

Alternative Learning Programs and Schools Standards and Implementation Procedures

**Created 2006
Revised 2016**

**Safe and Healthy Schools Support Division
Department of Public Instruction**

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

This document is the first revision to the original standards, which were prepared to serve as a guide for the planning and implementation of alternative learning programs and schools (ALPS) in North Carolina. The original document was created by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for the State Board of Education (SBE) in response to Session Law 2005-446, which directed the SBE to adopt standards for alternative learning programs.

The standards, suggestions and implementation strategies provided in this document shall be considered requirements for new program development or for modification of existing programs.

The SBE approved a set of procedures for Safe Schools and Alternative Learning Programs in 1999. In January 2000, the Alternative and Safe Schools/Instructional Support Section of DPI was given the task of clarifying the state's guidelines based on Session Law 1999-397. This statute required the SBE to define at-risk students and to include ALPS in state accountability requirements. The statute also required local education agencies (LEAs) to create a set of consistent procedures for placing students in ALPS.

The Alternative and Safe Schools Section provided a follow-up report during the 2001-2002 school year with specific recommended guidelines for ALPS focusing on the unique settings and populations provided for at-risk students. This led to the development of *Policies and Procedures for Alternative Learning Programs Grades K-12* were adopted in September 2003. This document was updated in 2014 and is posted on the same webpage as these standards: <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>

In May 2005, House Bill 1076 directed the State Board to adopt standards for ALPS. The Alternative and Safe Schools Section created focus groups to obtain input from key stakeholders, including the North Carolina Association of Alternative Educators and the Alternative Learning Program Advisory Committee. The standards were based on information gleaned from the focus groups, the legislation and SBE policies in effect at that time, the *Policies and Procedures for Alternative Learning Programs Grades K-12*, and research on best practices in alternative schools.

This revision seeks to maintain the substance of the original standards, update language to conform to current policies and legislation, and eliminate redundancy found in the original document.

ALPS Standards

Clear Mission

Schools or programs demonstrate a clear mission when they can describe a shared commitment to specific instructional goals, priorities, and accountability measures. As part of the mission, the staff accepts responsibility for student learning and growth as individuals.

Leadership

Leadership demonstrates the application of shared decision making, organizational direction, and the establishment of high expectations. Good leaders identify and obtain needed resources, including instructional materials and equipment, highly qualified instructional staff, student services staff, and assistants.

Culture and Climate

Schools must have a safe, orderly, and caring environment conducive to learning for all students. School accountability and improvement plans and/or program objectives clearly define expectations for professional conduct, student services, classroom instruction, and student behavior.

Professional Development

Professional development utilizes growth plans used to identify school and individual needs to improve teaching and learning for administrators, teachers, and support staff, with emphasis on research-based best practices and performance-based evaluations.

Parent/Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement focuses on the establishment of authentic partnerships between school, home, community agencies, industry, government, faith-based organizations and law enforcement based on mutual respect and collaboration.

Curriculum and Instruction

High quality instruction helps students attain mastery of academic topics and improves their self-efficacy for becoming life-long learners. Teachers maintain academic rigor and engage students in ways to bring relevance and relationships to the topics at hand. Teachers differentiate instruction and employ technology appropriately.

Monitoring and Assessment

The school or program frequently monitors student academic progress through a variety of diagnostic and assessment procedures. Teachers use data to modify instruction as needed to improve individual student performance. Students and parents are kept informed of academic status and progress.

Quality Indicators and Examples

Standards	Quality Indicators	Examples
Clear Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff shares in vision that all students can learn at high levels with appropriate support.• Mission, goals, and expected outcomes are documented and embraced by staff, students, and parents.• Student success is central to all management of learning.• Mission is consistent with district goals and state standards.• The whole student (personal, social, emotional, intellectual, life skills, safety and security) is of concern, not just academic endeavors.• Individual learning differences are recognized and embraced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vision statement• Mission statement• School improvement plan• Meeting agendas• Staff handbook• Student handbook

Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared vision is communicated through stated goals. • A collaborative process is used for making school and program decisions. • Decisions are made regarding program operation according to local policies and procedures within the confines of state legislation and policy. • School involves the community, home, and other stakeholders to foster a safe, caring, and orderly learning environment. • Clear procedures and guidelines are in place for staff and students. • Data is used to inform instructional practices and monitor student performance. • School provides transportation, food services and health support. • School provides sufficient and appropriate resources (technology, equipment, supplies and materials) • Teachers assigned to alternative learning programs serve only alternative program students. • Teacher performance is effectively evaluated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Handbook • Faculty Handbook • Newsletters • School rules • Student enrollment processes and procedures • Routines for classroom management, transportation, food service, discipline, scheduling • School calendar • Measurable goals and objectives • Curriculum guides • Academic performance data • School based teams – MTSS, School Improvement, Grade Level, Department • Faculty meeting agendas and memos • Teacher evaluations • School Improvement Plan • Emergency Management Plan
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<p>Culture and Climate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School addresses academic and non-academic needs of students. • Written rules are clearly understood and accepted by staff, students, and parents and are applied consistently to guide student behavior, monitor progress, and manage the learning experience. • The school has short- and long-term goals that address the needs of the student, staff, family, and community. • Program objectives are measurable and used to evaluate effectiveness. • Program effectiveness evaluations include student performance outcomes for core content, non-core content areas, and non- academic variables. • Cultural differences are understood and accommodated in order to meet student, home, and school needs. • High expectations for student academic performance, student behavior, and teacher performance are communicated on a regular basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission and vision statements • Student Code of Conduct • Student and Faculty Handbooks • Use of discipline data • Posted rules and consequences • Incentives and awards • Ceremonies and celebrations
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Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys of staff professional needs are recommended. • Each staff member develops a plan to facilitate personal and professional growth. • Each staff member participates in professional development activities aimed at personal and professional improvement. • Professional development uses internal and external resources. • School or program has sufficient resources to allow all staff to participate in workshops, conferences and seminars. • School or program uses a variety of professional development approaches. • Professional development emphasizes research-based strategies. • Professional development addresses long-term student learning and behavioral outcomes. • Professional development addresses effective collaboration with family and community. • Professional development emphasizes the three phases of the change process: initiation, implementation and institutionalization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development training rosters, agendas • Professional Development Plans • Staff Individual Growth Plans • Meeting agendas reflect PD sharing • Surveys to suggest areas of needed professional development • Data analysis to determine areas of needed professional development • Evidence of mentoring • Professional Development resources and materials
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<p>Parent/Community Involvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are involved in the decision for student placement in the ALPS. • Parents are involved in creating and updating the student's Personal Education Plan (PEP). • Leadership promotes effective communication and positive interactions between parents and school personnel. • Communications from school staff inform parents of specific ways to support the student in achieving success at school. • School or program should proactively provide positive contacts to parents regarding student successes. • School or program should refer parents to resources and training sessions that may help them provide a more supportive home environment. • Privacy is provided in working with parents regarding student success and needed support services. • Parents are invited to provide school improvement suggestions. • Partnerships are designed to support and enrich the school learning environment. • Partnerships exist with community service organizations, government agencies, cultural groups, faith-based representatives, and businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Volunteer logs • School activity logs • Meeting agendas • Business partnership log • Written communications to parents, community members • Newspaper articles • Student Personal Education Plans (PEPs) • Progress reports, report cards • Parent contact logs • Parent conference logs • Home visit logs • Access to online Parent Portal
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Curriculum and Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students have access to the academic core curriculum, including health and physical education. • Teachers use the North Carolina Standard Course of Study to facilitate instruction. • Teachers are certified in the content areas and levels they teach. • All students have access to arts, life skills, character education and other non-core content areas. • Curriculum options are available to students that assist them in meeting graduation requirements. • Curriculum options are developed to promote student internship and future work opportunities. • Students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs are addressed in the curriculum. • Teachers collaborate in planning cross-curricular instruction. • Instruction is differentiated to accommodate student strengths, deficits, learning styles, and interests. • Teachers use information about students from the PEPs in planning differentiated instruction. • Students receive both direct and indirect instruction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard Course of Study • Textbooks, workbooks • Learning styles indicators • Test data analysis • Lesson plans reflecting use of differentiated instruction • Personal Education Plans (PEPs) • Class schedules • Team/department meeting agendas • Thematic units • Homework policies • Grading scales • Sample assessments • Tutorial schedules • Diagnostic testing results • Remediation schedules
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Monitoring and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of assessments is clearly defined and communicated to the student and parents. • The school uses diagnostic testing for identifying deficits in reading and mathematics. • Students with identified deficits in reading and mathematics receive remediation. • Teachers use multiple evaluation and assessment strategies that are frequent, rigorous, and aligned with curriculum and instruction. • Teachers use assessments to identify concepts that need to be retaught. • Teachers use traditional and non-traditional methods of assessment to track student performance and progress. • Multiple assessment measures are aligned with district benchmark measures. • Multiple assessment measures support students in attaining concepts included in state end-of-grade and end-of-course testing. • Students and parents are informed of assessment results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample traditional assessments • Sample assessments using student portfolios • Test data • Performance goals • Scoring devices such as rubrics • Test data analysis • Diagnostic testing results • Parent access to online Parent Portal
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Standards in Action: Creating Best Practices

The ALPS Standards described in the preceding section bring a second source of guidance for establishing and operating alternative schools and programs in North Carolina. The other source is Policies and Procedures for Alternative Learning Programs and Schools (see <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/alp/develop/alpmanual.pdf>).

The following sections demonstrate how the seven ALPS standards along with ALPS policies and procedures can be put into practice to create quality alternative schools and programs.

Impact of Successful Alternative Learning Programs

Successful alternative learning programs will create learning environments that are nurturing and have protective factors that help students become resilient. These resiliency factors counter situations that put students at risk of school failure. Alternative learning programs help to decrease school failure through effective planning, implementation and evaluation of strategies that:

- maintain emotionally and physically safe, orderly, and caring learning environments;
- assist students in making healthy choices;
- increase student achievement;
- increase parental input and involvement;
- reduce dropout and suspension rates;
- increase student attendance and graduation rates;
- provide a low teacher/student ratio;
- involve communities in achieving the mission and goals of the program; and
- advance the concept of alternative learning programs as avenues of opportunity for positive student outcomes.

Effective ALPS Program Design

A general review of the research suggests that the following characteristics contribute to effective alternative programs:

- strong, visionary, and supportive leaders;
- warm and caring teachers and other staff;
- staff who choose to work in the program;
- high level of student and staff engagement;
- high expectations for staff and students;
- opportunities for students to choose to enroll in the program;
- long-term interventions to help students change behaviors;
- services designed to meet the needs of the whole student;
- small teacher to student ratios;
- flexible and individualized instructional delivery;
- sufficient support staff and a comprehensive counseling component;
- safe, orderly, caring, and inviting learning environment;
- standards for conduct, interaction, and engagement; and
- fair and equitable policies and procedures.

Considerations in Making Student Referrals

The following considerations should be made when establishing the referral process for the Alternative Learning Program or School.

Determining the Need for an ALPS Placement

- Evaluate all of the available data within timelines specified in the LEA's alternative learning program guidelines.
- Consider other interventions that may be implemented in the regular classroom or make a referral to another program or service (e.g. remedial reading/math) in the school's continuum of services for at-risk students.
- If the school cannot provide any further effective assistance, a referral to the alternative learning program or school (ALPS) may be recommended.

Data Sources

Listed below are some sources of data that may be used in determining the need for an alternative placement:

- Discipline and attendance records
- Demographic information
- Number of years the student is behind in grade placement for his/her age
- Student's cumulative record, including grades and state EOG or EOC scores
- Exceptional Children records, if applicable
- Interviews with the student, teacher(s) and parent/guardian
- Home visits conducted by teacher, social worker or other school personnel
- Observations made in the student's regular education setting by an appropriate third party
- Student's self-report
- Portfolio of student's work in the regular classroom
- Medical records, if applicable
- Academic and behavioral screening information, if available

Multidisciplinary Management Team

A multi-disciplinary team made up of three or more informed individuals (in addition to the parents) should be established to:

- receive and review the referral;
- schedule a placement meeting;
- provide written notification to the parents of the time, place, and date of the meeting;
- document the extent and effectiveness of the interventions identified in the plan for the student;
- document evidentiary information used to support the referral;
- document parental participation, or the lack thereof;
- document the individuals involved in the decision;
- provide to the alternative school or program all relevant student records, including anecdotal information if a decision is made to place the student;
- advise the parents or guardians of the student's due process rights and the appeals process;

- provide written notification to the parent, referring school, and ALP of the decision to assign or not to assign the student to the alternative program; and
- provide written notification to the parent regarding the appeals process and right of due process.

When the ALP is designed as a program or school within a school, the principal will have the authority to approve the placement, in accordance with ALP and LEA guidelines. If the ALP is a separate school or facility, representatives from the central office and the ALP should be included on the school-based committee making the placement decision. The central office representative must approve the placement.

Parent Involvement

Parents must be informed about difficulties their child is experiencing and involved in decisions regarding the student's placement and educational program. Specifically:

- Parents must be involved in the decision to refer and place a student in a therapeutic program and/or alternative educational setting.
- The school should strongly encourage parents to be present at each meeting and make arrangements that allow them to participate. If the parents cannot be present for meetings, the school should keep them informed about the committee's recommendations.
- The LEA should take actions needed to ensure that parents understand the proceedings at a meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for parents who are deaf or whose native language is not English.
- Parents who do not agree with the Committee's recommendations should be advised of the LEA's due process procedures.

Special Considerations for Children with Disabilities

- If the student subject to consideration for assignment to an alternative education program is suspected of being a child with a disability, the LEA must conduct a full and individual initial evaluation of the child to determine eligibility and placement.
- If the child is determined to be eligible for special education and related services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be developed for the child within specified timelines. Education placement of a child with a disability in an alternative program must be based on his or her IEP.
- Each LEA must conduct a meeting for the purpose of developing, reviewing, or revising an IEP for each child with a disability. Prior to consideration of assignment of any child with a disability in an ALP, it must be determined that all required content of the IEP can be provided to the student in the ALP.
- Any revisions in the child's IEP must be done by the IEP team with all procedural safeguards and due process afforded parents, guardians or surrogate parents in the process of such revision.

Transitioning between Schools and Programs

Services should be available to facilitate student transition(s) from and to their regular school

and Alternative Learning Programs, or other placements such as training schools and day treatment facilities. These services should ensure that:

- the academic program is followed to keep the student on the appropriate graduation track;
- exit criteria and exit processes exist to ensure that the student is returned to the most appropriate educational setting;
- appropriate assessments are provided as needed;
- counseling or other support services are available;
- positive communication between parents, students, and schools is maintained.

When other types of services not offered by alternative schools or programs are needed, the following list of educational programs should be considered:

- School-based programs including tutoring and extended day
- Charter schools
- Community Colleges
- Community-based programs and services
- Faith-based programs and services
- Juvenile Court services
- Day Treatment Programs, which can be accessed through a local mental health center or a local school system
- Other mental health services
- Residential Programs including
 - Eckerd Camp, accessed through any local agency or school system
 - Multi-purpose Group Homes, which have in-house education program
 - Residential Drug Treatment Programs
- Residential Programs for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services
- Tarheel Challenge Academy
- Group homes

Personal Education Plans

A Personal Education Plan (PEP) must be developed for each student, by the ALP staff in consultation with parents and the sending school. The PEP must address the presenting academic and/or behavioral problem(s) and include the following:

- academic and/or behavioral goals to be met in the ALP
- projected timelines for meeting the goals
- criteria to be used in evaluating student progress
- signatures of the student, parents, and representatives from the sending school and the ALP

The student and parents must also sign a contract, which specifies that they accept placement in the ALP and that they will abide by the academic, behavioral, and social expectations established by the ALP.

If the student has been suspended from school prior to placement in an alternative learning program/school, the PEP must be developed during the period of suspension and prior to the student's admission to the ALP. If the placement does not involve a suspension from school, the PEP will be developed and implemented within the first week the student is assigned to the ALP. The PEP must be reviewed at least annually by the ALP's Student Services Management Team (SSMT) and revised as needed. Parents must be invited to participate in this review.

- When a student is placed in the alternative school or program, ALP staff members will meet to review the records forwarded by the referring school.
- The staff will determine the student's academic and behavioral needs of the student and the support services and intervention strategies needed [see GS 115C-105.48 (b)].
- Mental health services or other services provided by state and local agencies will be considered as interventions if needed.
- The staff will develop or amend the PEP for the student in cooperation with his/her parents and staff members from the sending school.
- Parents will be provided a copy of the PEP upon request.
- Parents should be encouraged to provide input regarding their child's needs while they are enrolled in an alternative learning school or program.
- The Student Service Management Teams in both the sending school and the Alternative Learning Program will cooperate in the development of exit criteria for the student.
- If the student does not meet the goals of the PEP, decisions about the need to revise the PEP will be made in cooperation with parents and the receiving school or program.
- If the student does not meet the goals of the PEP, decisions about continued placement in the ALP, referral to another program, or reassignment to the sending school will be made in cooperation with parents and the receiving school or program.

Process for Developing PEPs

Principals are responsible for coordinating and overseeing the PEP process in their schools.

1. Establish a process to gather and organize the information specified on the PEP form.
2. Examine the information and thoroughly analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each student needing a PEP.
3. Arrange needs in priority order if several are identified. Keep in mind that the needs may not always be academic. There may be other barriers contributing to a lack of academic performance.
4. Assemble the stakeholders appropriate for the individual student (teacher, counselor, social worker, parent or guardian, principal, and/or assistant principal, etc.) to review the data and develop a PEP. These persons, along with the parent/guardian, make up the PEP team and are responsible for reviewing the data and developing the PEP. All parties sign off on the completed PEP.
5. Outline the individual responsibilities of each PEP team member, including the parent or guardian, in developing, implementing, and monitoring the PEP.
6. Assess each student's process on a regular basis. If strategies placed in the plan are not producing the desired results at the first checkpoint or any subsequent checkpoint, the PEP team should meet to discuss needed revisions.
7. Monitor PEP implementation on a regular basis. Keep the PEP where it is accessible to the PEP team members. Hold periodic update sessions with parents or guardians.
8. Include all documentation in the student's permanent file when the intervention period is complete.
9. Develop procedures for transmission of information and files within the school or to the next school.

Curriculum and Instruction

Students in an alternative learning program setting must be afforded equal opportunity to complete a program of study that takes into account the special needs of children and includes appropriate modifications for students with disabilities, academically or intellectually gifted students, and students with discipline and emotional problems. The course of study should allow students to easily transition back to the regular (referring) school and provide the needed coursework for graduation requirements and college and/or career readiness.

Legislation

Local boards shall assess on a regular basis whether alternative schools / programs provide students with high quality and rigorous academic instruction and/or behavioral interventions [G.S. 115C-47(32a)].

Curriculum guidelines

Alternative learning programs shall use the following minimum guidelines when developing the curriculum for students enrolled in their school or program:

- NC Standard Course of Study as the foundation of the curriculum
- A focus on the communication skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- Building thinking and problem-solving skills through class activities
- Incorporating life skills training that builds a positive self-concept and good interpersonal skills
- Maximization of student access to vocational courses

Staffing Requirements

The success of any school or program with at-risk students depends heavily on a qualified and caring faculty. Students in ALPs often have different learning styles and sometimes lack educational support from their families and communities. They need creative and persistent teachers with strong content knowledge.

Legislation

Local boards shall assess on a regular basis whether alternative schools/programs incorporate best practices for improving academic performance and reducing disruptive behavior and staffed with professional public school employees who are well trained [GS 115C-47(32a)].

Local boards are urged to adopt policies that prohibit assignment of any professional staff member who has received within the last three years a rating on a formal evaluation that is less than above standard [GS 115C-47(32a)].

Recruiting Alternative Learning Program staff

Alternative schools and programs should recruit teachers and administrators who effectively:

- individualize instruction based on learning styles and interests;
- modify instruction based on measured student performance;
- exhibit an understanding of diversity in managing student behavior;
- resolve conflicts among students;
- incorporate character education into classes;

Teachers must hold licensure appropriate to the areas in which they are assigned to teach. If Initially Licensed teachers, lateral entry teachers, or probationary teachers are employed, appropriate staff development and mentoring support should be provided. Every attempt should be made to recruit experienced teachers with expertise in working with students experiencing academic and behavior difficulties. The principal or program director should have input into all hiring decisions.

Recruiting ALP Staff

The following practices should be considered when recruiting new teachers and administrators and retaining current staff members.

- Make teacher assistants available to the classrooms.
- Maintain a low teacher/student ratio – preferably 10:1 but not to exceed 15:1.
- Ensure that a high level of instructional support services is available to provide support and guidance for students and other staff (e.g. counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses).
- Provide a high level of technology and other instructional resources.
- Ensure that the funding allocation is sufficient to meet the mission of the school.
- Provide bonus pay and additional supplements.
- Make schedules flexible and adaptable to meet the personal and professional needs of staff.

- Provide financial support for relocation (e.g. moving, housing, security deposit).
- Provide financial assistance in paying off college loans.

Instructional Support Services

Instructional Support personnel provide essential services to at-risk students. These professionals provide necessary support to promote academic and personal social development of students by helping to ensure a smooth transition into and from an Alternative Learning Program, alleviating and preventing problems that interfere with learning, and assisting staff to develop and implement necessary academic and behavioral modifications in students' educational programs.

Legislation

When a student is placed the appropriate staff in the alternative school or program should meet to review the records forwarded by the referring school and determine what support services and intervention strategies are recommended for the student [115C-105.48(b)].

Required Support Service Staff

The following are minimum requirements for ensuring student needs are met. These support services may be available on a full or part-time basis, depending on the size of the ALP and needs of the students and staff.

- Assistant Principal or Lead Teacher
- School social work services
- School counseling services
- School psychological services
- School nursing Services
- On-site therapeutic services
- Clerical support to assist with record keeping and communications

Best Practices for Providing Instructional Support Services

- Make instructional support services available to all students in ALPs.
- Provide support staff to work with court-involved students.
- Coordinate resources between and among schools and community agencies.
- Develop partnerships with agencies and organizations to meet the diverse needs of ALP students.
- Develop an interagency council to collaborate on student needs (e.g. mental health, DHHS, Juvenile Justice).
- Obtain services, as needed, from other professionals:
 - Media Specialist
 - Community Liaison/Volunteer Coordinator
 - Behavioral Specialist
 - Transition Coordinator
 - School Resource Officer

Staff Development

Staff development should be viewed as an essential component for achieving the mission of the alternative program or school. While the general staff development offered by the LEA serves to strengthen teaching methods, additional staff development may be necessary to address the unique needs of students in an alternative setting.

Legislation

The local board shall provide appropriate staff development. Alternative schools programs shall incorporate best practices for improving student academic performance and reducing disruptive behavior [GS 115-47(32a)].

Guidelines for Staff Development in ALPS

Staff development...

- should be guided by a clear, coherent strategic plan for the Alternative Learning Program.
- should focus on student needs and learning outcomes.
- provides adequate time during the workday for staff members to learn and work together.
- provides for the three phases of the change process: initiation, implementation and institutionalization.
- prepares teachers to use research-based teaching strategies appropriate to their instructional objectives and their students.
- fosters continuous improvement.

Best Practices for Implementing Staff Development Activities

Staff development programs should...

- be carried out at the local school level.
- be site specific.
- involve educators in the local school as planners, trainers, and participants.
- foster collegiality and collaboration.
- increase knowledge, change attitudes, and build skills.
- have every possible support for the changes in work behavior required.
- help teachers to see a vision of how the new skills will impact on the classroom.
- uses a research-based training model (e.g., observation, follow-up demonstration teaching, coaching, debriefing sessions, re-teaching).
- take place over a long period of time.
- facilitate the establishment of learning communities in the school.

Appendix I: Applicable General Statutes

§ 115C-12. Powers and duties of the Board generally.

(24) Duty to Develop Standards for Alternative Learning Programs, Provide Technical Assistance on Implementation of Programs, and Evaluate Programs. - The State Board of Education shall adopt standards for assigning students to alternative learning programs. These standards shall include (i) a description of the programs and services that are recommended to be provided in alternative learning programs and (ii) a process for ensuring that an assignment is appropriate for the student and that the students' parents are involved in the decision. The State Board also shall adopt policies that define what constitutes an alternative school and an alternative learning program.

The State Board of Education shall adopt standards to require that local school administrative units shall use: (i) the teachers allocated for students assigned to alternative learning programs pursuant to the regular teacher allotment and (ii) the teachers allocated for students assigned to alternative learning programs only to serve the needs of these students.

The State Board of Education shall provide technical support to local school administrative units to assist them in developing and implementing plans and proposals for alternative learning programs.

The State Board shall evaluate the effectiveness of alternative learning programs and, in its discretion, of any other programs funded from the Alternative Schools/At-Risk Student allotment. Local school administrative units shall report to the State Board of Education on how funds in the Alternative Schools/ At-Risk Student allotment are spent and shall otherwise cooperate with the State Board of Education in evaluating the alternative learning programs. As part of its evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs, The State Board shall, through the application of the accountability system developed under G.S. 115C-83.15 and G.S. 115C-105.35, measure the educational performance and growth of students placed in alternative schools and alternative programs. If appropriate, the Board may modify this system to adapt to the specific characteristics of these schools.

(27) Reporting Dropout Rates, Corporal Punishment, Suspensions, Expulsions, and Alternative Placements. - The State Board shall report by March 15 of each year to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on the numbers of students who have dropped out of school, been subjected to corporal punishment, been suspended, been expelled, been reassigned for disciplinary purposes, or been provided alternative education services. The data shall be reported in a disaggregated manner, reflecting the local school administrative unit, race, gender, grade level, ethnicity, and disability status of each affected student. Such data shall be readily available to the public. The State Board shall not include students that have been expelled from school when calculating the dropout rate. The Board shall maintain a separate record of the number of students who are expelled from school and the reason for the expulsion.

§ 115C-47. Powers and duties generally (of local boards of education).

(32a) To Establish Alternative Learning Programs and Develop Policies and Guidelines. - Each local board of education shall establish at least one alternative learning program and shall adopt guidelines for assigning students to alternative learning programs. These guidelines shall include (i) a description of the programs and services to be provided, (ii) a process for ensuring that an assignment is appropriate for the student and that the student's parents are involved in the decision, and (iii) strategies for providing alternative learning programs, when feasible and appropriate, for students who are subject to long term suspension or expulsion. In developing these guidelines, local boards shall consider the State Board's standards developed under G.S. 115C-12(24).

The General Assembly urges local boards to adopt policies that prohibit superintendents from assigning to any alternative learning program any professional public school employee who has received within the last three years a rating on a formal evaluation that is less than above standard.

Notwithstanding this subdivision, each local board shall adopt policies based on the State Board's standards developed under G.S. 115C-12(24). These policies shall apply to any new alternative learning program or alternative school that is implemented beginning with the 2006-2007 school year. Local boards of education are encouraged to apply these standards to alternative learning programs and alternative schools implemented before the 2006-2007 school year.

Local boards shall assess on a regular basis whether the unit's alternative schools and alternative learning programs comply with the State Board's standards developed under G.S. 115C-12(24) and whether they incorporate best practices for improving student academic performance and reducing disruptive behavior, are staffed with professional public school employees who are well trained and provided with appropriate staff development, are organized to provide coordinated services, and provide students with high quality and rigorous academic instruction.

§ 115C-105.47A. Proposals to establish alternative learning programs or alternative schools.

(a) Before establishing any alternative learning program or alternative school, the local board of education shall develop a proposal to implement the program or school that includes all of the following:

- (1) The educational and behavioral goals for students assigned to the program or school.
- (2) The policies and procedures for the operation of the program or school based on the State Board's standards adopted under G.S. 115C-12(24). The policies and procedures shall address the assignment of students to the program or school.
- (3) Identified strategies that will be used to improve student achievement and behavior.
- (4) Documentation that similar programs and schools in or out of the State, or both, have demonstrated success in improving the academic achievement and behavior of students assigned to them.
- (5) The estimated actual cost of operating the program or school. To the extent practicable, this shall include the cost of:
 - a. Staffing the program or school with teachers who have at least four years' teaching experience and who have received an overall rating of at least

- above standard on a formal evaluation and are certified in the areas and grade levels being taught;
 - b. Providing optimum learning environments, resources and materials, and high quality, ongoing professional development that will ensure students who are placed in the program or school are provided enhanced educational opportunities in order to achieve their full potential;
 - c. Providing support personnel, including school counselors, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, nurses, and other professionals to help students and their families work out complex issues and problems;
 - d. Maintaining safe and orderly learning environments; and
 - e. Providing transitional supports for students exiting the program or school and reentering the referring school.
- (6) Documented support of school personnel and the community for the implementation of the program or school.
- (b) After the local board completes the proposal under subsection (a) of this section, the board shall submit the proposal to the State Board of Education for its review. The State Board shall review the proposal expeditiously and, if appropriate, may offer recommendations to modify the proposal. The local board shall consider any recommendations made by the State Board before implementing the alternative learning program or alternative school.

§ 115C-105.48. Placement of students in alternative schools/alternative learning programs.

- (a) Prior to referring a student to an alternative school or an alternative learning program, the referring school shall:
- (1) Document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly.
 - (2) Provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative school or an alternative learning program.
 - (3) Provide to the alternative school or alternative learning program all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.
- (b) When a student is placed in an alternative school or an alternative learning program, the appropriate staff of the alternative school or alternative learning program shall meet to review the records forwarded by the referring school and to determine what support services and intervention strategies are recommended for the student. The parents shall be encouraged to provide input regarding the students' needs.

Appendix II: Applicable State Board Policies

Policy Identification

Priority: Globally Competitive Students

Category: Dropouts

Policy ID Number: [GCS-Q-001](#)

Policy Title: Policy regarding dropout prevention and students at-risk

Current Policy Date: 04/01/2004

Other Historical Information: Previous board dates: 06/06/1990, 08/07/1996, 08/06/1998, 01/13/1999, 01/13/2000

Statutory Reference: SB 43 (1989)

Administrative Procedures Act (APA) Reference Number and Category:

The 1985 General Assembly established the state dropout prevention fund as a part of the Basic Education Program. The intent of the General Assembly is to increase the number and range of services to at-risk students. It is the policy of the State Board of Education that dropout prevention and students at risk services be a part of the educational program of every local education agency (LEA). The Board has established the goal of reducing the dropout rate in North Carolina. To facilitate the accomplishment of this goal, the State Board of Education has adopted a performance indicator in guidelines for implementation of the School Improvement and Accountability Act and a standard in state accreditation which requires all local education agencies to set a goal for the reduction of their dropout rates.

I. DEFINITIONS

- A. Dropout - Any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school.
- B. Student at risk - A student at risk is a young person who because of a wide range of individual, personal, financial, familial, social, behavioral or academic circumstances may experience school failure or other unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk factors. Circumstances which often place students at risk may include, but are not limited to: not meeting state/local proficiency standards, grade retention; unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs, alienation from school life; unchallenging curricula and/or instruction, tardiness and or poor school attendance; negative peer influence; unmanageable behavior; substance abuse and other health risk behaviors, abuse and neglect; inadequate parental/family and/or school support; and limited English proficiency.
- C. Alternative Learning Programs – Alternative Learning Programs are defined

as services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, and/or dropping out of school. These services should be designed to better meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the regular public school setting. Alternative learning programs serve students at any level who

- are suspended and/or expelled,
- are at risk of participation in juvenile crime,
- have dropped out and desire to return to school,
- have a history of truancy,
- are returning from juvenile justice settings or psychiatric hospitals, or
- have learning styles that are better served in an alternative setting.

Alternative learning programs provide individualized programs outside of a standard classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.

An alternative learning program must

- provide the primary instruction for selected at-risk students
- enroll students for a designated period of time, usually a minimum of one academic grading period,
- offer course credit or grade-level promotion credit in core academic areas and
- provide transition support to and from/between the school of origin and alternative learning program.

Alternative learning programs may also

- address behavioral or emotional problems that interfere with adjustment to or benefiting from the regular education classroom,
- provide smaller classes and/or student/teacher ratios,
- provide instruction beyond regular school hours,
- provide flexible scheduling, and/or
- assist students in meeting graduation requirements other than course credits.

Alternative learning programs for at-risk students typically serve students in an alternative school or alternative program within the regular school.

- D. Alternative School - An Alternative School is one option for an alternative learning program. It serves at-risk students and has an organizational designation based on the DPI assignment of an official school code. An alternative school is different from a regular public school and provides choices of routes to completion of school. For the majority of students, the goal is to return to the regular public school. Alternative schools may vary from other schools in such areas as teaching methods, hours, curriculum, or sites, and they are intended to meet particular learning needs.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES

- A. Funds may be used to support programs and services to at-risk students in all grades, pre-kindergarten through grade twelve.
- B. Each school system and school shall develop and maintain identifiable and targeted dropout prevention and students at risk program to meet the needs of students at risk of school failure. The program shall be goal oriented and shall include specific strategies to improve student achievement and keep students in school. Plans shall be maintained at the LEA and be available for review by Department of Public Instruction staff. Individual schools with dropout rates above the annual state average and/or those that have not steadily reduced their dropout rates annually shall develop a dropout prevention plan based on best practices and shall incorporate these strategies into their School Improvement Plan.
- C. LEAs are encouraged to develop a personal education plan for each identified student at risk.
- D. Funds may be used to employ full-time or part-time personnel.
- E. Funds may be used to compensate substitute teachers.
- F. All personnel must hold State Board of Education certification appropriate for the teaching or student services position held. Personnel in in-school suspension programs may in some instances be non-certified, as determined by program needs on a case-by-case basis. However, in instances where these personnel are not certified, they should minimally have the same training as required for teacher assistants. In-school suspension programs should include both an instructional focus and behavior modification strategies.
- G. Funds may be used for administrative costs to support the salary, travel, and supplies of a full- or part-time coordinator (supervisor or director).
- H. Funds may be used for instructional materials, supplies, travel, and equipment for dropout prevention and students at risk staff and programs.

- I. All work of staff employed through dropout prevention funds must directly benefit students at risk of dropping out. Dropout prevention and students at risk staff may, however, share proportionately in routine duties carried out by all staff of a school.
- J. State dropout prevention and students at risk funds may not supplant dropout prevention programs funded from other state and federal sources (except Job Training Partnership Act funds).
- K. All Average Daily Membership positions that are generated by dropout prevention programs, such as extended school day and alternative schools, should remain within those programs to provide additional services to at-risk youths.
- L. Funds may be used for dropout prevention programs throughout the twelve months of the fiscal year but may not be carried forward to the next fiscal year.
- M. Each LEA shall submit data requested by the Department of Public Instruction.

III. PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Each LEA is expected to implement the following guidelines for dropout prevention. The program's impact can be evaluated by the indicators listed.

- A. Reduce the dropout rate of the school system.

Indicator:

- 1. A decrease in the number of dropouts as set forth in the Lea's accountability plan.

- B. Provide an alternative to out-of-school suspension by creating a learning and therapeutic environment within the school for students with problems which would normally lead to out-of-school suspension.

Indicator:

- 1. A reduction in the number of out-of-school suspensions from the previous school year.
- 2. A reduction in the number of in-school suspensions from the previous school year.

- C. Develop and adopt by the local board of education a system-wide discipline policy incorporating a continuum of approaches to be used in addressing

behavior problems.

Indicator:

1. A reduction in the number of incidents and referrals to the principal's office for behavior problems from the previous school year.
2. Completed copy of the adopted discipline policy.

- D. Implement a system, using teachers, counselors, or other appropriate personnel, for early identification of at-risk students, grades K-12, with an emphasis on the early grades, K-3.

Indicator:

1. Development and adoption of a system for the identification of at-risk students, kindergarten through grade twelve.
2. Development and maintenance of a profile of each at-risk student. The profile should include grades, truancy (attendance record), number of retentions, and discipline problems.

- E. Develop and enhance programs and services to identify, assess, and resolve difficulties which may interfere with a student's attendance.

Indicator:

1. A reduction in unlawful absences from the previous school year.

- F. Establish linkages with community agencies for program support and coordination.

Indicator:

1. Development and adoption of written cooperative agreements with at least two community agencies serving at-risk students.
2. Collection of data on the number of referrals of individual students to community agencies (results to be submitted to state agency).

IV. PROGRAM OPTIONS

A wide range of programs for dropout prevention and students at risk is needed within every school system and community to complement the quality educational programs available to all students. Listed below are the types of programs which may be funded through state dropout prevention and students at risk funds. Within these general options, the specific programs to be implemented will be determined by each local school system based on an assessment of needs and local priorities. Local programs

may include components of one or more of these options, but every school system is encouraged to develop programs which can most effectively meet local needs.

A. Early Identification and Intervention Programs:

Early identification and intervention programs seek to recognize students who may face problems and prevent or ameliorate those problems before they become severe.

B. Counseling for At-Risk Students:

Counseling for at-risk students focuses the skills of counselors on preventing and alleviating the problems facing students which can lead to dropping out. Counselors identify at-risk students and follow up to assure that needed services are provided.

C. Behavior Improvement Programs:

Behavior improvement programs seek to improve discipline in the schools through a variety of approaches, with the ultimate goal of greater self-discipline. The emphasis is on increasing the ability of teachers to handle discipline within their own classrooms. In-school suspension programs are one alternative for students whose behavior is extremely disruptive and could result in suspension or expulsion. The programs focus on reduction of disruptive behavior and provide classroom instruction as well as counseling in a therapeutic setting.

D. Academic Enhancement Programs:

Academic enhancement programs are designed to accelerate the learning of students who are falling behind their peers in academic achievement. Through remediation, accelerated learning, continuous progress learning, and other enhancements, the goal is to increase achievement while keeping these at-risk students a part of the overall educational program in the schools.

E. Work-Related Programs:

Work-related programs identify potential dropouts and offer counseling, remediation, career guidance, and job preparation services designed to meet their individual needs. These services are intended to assist at-risk students in moving from school to the work environment and to provide them with skills necessary to compete in today's society.

F. Services for At-Risk Students:

Services for at-risk students are designed to meet particular local needs and priorities. The basic requirement of each service is that its primary goal is to encourage achievement and keep students in school. Among the types of

services that may be funded are attendance improvement programs and other programs that serve groups of at-risk students, such as the handicapped, juvenile and youthful offenders, substance abusers, pregnant students, or adolescent parents, such as school social work, school psychology services, or school nursing, to at-risk students. Services such as after-school care and enrichment, public/private partnerships, mentoring, support clubs, summer activities, peer helpers, outdoor experiences, student advocacy, and parental involvement are encouraged (to the extent that they may be funded under other guidelines set forth herein).

V. APPLICATION TO CHARTER SCHOOLS

A charter school may apply to the State Board of Education for designation as an alternative school if it designates in the charter that the school will serve as an alternative school as defined in Section I-C of this policy.

Charter Schools designated as alternative schools are subject to application procedures and on-site monitoring by the Charter Schools office and/or the Division of Accountability Services as specified by the State Board of Education.

In all respects, programs will be consistent with Chapter 147, Article 3C of the General Statutes (Senate Bill 1260).

Appendix III: Applicable Definitions

Definitions were approved by the State Board of Education in January, 2000. These are included in State Board Policy GCS-Q-001.

Alternative Learning Program

Alternative Learning Programs are defined as services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, and/or dropping out of school. Such services should be designed to better meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the traditional school setting.

Alternative Learning Programs serve students at any level who are

- suspended and/or expelled,
- at risk of participation in juvenile crime,
- have dropped out and desire to return to school,
- have a history of truancy,
- are returning from juvenile justice settings or psychiatric hospitals, and
- whose learning styles are better served in an alternative setting.

Alternative learning programs provide individualized programs outside of a standard classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.

An alternative learning program must

- provide the primary instruction for selected at-risk students,
- enroll students for a designated period of time, usually a minimum of one academic grading period, and
- offer course credit or grade-level promotion credit in core academic areas.

Alternative learning programs may also address the following:

- behavioral or emotional problems that interfere with adjustments to or benefiting from the regular education classroom,
- provide smaller classes and/or student/teacher ratios,
- provide instruction beyond regular school hours,
- provide flexible scheduling, and/or
- assist students in meeting graduation requirements other than course credits.

Alternative learning programs for at risk students typically serve students in an alternative school or alternative program within the regular school.

Alternative Learning School

Alternative Schools are defined as an option for an alternative learning program. It serves at-risk students and has an organizational designation based on the DPI assignment of an official school code. An alternative school is different from a regular public school and provides choices of routes to completion of school. For the majority of students, the goal is to return to the regular public school. Alternative schools may vary from other schools in such areas as teaching methods, hours, curriculum, or sites, and they are intended to meet particular learning needs.

Student “At-Risk”

A student at risk is a young person who, because of a wide range of individual, personal, financial, familial, social, behavioral or academic circumstances, may experience school failure or other unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk factors. Circumstances which often place students at risk may include but are not limited to:

- not meeting state/local proficiency standards
- grade retention
- unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs
- alienation from school life
- unchallenging curricula and/or instruction
- tardiness and/or poor school attendance
- negative peer influence
- unmanageable behavior
- substance abuse and other health risk behaviors
- abuse and neglect
- inadequate parental, family, and/or school support, and
- limited English proficiency

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