

Our ASD Public Education Challenge: Parents in Eagle River/Chugiak Deserve Local Control

Description

The Anchorage School District is too big, with a top-down Command-and-Control system accountable to a school board governed by members elected at-large, but ultimately accountable to no one to assure Local Control, according to former ASD teacher and principal, Sean Murphy.

District Details (2018-2019 school year; Fiscal data from 2017-2018)

Characteristics

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County: Anchorage Municipality

County ID: 02020

Locale: City: Large (11)

CSA/CBSA: 11260

Total Students: 46,115

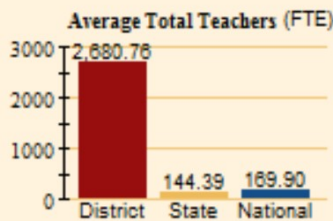
Classroom Teachers (FTE): 2,680.76

Student/Teacher Ratio: 17.20

ELL (formerly LEP) Students: 7,269

Students with IEPs: 7,018

Staff



Other Staff (FTE)

Total:	2,930.40
Instructional Aides:	708.67
Instruc. Coordinators & Supervisors:	0.00
Total Guidance Counselors:	110.90
Elementary Guidance Counselors:	28.50
Secondary Guidance Counselors:	81.40
Librarians/Media Specialists:	76.00
Library/Media Support:	9.24
District Administrators:	255.09
District Administrative Support:	215.00
School Administrators:	166.00
School Administrative Support:	409.14
Student Support Services:	253.90
Other Support Services:	726.46

Teachers (FTE)

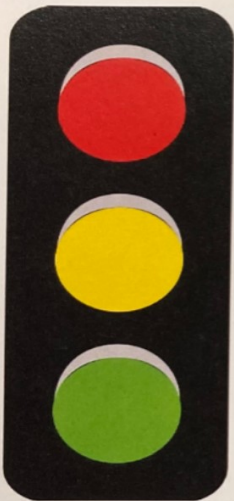
Total:	2,680.76
Prekindergarten:	56.32
Kindergarten:	164.92
Elementary:	1,239.93
Secondary:	1,219.59
Ungraded:	†

Total Staff (FTE): 5,611.16

This is the dimension of the Anchorage School District: 46,115 students, of which more than 14,000 are identified as having special needs, 2,680.76 teachers and 2,930.40 other staff.

In retirement, Murphy is a member of the EagExit Board of Directors.

I worked at *Alpenglow Elementary* for several years, then went to east side of Anchorage to help open up *Begich Middle School*, explained Murphy. *With that experience I chose to go into administration and was the principal of Wonder Park Elementary—also on the east side—for eight years. My own kids have all attended Eagle River schools, graduating from Chugiak High School, and I coached at Chugiak High School. I tease my kids that I followed them to high school and became a basketball coach to keep an eye on them!*



Red - Your child is now considered chronically absent with more than 10% absences during the semester. Please schedule a meeting with your child's teacher to come up with a plan. *(9 or more absences per semester)*

Yellow - Your child is now at risk with 5 - 10% absences during the semester. It's time to come up with a family plan. *(5 - 8 absences per semester)*

We miss your child when they're not here.

Green - Your child is under 5% absences so far this semester! You're doing great, keep it up!!! *(4 or less absences per semester)*

Ways You Can Help As a Family...

1. Set a consistent bedtime and morning routine.
2. Not sure if your child is too sick for school? Check in with the school nurse.
3. Try to schedule medical appointments when your child is *not* in school.
4. Establish a backup plan for getting your child to school.
5. Talk to someone at school if you are facing challenges.

We Are Here To Help!

Your attendance is Important!

<https://www.asdk12.org/wonderpark>

Good parents keep track of the academic progress of their children.

“I will tell you, there is such a diversity among schools in ASD—and not just between Eagle River and Anchorage—but between each of the different schools,” Murphy continued. “The needs are different. The school communities want different things. You see it in Eagle River with our optional programs. The community wanted those kinds of programs.”



Murphy has studied test scores among the ASD Schools and reports that generally schools in AD2 have a 10 percent higher score level among students than the rest of Anchorage. Some of that has to do with the socio-economic status of parents, and he experienced the challenge as a teacher in a school with high number of families qualifying for Title 1 federal funding. [1]

When you have a kindergarten, kid brought to school in the front seat of a police car and his dad is in the back on his way to jail, how is that kid going to learn today? asks Murphy. Title I allots Federal funds for schools with students from low socio-economic families. AD2 doesn't have any schools that have majority Title I student populations although most schools in ASD have some individual students who qualify for this extra funding.

“How do we try to fix that?” asks Murphy. “What I saw is ASD uses Title I funds to try and take care of some of the need, but then the State will take some of those funds in our centralized system for education where all of the money goes to a *Command-and-Control School District* . Administration disseminates all of that money based on a formula, with a cookie-cutter approach that may not address the real needs of individual communities.”



Relating to his experience, Murphy explained: “At Alpenglow we saw the expansion of that valley with housing development down there, and that area got nick-named “Little Elmendorf”

because of all the military population growth. Wonder Park—located just outside the gates of the base—by contrast had only 2 families out of out of some 400 kids that were military. That’s a huge contrast. When you have kids with low socio-economic situations you have everything that follows them with that trauma.”

<https://www.asdk12.org/alpenglow>

“The federal money becomes available, and some decision-makers decide what they need is more technology,” Murphy continued. “They say *let’s buy up all the computers we can get for these kids*, but the kids cannot read and write yet because Mom and Dad never read to them. If their vocabulary tanks are half-full when they come to us at five-years-old, that means extensive remediation to help them learn to read, and ultimately become good citizens”.

But there is more to the problem of a district that is too large. [2]

“A lot of things are going on in public education that are in the news every day with COVID, cost, and budgets. Failing grades, poor graduation rates, and the rising cost of employees, healthcare, and fuel. I would like to bring in to the public’s attention our school district has become too inefficient at meeting our schools needs. Our school district has gotten so large that I have witnessed them going to cookie cutter approaches rather than address needs of every school—including how they want the schools administrated and how the curriculums will be implemented,” said Murphy. “They want to come into the classroom and say: “Teacher, you will teach spelling for this many minutes, and you will teach writing for this many minutes. I felt they took teachers and principals entirely out of the discussion.”



<https://donnliston.net/2021/02/the-best-thing-about-being-in-anchorage.html>

Do you remember your favorite teacher using a stopwatch to keep track of what you were spoon-fed?

The failed *Everyday Math* curriculum adopted in a narrow vote of the *Anchorage School Board* is an example of why teachers need to be supported rather than put on pedagogic treadmills.

“As a teacher at *Alpenglow Elementary* I remember well the district coming in with a canned curriculum to teach Reading,” said Murphy. “It was a big book with extra pull-outs, and it was all regimented, doing one thing for 30 minutes and another thing for one hour. At that time teachers taught reading and they were in charge of *teaching* it; we had literature circles and boxes of books in a whole room dedicated to reading—novels, books in tubs, that we saved and scraped to buy because we didn’t get that federal money. After we had saved and saved the district came out with the new curriculum and said You WILL adopt this approach to teaching reading. It was top-down again, and we fought it for years until finally we were told “no more” you have to give in on this and adopt it.”



Anyone reading this article who wants to assure a positive direction for ASD needs to vote for these candidates.

Murphy has a different vision for AD2 schools: “If you listen to the candidates for school board, they will tell you they are accountable to meet every need of every student, but that is absolutely impossible in a district the size of ASD. AD2 has three high schools, a couple of middle schools, 14 elementary schools and a couple of different charter/homeschool programs. anywhere from 7,000 to 9,000 students, 400 teachers; what a difference in size from ASD! We could have a school district the size of this region if we wanted one, with a school board if we wanted one, and small advisory boards—however we wanted to organize it—in accordance with Title 14, which regulates how public schooling will be conducted in Alaska.



<https://donnliston.net/2021/01/destiny-happens.html>

“We are running our schools in the old industrial farm model,” concludes Murphy “We are not in that model anymore; our students must be able to compete globally. It is exciting to think about what options we might consider! I think with EagleExit we can invite community members to come forward and create new options for building a better system. Let’s consider: “What can we do better?”

References:

[1] ASD Title 1 Schools <https://www.asdk12.org/Page/5320>

Preschools

- [Alaska Native Cultural Charter School](#)
- [Chester Valley Elementary School](#)
- [Fairview Elementary School](#)
- [Lake Otis Elementary School](#)
- [Mountain View Elementary School](#)
- [North Star Elementary School](#)
- [Russian Jack Elementary School](#)
- [Tyson Elementary School](#)
- [Williwaw Elementary School](#)

Elementary Schools

- [Abbott Loop Elementary School](#)
- [Airport Heights Elementary School](#)
- [Alaska Native Cultural Charter School](#)
- [Chester Valley Elementary School](#)
- [Creekside Park Elementary School](#)
- [Fairview Elementary School](#)
- [Klatt Elementary School](#)
- [Lake Hood Elementary School](#)
- [Lake Otis Elementary School](#)
- [Mountain View Elementary School](#)
- [Muldoon Elementary School](#)
- [North Star Elementary School](#)
- [Northwood ABC Elementary School](#)
- [Nunaka Valley Elementary School](#)

- Ptarmigan Elementary School
- Russian Jack Elementary School
- Taku Elementary School
- Tyson Elementary School
- Williwaw Elementary School
- Willow Crest Elementary School
- Wonder Park Elementary School

Secondary Schools

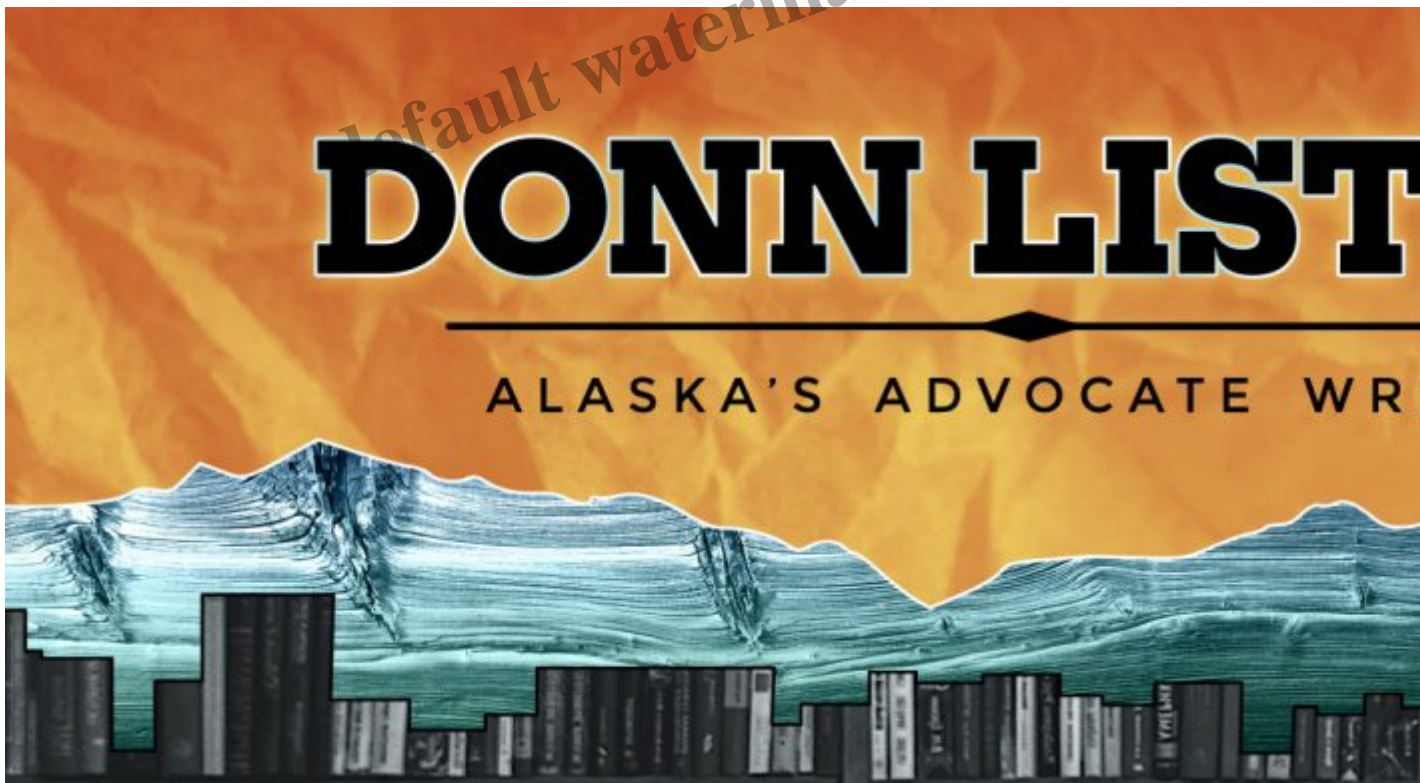
- Bartlett High School
- Begich Middle School
- Central Middle School of Science
- East High School
- Benny Benson Secondary School (Alternative)

[2] Designing Education

<https://eagleexit.com/designing-education/>

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<https://eagleexit.com/designing-education/>



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