering to expand grades both above and below our current grades. We predict 17 students to enter in grades K-2 the first year, then building a second classroom at that multi-grade in 08-09. We will also consider adding a 7-9th and 10th –12th component in 2007-2008 to accommodate requests from our former students and parents.

12. Enrollment

Student Enrollment

As predicted in our 2002 Charter Renewal Application, our enrollment has stabilized in the past five years as we hold onto more students as they pass through grade levels and siblings of charter school graduates enroll. Our current struggle is in fostering balance. With our admissions policy and lottery setup in the past, we could not select students to create gender and grade balance. Student population has varied depending on the community's needs and Fireweed Academy's ability to provide adequate space and staff. We plan to expand to 150 students in grades K-12 over the next five years.

Recruitment Process

In our recruitment process we focus on recruiting students that will be most successful in an alternative program. It is based on a philosophy that all kids have strengths and can succeed in learning. Most of our clients enroll because the parents are looking for an alternative to traditional public school. Most serious inquiries are the result of word of mouth contacts. We have also boosted enrollment through the following avenues:

1. Fireweed Academy Informational Brochure,
2. Advertisements in Newspaper and Radio,
3. Open House in April to generate interest for the following school year and
4. Visitations throughout the school year for interested families, especially in April and May.

Evidence follows:

- Fireweed Academy enrollment history
- Tri-fold Brochure
- Sample newspaper ads

Fireweed Academy Enrollment History

	1997/1998		1998/1999		1999/2000		2000/2001		2001/2002	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Grade 3	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	3	6	0
Grade 4	10	2	5	3	6	2	2	3	2	3
Grade 5	5	4	7	1	5	3	7	1	6	4
Grade 6	0	3	3	2	4	2	2	3	2	2
Grade 7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Total	15	9	15	6	17	9	16	10	18	9
	24		21		26		26		27	

	2002/2003		2003/2004		2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Grade 3	0	4	2	3	5	5	8	6	7	8
Grade 4	6	3	2	6	2	7	6	8	15	8
Grade 5	3	4	7	3	2	6	4	8	7	9
Grade 6	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	7	5	8
Grade 7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	14	15	14	16	13	21	21	29	29	33
	29		30		34		50		68	

13. Teaching Method/Curriculum

A. Explicit Teaching Methods

Theme Immersion is the model we have chosen to implement integrated instruction for students with diverse backgrounds, skills and learning styles. We chose the Theme Immersion model because it reflects Best Practices, can easily be mapped to standards, and facilitates student connections and accountability. The model allows us to employ constructivist principles to design activities and assignments. This model also constructs the scaffold for providing opportunities to make progress in all six of the learner outcomes in our Mission Statement, not just testable Academic Achievement. Within this Theme Immersion model we explicitly use Problem and Project Based Learning; Visual Math and Problem of the Week; Science and Social Studies Inquiry; Reading and Writing Workshop; Socratic Seminar; and Integrated Music, Physical Education and Discipline Based Art Education.

Our quarterly themes are broad issues with related subtopics that can be flexibly mapped to state curriculum standards. Through these methods we use relevant reading and writing assignments, and authentic activities and assessments that reflect student interest and choice. We value interaction and collaboration in a productive classroom where the content evolves as we explore the theme. Our themes are chosen using the following criteria: broad with lots of subtopics, connect to all content areas, meet standards, reflect student interest, address specific need, and best utilize available resources.

Our Math program has three components. Visual Math emphasizes conceptual mathematics education. Its methods are aligned with our philosophy and mission and have proved very successful for students who stick with the program. Problem of the Week addresses math standards and connects mathematical skills and reasoning to authentic theme study. Skill instruction is the final component in which computation and mathematical skills are stressed.

The foundation of our language arts program is based on Whole Language concepts. For Reading Workshop, rather than separating students into ability groups, we do a variety of dynamic grouping. Literature Study Guides are designed to cover general reading concepts and strategies that all students can complete based on a text of their choice. Coupled with literature circles and enrichment projects, these methods give students opportunities to refine skills and meet standards regardless of reading ability. For Writing Workshop, we use a large variety of mentor books to initiate broad assignments embedded with student choice. All students are instructed in Six Trait writing regardless of their ability and given assistance when needed. We use the AWA rubric to assess writing and monitor progress with writing samples.

All our methods are Constructivist, map to State Standards, and reflect current research on Best practices and effective strategies. At Fireweed, we are more concerned with nurturing passionate learners who view themselves as readers, writers, and problem solvers.

Evidence follows:

- Sample of Quarter Achievement Reports

13. Teaching Method/Curriculum

B. Monitor curriculum implementation and curriculum quality.

Although we do not directly follow the KPBSD curriculum schedule, we provide students with activities that address curriculum components and standards. For example, we do not "do" Alaska Studies in 6th grade, but we sprinkle Alaskan studies throughout our themes. When we are immersed in the *Transportation Theme*; we study transportation development in Alaska; during the *Culture Theme*, we explore Alaskan cultures with a webquest called RASIP; in *Habitat* we look at *Alaskan Habitats*; with *Currents* we map Alaskan rivers; and in *Structures* we look at the economic structure of the Permanent Fund.

Likewise, we look at curriculum implementation possibilities in each of the content areas, always integrating them into the theme. For example, in the *Structures Theme* we can address: word, sentence, paragraph and essay structure in writing; poetry and plot structure in literature; bridges, tessellations and geometry in Frank Lloyd Wright architecture; three branches of government in social studies; and landforms in earth science.

We use many tools to monitor curriculum quality and implementation including:

1. Initial yearly curriculum that is mapped to State Standards on a 4 year Theme rotation schedule.
2. At the end of each quarter we assess whether we have provided the intended opportunities to meet specific standards using information from Narrative Grade Reports; student, parent, teacher conferences; Balance Your Week sheets and quarter assessments to make decisions.
3. At the beginning of the quarter we adapt plans to address any deficiencies in providing activities to meet standards. We evaluate available resources and use planning tools to map out the quarter.
4. At the end of year staff evaluates curriculum accomplishments and identifies strong and weak areas.
5. In May we complete the School Development Plan and evaluate our progress and adapt goals for the next year. We predict staff development needs for resources and workshops in new methods. In the past, we have participated in First Steps Reading, Science and Math Consortiums, Literacy Conference, Standards Based Education, Portfolio Assessment, State and National Charter School Conferences.
6. Parents and students complete district generated and APC generated surveys throughout the year. We especially encourage participants to fill them out at conferences and the end of the year. We use the surveys to adjust emphasis and address priorities.

Evidence follows:

- Sample of curriculum monitor forms

13. Teaching Method/Curriculum

C. Curriculum Review and Revision

Review and revision of curriculum are natural results of monitoring and implementing quality curriculum. We use the tools and methods for reviewing and revising curriculum as explained in the preceding sections. Listed below are some examples of how we have used test results, parent and student input, mapping, and staff development.

1. The first two years of operation we used test results and parent concerns that indicated weak mathematics computation to revise and build up the skills component of our mathematics program.
2. Students enrolling with low literacy skills prompted us to explore reading inventories, attend First Steps Reading Workshops, and attend the Alaska Literacy Conference. We also added a reading remediation component for students at risk.
3. Initially Socratic Seminars followed a strict format generated at the High School level in our community and used “Great Books” types of short stories. A teacher attended St. John’s College to discuss and purchase the Socratic Methods Programs they had developed for intermediate students. The last two years we have implemented a variety of seminar techniques using a complex variety of texts, art pieces, and music that are integrated into our themes.
4. In the Analytic Writing Assessments we found that our students maintained average scores aligned with those of the district as a whole. However we noticed that our scores were higher in content, organization and voice, lower in sentence structure, word choice and conventions. We shifted writing priorities to balance that slight discrepancy.
5. Through item analysis of science questions, we found our students lacked some basic science content knowledge. We then mapped our themes very closely to science topics and standards so that we cover the content.
6. While mapping to district Social Studies curriculum goals and objectives we noticed the sheer impossibility of addressing them all. We decided to revise our curriculum to emphasize the four strands of social studies education through the quarterly themes.
7. Our clients have strong interests in arts of all kinds. Initially we successfully integrated art into our Theme studies. After our third year student interest and parent concern over Music increased. The last two years we have implemented a stronger music program.

Evidence follows:

- Surveys of teacher and school performance

13. Teaching Method/Curriculum

D. Effective intervention with students who are at risk.

Since its inception, Homer Charter School/Fireweed Academy has attracted students considered at risk. We have attracted many students from private and home school settings who have needed extra time, patience, attention and a variety of teaching methods. We work closely with the district psychologist, speech therapist, and both Mildly Handicapped and Gifted & Talented special education teachers to identify, assist, assess, and monitor students who are at risk.

We have also collaborated on several occasions with our local Community Mental Health organization in intervention meetings to discuss, identify and provide services for students with emotional handicaps and behavior disorders.

E. Addressing the needs of student with educational disabilities.

Our school is blessed with an extremely diversified population. Although we serve students in grades 3- 7, their abilities range from grades K – 12. Many parents have chosen our program because it addresses the needs of students with disabilities without labeling them, or setting them apart from other students. We have several parents who have chosen to decline special education services, because they are confident that the needs of their children are being met. We consider every student gifted in some way, and this attitude has spread to the students. These students have especially benefited from the differentiated curriculum inherent in the Theme Immersion model, problem and project based learning, visual math, reading and writing workshop.

Each year we have intervened and monitored several students with speech concerns or learning disabilities. Students are responding positively to our collaborative and more direct services. Several parents who refused special education services in the past have now agreed to special education services. We have also collaborated with special summer tutors and programs for students with reading difficulties.

We have also referred, assessed, identified and monitored several Gifted and Talented students each year. These students have benefited from enrichment opportunities provided through collaboration. Fireweed Academy does not participate in a pull out program to serve Gifted and Talented students because we want to prevent the development of elitist attitudes. These students especially benefit from the authentic learning experiences and the opportunities to make choices and direct their own learning that Fireweed Academy offers to all of its students.

Over the years we have had yearly intervention meetings for specific students with professionals from Community Mental Health. Through these meetings we have identified strengths and weaknesses, generated behavior plans, and monitored medication effects.

F. Up to this point, we have not had any students with Limited English Proficiency.

Evidence follows:

- Letter from special needs providers

14. Collective Bargaining

Collective Bargaining Agreement between KPBSD and KPEA

Certified staff employed at Fireweed Academy are covered under the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and the Kenai Peninsula Education Association.

Collective Bargaining Agreement between KPBSD and KPESA

Support staff employed at Fireweed Academy are covered under the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and the Kenai Peninsula Educational Support Association.

Written Narrative Regarding Exemptions/Waivers

The employees of Fireweed Academy are subject to all provisions of the collective bargaining agreements enforced by the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. There are no waivers or exemptions to these agreements.

15. Contract Termination

Charter School Termination Clause

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District School Board reserves the right to terminate this contract for failure of Fireweed Academy to meet educational goals or fiscal management standards or for other good cause.

Evidence includes:

- Fireweed Academy Charter School Contract located in section **2 Law Provisions**