



Policy Brief

Anchorage School District Should Consolidate Its Empty Classrooms

By Bob Griffin

Anchorage has dedicated more space for elementary schools than it currently needs, and it is making ASD less effective than it could be. Our elementary schools are currently operating at an average of 85% capacity¹. A reasonable solution would be consolidate the space we have, bringing it up to the level of capacity we have at our secondary schools. If we were to realign the elementary system closer to the 92% capacity of the secondary school system, it would result in tens of millions of dollars that could be refocused on improving student outcomes without increasing taxpayer burden.

Based on information from Appendix E of the current CIP, ASD schools had 5.7 million square feet in 1993-94 with 47,232 students. In 2011-12, we have 7.7 million

square feet with 46,347 students (not including 2,405 charter schools students who do not attend classes in ASD buildings). The 7.7 million square foot figure also excludes new district headquarters, since that is a leased facility that is not owned by the district.

Anchorage has added capacity for at least 4,000 new kids in elementary schools while enrollment has dropped by 3,500.

Since 1993-94, we've added 12 new schools and expanded 40 others. In raw figures, this represents an increase in school floor space of 35%, which would accommodate as many as 10,000 new students. But the number of students attending

has declined 2%.

The difference is especially evident in the elementary schools. Enrollment in non-charter elementary schools in 1993 was 27,842. It had fallen to 24,302 by 2010 (a 15% decrease). Despite this dramatic decline in enrollment we have expanded elementary school floor space by 826,926 square feet (equal to more than 17 football fields) since

¹ According to the ASD Capital Improvement Plan

1993. This includes six new schools, Alpenglow; Kasuun; Kincaid; Lake Hood; Tyson; Trailside and Polaris.

Bottom line: We have added capacity for at least 4,000 new kids in elementary schools while enrollment has dropped by 3,500 and will fall by at least 2,000 more as more sixth graders are moved to middle schools.

Each elementary school has a budget of about \$3 million including labor, supplies, maintenance, cleaning and utilities. Not included in those budgets are approximately \$400,000/year in reoccurring component replacement and an unknown portion of district resource to support each school.

Moving from 85% capacity to 92% capacity would involve closing or repurposing four elementary schools in the short term, and one or two more, as more sixth graders moved to middle schools. Operating elementary schools at

92% would also allow us to absorb a sudden surge of about 3,000 more elementary school kids in the future without exceeding system capacity.

New schools since 1994	Student Capacity
Alpenglow (1995)	500
Begich Middle (2007)	1,100
Eagle River High (2005)	900
Goldenview (1997)	900
Kasuun (1996)	500
Kincaid (1996)	500
Lake Hood (1996)	500
Mirror Lake Middle (1997)	900
South (2004)	1,600
Trailside (2000)	500
Tyson (1996)	450
Polaris (K-12)	500
Kennedy (closed)	-250
Change in Capacity	+8,600

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