

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SPECIAL MEETING  
ASSEMBLY/SCHOOL BOARD - MARCH 12, 2002**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The special meeting of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly was held on March 12, 2002 at the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly Chambers, Palmer, Alaska. The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. by Mayor Timothy L. Anderson. The purpose of the special meeting was a joint assembly/school board meeting.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Assembly members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. J. Bruce Bush, Assembly District No. 1  
Ms. Sara Jansen, Assembly District No. 2 (Deputy Mayor)  
Mr. Talis J. Colberg, Assembly District No. 3  
Mr. Dan Kelly, Assembly District No. 4  
Ms. Jody Simpson, Assembly District No. 5  
Mr. Jim Colver, Assembly District No. 6 (via teleconference at 6:25 p.m.)  
Ms. Kelly Ladere, Assembly District No. 7

School Board members present and establishing a quorum were:

Mr. Rob Wells, Seat A  
Mr. Carl Gatto, Seat B  
Ms. Linda Menard, Seat C  
Mr. Bob Johnson, Seat D  
Mr. Mike Chmielewski, Seat E  
Mr. Larry DeVilbiss, Seat F  
Mr. Daniel Contini, Seat G

Borough staff present:

Ms. Sandra Dillon, Borough Clerk  
Mr. John Duffy, Borough Manager  
Mr. Jim Swing, Public Works Director

School staff present:

Mr. Jack Sherman  
Ms. Patricia Chesbro, Superintendent

**III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The agenda was approved as presented without objection.

**IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The pledge of allegiance was led by students in attendance for their government class.

**V. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

There were no one present who wished to be heard.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Annual Budget (MSB 2.12.075)

Mr. Jack Sherman:

- reported and explained the written report of revenue and expenditures;
- summarized the total revenue budget of \$122,525,062; and
- explained the \$1.8 million increase in total grants.

Mayor Anderson noted the presence of Assemblymember Colver via teleconference at 6:25 p.m.

Discussion and questions ensued regarding the budget report.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- spoke to the school board's attempt to address increased salaries; and
- voiced concern and asked if anyone had any solutions to the problem.

School Board Member Contini:

- explained that what the assembly just saw was the 2002 budget; the 2003 budget is currently in process;
- noted the request for 2003 is anticipated to be about the same as 2002;
- said that from public comments to date, Trappers Creek and Midnight Sun Charter Schools need more than what is budgeted;
- noted two big obstacles currently ongoing with contracts in arbitration; said dealing with an unknown number;
- spoke to what the school board has contemplated doing in order to make the budgeted money stretch;
- said the board plans to sit down at its next meeting with staff and see how they can make it work;
- expects it to end up in a give/give situation;
- asked for help and advice as to solutions from the assembly and from whoever else wants to participate; and
- stated they intend to have a budget ready to present by April 1, 2002.

School Board Member DeVilbiss:

- noted information not widely known is that the board has in its budget a three percent cost which has been offered attempting to help accommodate the employees' needs.

Assemblymember Jansen:

- spoke to the headway made last year by the school board and assembly working together;
- commented that she is not sure what the best solution is;
- noted that state full funding is also necessary; and
- looks forward to seeing what the educators in the community think is the best way to tackle the problem.

School Board Member DeVilbiss:

- suggested offering a bonus at the end of the year if a fund balance remains.

School Board Member Gatto:

- reminded the assembly that legislators won't consider amending the formula until the borough fully funds; and
- noted that there is no better way to spend money than on education.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- spoke to educating teachers and parents about funding issues;
- emphasized making an extra effort to meet with teachers and parents or send out newsletters informing what the costs are, where the money will be coming from, and what would be expected of them in order to gain their support;
- doesn't have a specific answer to lowering the costs, but doesn't want to see our teachers earning less money;
- suggested that we need to have a financial incentive to keep our good teachers; and

- suggested asking for temperance in terms of wanting more money or at least find a way to lower the costs so that money can be available to them.

School Board Member Chmielewski:

- spoke to the issue of lapsed funding at the end of the year ;
- thinks it is worth revisiting the issue and taking a look at how we deal with that money;
- suggested projecting what may come from Juneau as additional funds and plugging it in as a potential; and
- said that it be projected what should be done with any anticipated money in terms of salaries, benefits, insurance, etc., instead of waiting until it actually arrives.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- thanked the school administration for the fine efforts achieved in obtaining grants.

B. Zoning (requested by School Board)

School Board Member Contini:

- explained that the board has received correspondence from the borough requesting opinions on the zoning issue; and
- opined that since schools are on public land and in public use zones, that they would be exempt from opposition and continue as planned.

Mayor Anderson:

- was assured by the planning director that all existing schools have been put in public use zones.

C. Legislative Issues (requested by School Board):

School Board Member Chmielewski:

- commented that there is less potential for legislative funding this year compared to last year;
- said there was a much narrower range of possibility for additional funding; and
- noted the school board has chosen to be conservative in what they have done, without a projection for additional monies, rather than have to deal with cutbacks in case the money doesn't come through.

School Board Member Gatto:

- commented on the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- noted serious federal requirements attached to the Act;
- opined that the money obtained under this Act will not be enough and that we will have to supplement with our own money to satisfy stringent requirements;
- relayed that the Alaska Association of School Boards is very concerned with the federal government control instead of local control; and
- said there is a huge lobbying effort to get some relaxation to the requirements from Washington but he doesn't expect it and doesn't think the association does either.

School Board Member Menard:

- commented that there are many more bills dealing with education right now than in the past;
- noted teacher shortage and Alaska history;
- submitted a list of all the bills for those who are interested in having a copy;
- informed that the board has come up with a list of what it will support and what it will oppose;
- spoke to the issue of consolidating school districts;

- spoke to the issue of dealing with attracting and keeping good teachers, noting teacher housing loan programs, student loan assumption, and offering bonuses;
- said she expects a lot of debate on the floor over teacher shortage bills;
- suggested if the assembly is of a like mind concerning school district consolidation, to send a letter of support to Juneau; thinks a lot of money could be saved by consolidating districts; and
- reported the three board members were able to meet with all our legislators and that it went quite well.

School Board Member DeVilbiss:

- inquired whether these priorities were already blended with our borough priorities, whether the assembly has adopted them, and whether borough lobbyists would help with their support.

Mr. Duffy:

- responded affirmatively.

School Board Member Gatto:

- had some additional notes, stating by comparison that 40 states in the country had to cut their budget, not including Alaska;
- noted there is very little money available under the ESEA;
- informed that national testing is coming and the federal role in education is exploding;
- noted the federal government's demand that we have the least restrictive environment for students, which creates an enormous discipline problem;
- opined that the curriculum that the federal government expect from the country are really driven by simply seven areas – all mega-cities – which have the most significant impact on decisions made at the federal level;
- spoke to what is happening with teachers – in Clark County, NV, for example, they are getting houses as well as a signing bonus; noted other incentives for teachers that they are trying to get from anywhere they can get them; and
- commented that we are going to be inundated with new rules, requirements, regulations, and restrictions.

Further discussion continued regarding the ESEA lack of funding.

School Board Member Menard:

- referred to the Citizens Information Kit, which gives a lot of great information on how Alaska compares regarding teacher salaries, spending priorities, etc; and
- noted that it is an excellent fact-finding book.

#### D. Math Matters

Ms. Patricia Chesbro:

- referred to the comprehensive written report on the Math Matters project submitted with the packet; reviewed items listed on the first page;
- noted time line of June 10-29, 2001, with 1,583 students, 125 teaching staff;
- reported that the planning team was composed of 12 teachers from across the district, representing K-12 education, all working together to design Math Matters;
- cited the grants used in addition to borough funds to support the project;
- reported that the group focused on the theme of functions and relationships (algebra) because it was one of the weakest areas, and developed a K-12 continuum that the teachers used in preparing their lessons;
- noted the teachers used Alaska as well as national math standards;
- three sites were chosen: Palmer Junior-Middle School (750 students), Wasilla Middle (750 students), and Su Valley High School (100 students);
- spoke to how the project was advertised; students were divided into groups of 15;

- discussed the elements of assessment used;
- spoke to benchmark testing, discussing the new Terra Nova test this year;
- noted of interest is the child's attitude and confidence in learning math;
- commented that several attitude surveys were done and it was found that especially in the middle school students, attitudes considerably changed about math in three weeks;
- commented that research is very clear that if students have a better attitude towards math, they're going to do better in math especially when they get to high school;
- reported that the teacher and student materials ordered are also now being used in classrooms;
- noted that coordinated transportation was provided;
- said that one of the things they learned was that they need to be more careful about grouping because the achievement levels were too wide within the groups and it was difficult for the teachers to address the students' specific needs;
- reported the teaching staff professional development worked well;
- reported 251 parents responded to the parent survey; results were that only 8 of those responding would not have their child participate again;
- noted program evaluations were based on the student and teacher journals, pre and post test attitudes, student portfolios, and parent surveys;
- noted some of the changes needed as recommended by a hired consultant;
- said they expect to serve 1,200 students in the next summer school with 82 teachers, making the groups a little smaller and also putting some emphasis on reading experience; and
- reported the final analysis was that it was a very successful summer school which changed the way teachers are dealing with math.

Comments and questions ensued regarding:

- the dollar amount spent by the school district on this program last year;
- current inability to extend the program to greater than 3 weeks because funding expires the end of June;
- the weakest math areas for students - algebra, geometry, and numeration;
- whether or not 2003 money could be used in July or August to extend summer school; and
- the program not being limited to just those students who attended last year.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- shared that she received an overwhelming number of positive responses to the summer school program from her constituents;
- noted they thought it was a good use of the money; and
- appreciated the comments from the consultant on ways to improve and assess the program.

School Board member Menard:

- commented that the 162 teachers that have applied for the 82 teacher positions for the summer program is an example of what we're seeing in teachers having to augment their salaries during the summer; and
- stated we haven't inflation-proofed the funding formula for years and we are behind on what we can offer.

Further discussion and comments continued regarding Math Matters.

#### E. School Designators

Assemblymember Simpson:

- explained that she asked this be put on the agenda as a reminder to discuss before going to AML in April and that there is legislation pending on the issue.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- commented that she also has an interest and asked if the school board had a particular area they would like the assembly to underline; and
- requested a copy of the bill.

School Board member Chmielewski:

- commented that he expects a delay on the legislation and that there needs to be more work done before we can apply it in a way that is worthwhile.

#### F. Houston High School Construction Update

Assemblymember Simpson:

- explained this is a request from her constituents to track the progress of the school construction and the district's effort to engage the community in developing a curriculum for the school.

Mr. Jim Swing:

- gave an update on the Houston High School construction;
- noted the construction is 53 percent completed at the present time;
- reported they extended the contract time for 110 days, making the due date for completion of the project on November 6, 2002;
- reported all structural work is completed and that all work being done is now inside the building, which consists of mechanical systems rough-in, electrical systems rough-in, HVAC systems rough-in, required sheetrocking, and hanging door frames;
- noted change orders totaling \$21,556.00;
- noted that the original amount of the contract was \$14,347,000;
- stated that at present, there is no change in the notice of claims; and
- thinks that the 110-day extension was warranted.

Discussion followed regarding:

- damages connected to the 110-day extension; and
- the status of the committee appointed to work with the community to develop the curriculum.

Ms. Kim Floyd:

- informed as to status of the committee; and
- reported they did have a meeting with some of the parents several months ago and that special effort is being taken to keep them informed.

Assemblymember Simpson:

- noted she received a newsletter that contained an overview of what happened at the last meeting; and
- inquired as to date of the next meeting.

## VII. SCHOOL BOARD, MAYOR ANDERSON, ASSEMBLY, AND STAFF COMMENTS

School Board member Gatto:

- spoke to what is referred to as the "Alaska Disconnect" in terms of the problems we face when we ask the state for money.

School Board member Menard:

- expressed appreciation for these reports that come back to be shared with fellow board members;

- thinks as a general rule the school board members have done a good job in reporting the information they've learned; and
- commented that she is looking forward to Assemblymember Kelly's report.

School Board member Contini:

- commented on the presentation on Sherrod School; noted the Swanson and Sherrod PTAs were very happy with the presentation;
- encouraged staff to keep the project moving; and
- thanked Mayor Anderson for his attendance at the recent school board meeting.

Assemblymember Kelly:

- reported on his trip to Washington, D.C. - - the details of which were submitted in a full written report;
- highlighted the issues concerning homeland security and IDEA funding;
- reported that he had a chance to talk with Senator Stevens, Congressman Young, and Senator Murkowski's office staff regarding IDEA funding;
- pointed out that Senator Berg has an amendment which calls for distribution of those funds at 30 percent to the state for administration and 70 percent to the municipalities;
- noted that Senator Murkowski's staff was not only happy that he had come prepared to discuss full funding for IDEA;
- relayed that he had asked if it was possible to earmark these funds so a majority of the funds actually get down to the municipal school boards rather than just stopping at the state level,
- reported that we should be seeing some additional funds coming that will be earmarked specifically for the municipalities in Alaska that are scheduled for the IDEA funding; and
- pointed out that the sum is \$3.7 million and just that issue by itself was worth the cost of trip.

Assemblymember Colver:

- commented that he thinks we have a challenging budget ahead with respect to the funding of schools and looks forward to working with the board members and administration to resolve the issues together.

Assemblymember Ladere:

- commented that she is optimistic that we can all work together to resolve the budget challenges.

Assemblymember Jansen:

- voiced support for the Sherrod School project;
- commented we are faced with a huge challenge in public education;
- noted places like Nevada who are able to offer teacher housing and have sources of revenue that are not available us;
- commented that it would be helpful to know what the average teacher's salary is during the budget process; and
- said that she is hopeful that we will find the answers.

Ms. Dillon:

- noted that the March 26, 2002, joint assembly/planning commission meeting will have to be rescheduled for lack of a quorum; and
- stated that she will advise of the rescheduled date.

Mr. Duffy:

- thanked the school district and Mr. Bob Doyle for providing the borough with some technical assistance during the emergency with the UPS system;

- also thanked Mr. Contini for helping to get the matter resolved late Friday night;
- alerted the school board that Senator Green's bill regarding a nutrition center will have a hearing on Thursday afternoon;
- brought attention to the manager's report, noting a report concerning the Chickaloon request, and also that the Senate Transportation Committee had requested that the borough come up with the top two regional priorities; and
- noted that the port commission and the planning commission have forwarded their items which have been identified in the report.

Mayor Anderson:

- commended Assemblymember Kelly on his report;
- thanked Mr. Contini for his comments on the recent school board meeting;
- said that he is looking forward to the budget process and that he expects it to be a little smoother than last year;
- commented on the Chickaloon letter addressed to him asking for another meeting; and
- thanked the school board and the assembly for coming.

## VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The special meeting was adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Minutes approved: April 9, 2002

*Signed copy available at the Clerk's office.*