



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Superintendent

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M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: January 24, 2007
TO: Members, Board of Education
FROM: Donna Peterson, Ed.D. *Donna Peterson*
Superintendent of Schools
RE: Kenai Conversation

The written comments are in, the testimony from the public meeting has been transcribed, and the decisions have to be made. On January 15th a worksession was held with the Board of Education to discuss their impressions of the Kenai Conversation. No action was slated for that meeting.

A worksession to present the administration's current thinking is scheduled for February 5, 2006. Depending on the discussion during the February worksession, administration will be prepared to present a recommendation for action at the February 19, 2006 Board of Education meeting.



Kenai Conversation

Outcomes

The intent of the Board of Education to gather input from a local level prior to making decisions was realized.

The hope of reaching consensus or win/win resolution regarding the Kenai Conversations did not materialize. There is some evidence that the process, at least for a time, may have polarized “sides” on the issues. For purposes of worksession discussion, several potential solutions are presented for consideration.

Decision Matrix

In order to provide a framework for decision making, the following criteria categories were used. Each option was reviewed against criteria with a subjective score of + (positive) or - (negative) assigned. Following each criteria listed are examples of questions and considerations used in determining the ranking.

Building Adequacy

- do the students “fit” at less than 100% capacity using new rating criteria
- is the building suited to the age of students
- special populations and needs

Enrollment and Demographics

- enrollment projections versus capacity in the future
- transportation, proximity, historical patterns
- number of transitions

Financial Factors

- age of building
- cost of maintenance and utilities
- costs gained from consolidation

Academic Programs, Performance and Instruction

- “specials” available
- is size of school adequate for comprehensive programs
- are collaboration opportunities more available due to size of staff

Results Summary

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
Building Adequacy	+	+	+	+	?
Enrollment & Demographics	+	+	+	+	+
Financial Factors	+	-	+	-	+
Academic Program	+	?	+	?	+

Potential Solutions

A variety of lenses were used to determine potential solutions.

Lens A: What would the District do if starting from scratch?

With the buildings available in their current locations in the Kenai area and the demographic patterns outlined and expected for the next five years, the following scenario would be considered.

Option 1

Mountain View, K-4
 Kenai Middle, 5-8
 Sears building used for Kaleidoscope Charter

The numbers of students are better divided in a configuration of K-4 and 5-8 between Mountain View and Kenai Middle providing for below capacity in both locations. This configuration more closely reflects the current primary and intermediate emphasis but allows one less transition and moves from traditional schools spread thinly between three buildings to more comprehensive sized schools housed in two buildings. The Mountain View building would house grades K-4 (2007-2008, 324 students in a building rated for 430 = 75% capacity); the Kenai Middle building would house grades 5-8 (2007-2008, 416 students in a building rated for 500 = 83% capacity).

One advantage of housing Kaleidoscope Charter in its own building is that Kaleidoscope becomes solely responsible for many of the costs associated with a building (utilities, transportation, food service, etc.). Additionally, the problem of shared facilities integration is no longer present.

Literature currently available on the “elemiddle school” (or intermediate school) shows that some benefits may exist from housing grades five through eight together, particularly in this case by providing a student body size that allows for more options (i.e. departmentalization) and better use of buildings.

Lens B: What would the District do if it relied on written and oral public testimony?

Option 2

Sears Elementary, K-2
 Mountain View, 3-5
 Kaleidoscope campus divided K-2 at Sears and 3-5 at Mountain View

If Kaleidoscope students were housed between Sears and Mountain View the numbers would be:

Sears	Kaleidoscope	Sears & Kaleidoscope (% capacity)	Mt. View	Kaleidoscope	Mt. View & Kaleidoscope (% capacity)
208	92	300 (100%*)	180	104	284 (66%)

* Portables are currently available on site to address overcrowding concerns

Moving current Kaleidoscope students housed outside District buildings into empty classrooms at Mountain View would allow charging the pro-rated facility use fees to the charter school. Kaleidoscope would still have two locations (con) with two administrators being responsible for shared facilities (con), Sears and Mountain View would be housing similar aged students (pro), the District would recover some of the revenue now going to an outside entity (pro), and Mountain View would lose the double rooms currently being used for instruction (con).

Lens C: What would we do in the best interest of students at this time?

The question, what is best for kids is at the heart of all decision making. When considering all children of the District, the following scenario seems appropriate.

Option 3

Sears and Mountain View combined into K-5
Sears building used for Kaleidoscope

Expanding the current configuration of grades 3-5 at Mountain View to encompass grades K-5 provides the size of student body for a comprehensive school curriculum with traditional “specials”. Opportunities for choice of teachers at a given grade level would be available and there would be fewer transitions between schools. The building capacity is 430 and 388 students would attend grades K-5, putting the building at 90% capacity. Research on school configurations finds little difference in the configuration of the building as contributing to the achievement of the students. The District has high functioning schools that are K-6 with primary students in one wing and intermediate students in another. Because of mere proximity, more vertical collaboration could occur. Evidence suggests through the experience at Nikiski North Star that a change can occur with positive results. Should the enrollment decline trend continue there will likely be further reductions at Sears and Mountain View in terms of offerings for students because the staffing formula is based on numbers of students.

Should the combined enrollment between Mountain View and Sears students grow beyond current projections, a long range plan for priority use of space at the Sears building, additional portables at Mountain View, or different grade configurations at Kenai Middle School would be considered.

What other options are available and what are the pros and cons of each?

Option 4

Mountain View (3-5) and Kaleidoscope (K-5) housed together in Mountain View Building

Kaleidoscope students would be housed in the 10 available classrooms at Mountain View. Under this scenario, Kaleidoscope would be housed on one campus (pro), Sears would have room to add a fee-based community pre-school program (pro), and Mountain View would lose the double rooms currently being used for instruction (con).

Option 5

Sears, Mountain View combined into K-5
Kenai Alternative moved to Sears building
Kaleidoscope students housed at Willow Street Mall and current
Kenai Alternative location

Kaleidoscope would still be housed on two campuses, but the buildings are closer to each other than currently configured (con), charter schools would not be in a shared facility (pro), and Kenai Alternative would have room to grow (pro). The Sears building would house Kenai Alternative students (including the Young Parenting Program) and perhaps a fee-based preschool. Evidence suggests that Kenai Alternative could grow beyond its current population and a larger building would allow that to occur.

More Work to be Done Districtwide

The Kenai Conversations, declining enrollment, and budget concerns have further illustrated the need for KPBSD to **revisit the consolidation discussions** from past years. In order to be excellent stewards of taxpayer dollars, a complete review of infrastructure needs to occur with recommendations for a long-term master plan presented with criteria for better utilization of buildings. An outside consultant with specific criteria may be needed to expedite an overall plan for building use for the next ten years. Undertaking this conversation will be difficult as illustrated below. Notes about closing schools taken from “The Hardest Choice: Closing schools is one of the most difficult – but necessary – decisions a district can face” by Naomi Dillon, American School Board Journal/December 2006.

“Everyone knew but nobody wanted to talk about it. They didn’t want to hear that we needed to close schools. No one does, really. Closing a school, or schools, is one of the most emotionally charged issues a district can face. In so many communities, schools hold much more than learning opportunities. They hold memories and milestones, prominence and perspective... by not closing a school, by default we have been robbing the classroom to pay for these fixed costs... In a way, we were hurting academics by not making some of these decisions.”

Questions regarding the **financial responsibilities of charter schools** seem to be at the core of misinformation in community discussions. The bottom line question, “Do the charter schools contribute their fair share for the services they receive from the District?” needs to be revisited. Last year the Charter School Study Team grappled with ways to assign costs in a fair manner. A new prorated method was used in shared facilities. This first step needs to be followed with a means for placing value on District level services and passing the costs on to the charter schools.

The District’s **role in facilitating harmony between charter and traditional schools** needs to be revisited. Site councils and APCs asked, “How does the District plan to solve the animosity between District employees? How does the District plan to address the lack of diversity in charter schools? Can the board modify charter schools for the good of all students?” These questions reflect the frustration voiced in the meetings and require people of good will coming together to work together for the common goal of meeting the educational needs of all Peninsula children. Two perceptions that need to be addressed through negotiation or policy are the need for charter school demographic guidelines mirroring total student population and funding advantages for charter schools.

A **marketing plan** showing the pros of each the Kenai school choices would certainly be a worthwhile undertaking and might result in increased communication and cooperation between the schools.

Additional Thoughts

It is the District superintendent's responsibility to declare whether space is available in buildings to house charter school students. The District has space available in a variety of buildings across the Peninsula. The responsibility of organizing and utilizing buildings, programs, and staff effectively is what the Kenai Conversation was about and has implications Districtwide.

Over 1000 individuals provided input to KPBSD regarding their thoughts on the future of education in Kenai. Each of these individuals had a passion and commitment to children. The complexity of the decision making process must take into account the quantitative aspects of the facilities involved as well as the qualitative aspects that address the history, concerns and hopes of internal and external community members.

The Board will not escape controversy. A decision is inevitable and necessary. It is hoped that the conversation itself will accelerate the attention to continuous improvement in the educational experience of the District's students.

Attachments: Kenai Conversation Process
Kenai Conversation Review
Other Notes

Kenai Conversation

Issue:

Kenai has fewer students that are spread out among more educational options.

Background:

District-wide enrollment declines have been about 2% per year. In Kenai area neighborhood schools, the enrollment decline has also been impacted by changes in Nikiski area schools and the opening of private and charter schools. Transferring teachers who have been teaching in buildings for several years as well as transferring teachers after school begins because projections were not met have occurred more frequently in Kenai than in any other area of the peninsula. Significant public comment has been made about the reasons and subsequent actions of KPBSD administration to address issues of transferring teachers and housing of charter schools. Directed by the Board of Education, and in line with the community based model for addressing issues, Superintendent Peterson is charged with conducting conversations with Kenai residents about the future of education in their community. It is assumed that collaborative conversations with those most affected will result in recommendations based on the needs of the Kenai students and a recognition of the wishes of the community.

Process:

1. Gather data about Kenai demographics and community trends.
2. Frame the conversations by addressing questions:
 - Are there too many transitions between our traditional schools?
 - How can each school be considered as the "best show in town" so that parents have quality options for educating their students in the public system?
 - How do we develop an educational system where every student can reach his/her highest personal potential?
 - Is there such a thing as a neighborhood/traditional school in the working parent society of today?
 - Should/how can the school role be expanded as the learning hub of the community?
3. Share a "situation paper/process" and refine prior to meeting with community
 - with Kenai principals
 - with leadership team
 - with Board of Education

4. Finalize process for community conversations and communicate
 - a. meet first with site councils/parents at school sites to share statistics and data
 - b. Meet with Real Estate agents
 - c. Presentation to:
 - Chamber Board
 - Kenai City Council
 - Child Study Team
 - Pastor group
 - d. Communicate with site councils, parent groups to finalize information on providing feedback
5. Schedule and conduct public meeting
 - a. take testimony
 - b. provide opportunities for written feedback

Outcomes:

Short term:

In spring 2007, the School Board will be looking for a recommendation from the District Administration regarding housing of Charter School student growth for Kaleidoscope School. At this time, it appears that space is available at Mountain View Elementary. The concerns about Kaleidoscope being housed on two campuses and about sharing facilities should be addressed.

The option of combining the neighborhood schools of Mountain View and Sears into one building and allowing Kaleidoscope School to have responsibility for the costs associated with Sears Elementary facility should also be explored. The questions of "do they fit" and "what will the District do if/when the numbers are too big for the one school" need to be addressed.

Long term:

Unknown, but a conversation will hopefully result in additional ways to create a vibrant learning community. Kenai has many strengths such as unparalleled community support and behavioral norms/expectations for children. It is a more "traditional" community than most on the Peninsula. Students have outstanding opportunities for involvement in sports, music, and service learning. Partnerships with outside entities flourish and leadership opportunities and mentorships abound. The expectation is that the strengths can be the foundation for designing and embracing a future educational system that addresses the needs of the students and wishes of the community.

Public Input:

- Letters from site council/APCs
 - Written after site discussion
 - Weighed heavily
 - Must be on school letterhead
 - Received by superintendent by November 3

- Written Comments/letters from individuals and groups
 - Via email to superintendent and Board at dpeterson@kpbsd.k12.ak.us
 - Via fax at 262-9132
 - Via US mail to 148 N. Binkley, Soldotna, Alaska 99669
 - Received by superintendent by November 3

- Oral comment
 - Public meeting November 7, at 7 p.m. at KCHS
 - To give information beyond written statements
 - 3-minute time limit
 - At any school Board meeting during Public Presentations.

Kenai Conversations Review

Spring, 2006

Space issues regarding Kaleidoscope School prompt BOE to suggest that community conversations be held in Kenai regarding efficient use of building and future direction of education.

June, 2006

Board discusses "Kenai Conversation" in annual planning retreat, not adopted as a Board goal, rather as an administrative task.

August, 2006

Meeting held with Kenai area administrators and superintendent to brainstorm process.

September 11, 2006

Worksession held with Board; Administrative work plan presented, preliminary demographic data reviewed, sample presentation previewed, direction discussed.

September/October 2006

Meetings conducted by superintendent:
with Kenai area realtors
with Kenai city officials
with Peninsula Clarion staff and manager
Site Council/APC meetings

Mountain View	9/19/06
Sears	9/26/06
Kenai Alternative (briefing)	9/27/06
Kenai Central High (briefing)	9/27/06
Kaleidoscope	10/09/06
Kenai Middle School	10/19/06
Aurora Borealis	10/19/06

October/November, 2006

Board members visit schools in Kenai. Individuals and groups provide feedback.

November 7, 2006

Public meeting held at KCHS for purpose of gathering information from community. Board listens to testimony and reviews pre-received written public comments.

Other Notes

Research on size of school

The December, 2002 KPBSD Preliminary Long Range Plan for Consolidating Schools focused on comprehensive programs which provide a traditional variety of students' opportunities for schools of a specific size: 350-500 student elementary schools, 700-900 student middle and high schools.

(Andrews, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2002) research synthesis..... "some evidence that moderately sized elementary schools (300 to 500 students) and high schools (600 to 900 students) may optimally balance economies of size with the negative effects of large schools."

Research on school configuration

(Renchler, 2000) research synthesis.... "sparse empirical research on the topic of grade span or grade configuration's influence on the success of school systems or the students they serve.... Each grade configuration has its own strengths and weaknesses relative to the context in which the grade span occurs....In general, students suffer achievement loss during each transition year they experience.... Students typically gain back the achievement loss in the year following the transition year."

(Wren, Paglin, Fager, Coladarci, Gregg) internal research review conclusions:

- School-to-school transitions have a negative impact on student achievement, school-family partner
- Transitions have a much more significant impact on lower-socioeconomic students.

Expected demographics in Kenai proper

The outlook for the Kenai area regarding school enrollment is a continuation of the 2% student decline. Demographics continue to shift with fewer babies being born, fewer jobs for professionals in the child-bearing years, and housing being purchased by older, seasonal inhabitants. Though Lowe's and Walmart are expected to open in the future, the impact on schools is expected to be spread throughout the central peninsula area and therefore will not significantly change the projected enrollment figures for any one school in the Kenai area.

Pre-K services Note

A great need exists for affordable high quality pre-school in the high poverty area of Kenai. By entering these students into the school system at a much younger age, the opportunity to provide developmentally appropriate instruction, intervention, and supervision will best serve students and society in the long run. The option of providing fee based programs inside of our school buildings as space permits should be explored.