

June 16, 2013

Final Investigative Report Concerning Ombudsman Complaint 2012-0099

COMPLAINT

An Anchorage citizen alleged that the Anchorage School District does not adequately inform parents about the Gifted/IGNITE program, and does not adequately inform parents that their children are eligible for gifted testing.

FINDINGS

The complaint that parents are not adequately informed about the Gifted/IGNITE program is **JUSTIFIED**. The complaint that parents are not adequately informed that their children are eligible for gifted testing is **JUSTIFIED**. Both of the complaints in this case are **JUSTIFIED**.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

First allegation: An Anchorage citizen, whose child is enrolled in an ASD school, contacted the Ombudsman's office in March 2012 alleging he was not informed by the school regarding the gifted program, IGNITE. ASD confirmed that while the Anchorage School District trains classroom teachers to identify potentially gifted students, parents are generally expected to learn about the gifted program through the ASD web site, word of mouth, the parent's own contacts, and through other programs, such as pre-school. The Associate Ombudsman and the Deputy Ombudsman found information about the Gifted/IGNITE program difficult to locate on the ASD website. The complainant was not provided information regarding the IGNITE program through school newsletters, nor was he informed about the program during parent-teacher conferences. **For these reasons, the complaint that the ASD does not adequately inform parents about the Gifted/IGNITE program is JUSTIFIED.**

Second allegation: The ASD elementary enrichment program, IGNITE, is open to qualified students grades 2-6. The complainant alleges he was not informed by the school that his child was eligible to test for the IGNITE program; he was made aware of the program by the parents of one of his child's classmates. Subsequently his child was tested for the IGNITE program. The complainant alleges that his child's potential acceptance into the program was diminished because he was not tested as soon as he became eligible. Upon investigation it was determined that testing at a younger age will not necessarily yield more reliable gifted results; however it is documented that identifying children as soon as possible for gifted services results in better educational experiences for gifted children. **Because the ASD does not make information as to when children are eligible for gifted testing readily available to parents, this complaint is JUSTIFIED.**

The Anchorage School District has a highly diverse student population. Limiting access to gifted programs to children whose parents have access to computers, are comfortable

communicating with teachers, have knowledge of the ASD website or established parental networks may lead to racial and socioeconomic disparity. ASD Policy 325.12 states
“The Board recognizes that the needs of individual students vary widely and that the highest educational standards imply challenging each child according to his/her individual capacity. Therefore, programs shall be developed to meet the educational needs of both the gifted and the physically or cognitively disabled students.”

Because the Anchorage School District does not have a policy of informing every student and parent about the opportunity to be tested, and if qualified, participate in the District’s Gifted Programs, the Ombudsman finds these complaints to be JUSTIFIED. A preliminary report regarding these matters was provided to the Anchorage School District, and the district responded via email on June 6, 2013. **Based on the investigation of this case, the Municipal Ombudsman recommends the following:**

- 1) that the ASD website include links to the gifted programs, as appropriate including Kindergarten, Newcomers and Military Resources pages.** The Anchorage School District has provided a link on the “Parents” page for the gifted Gifted program. **In the Ombudsman’s opinion, the Anchorage School District should add links to the Kindergarten, Newcomers and Military Resource pages as well.**
- 2) that the Gifted program be highlighted on the Choices in Education home page and Alternative Schools and Programs page.** The Anchorage School District did not respond to this recommendation.
- 3) that the pamphlet “School Registration”, for new to ASD students include information regarding gifted programs available to students.** The Anchorage School District did not respond to this recommendation.
- 4) that the ASD Gifted Department page include information regarding the qualifications and application process for gifted testing.** The Anchorage School District has made the needed changes to the Gifted Department page making Information about the program and testing more accessible for parents.
- 5) that at the end of every academic year, all elementary school newsletters include Gifted/IGNITE information.** The Anchorage School District has made the commitment to include gifted IGNITE information in school newsletters.
- 6) that all parents of first graders receive mailed information about the IGNITE program that is available for qualified 2-6th graders.** The Anchorage School District said that this recommendation was not economically feasible.

Based on these findings, and these recommendations, this case is closed.

If you object to the Ombudsman's decision to decline or discontinue this investigation or review, you may file a grievance with the Ombudsman as specified in A.M.C.R. 2.60.006.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Darrel W. Hess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Darrel W. Hess
Municipal Ombudsman

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eisses". The signature is cursive and somewhat compact, with the first letters of each word being capitalized.

Elizabeth A. Eisses
Deputy Ombudsman