

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

A. PURPOSES

The board is committed to the goal of providing a safe, orderly and inviting learning environment at each school. The educational program and the behavior management plan developed at each school, as well as numerous other strategies identified in board policies, are intended to create such an environment and help each student be a contributing and successful member of the school.

Alternative learning programs is or schools are provided as an option for when a student's behavior management or academic performance needs cannot be met in a regular education setting. The purposes of the alternative learning program or school are to (1) intervene and address problems that prevent a student from successfully achieving in the regular educational setting; (2) reduce the risk of the student dropping out of school by directing resources to helping the student resolve issues affecting performance at school; (3) return the student to the regular educational setting as soon as practical with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment; and (4) preserve a safe, orderly and inviting learning environment at the regular educational setting.

B. ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

The alternative learning program or school should be developed to serve the purposes as described above. The alternative education program is expected to meet all board policy and state requirements. In addition, the alternative educational program and supporting services should be designed to facilitate the transition of the student back into the regular educational setting.

Staff of the alternative learning program or school should receive training to assist them in successfully meeting their requirements.

The alternative learning program or school is required to develop a behavior management plan, a school improvement plan and a parental involvement plan in accordance with board policy. In addition, a conflict resolution plan, as provided in board policy 3431, Conflict Resolution, must be included in the school improvement plan. In developing these plans, the board encourages the principal and staff to review successful alternative education programs and use resources made available by the superintendent.

The superintendent and board will review these plans in accordance with board policy. While providing flexibility at the school level to develop the plans, the superintendent and board will not approve any plans that are not reasonably likely to meet the purpose of the alternative learning program or school.

Beginning with the 2006-07 school year, prior to the implementation of a new alternative learning program or school, the board will develop an implementation proposal that is consistent with the State Board of Education standards for alternative learning programs. The board will then submit the proposal to the State Board for its review. Upon review by the State Board, the board will consider any recommendations to modify the proposal made by the State Board before implementing the alternative learning program or school. The board will also review on a regular basis whether the school district's alternative learning programs and schools comply with State Board standards.

C. TRANSFER TO ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

Students generally are assigned to a school based upon attendance area. However, as provided by law, the board may assign any student to a school outside the attendance area in order for the student to attend a specialized school or for any reason the board, in its sole discretion, deems sufficient.

Students may be transferred to the alternative learning program or school on a voluntary or involuntary basis. The process for transfer is provided below.

1. Responsibilities of Referring School Staff

In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to the alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must;

- a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly;
- b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school; and
- c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

2. Responsibilities of Alternative Learning Program or School Staff

In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, once a student is placed in an alternative learning program or school, the appropriate staff of the program or school must meet to review the student's records and other documentation forwarded by the referring school.¹⁰ Based upon the student's records and any input provided by the parent(s) concerning the student's needs, the alternative program or school staff is to determine what support services and intervention strategies are recommended for the students.

If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral

The board encourages parental involvement in decisions regarding the child's education and in identifying effective options for addressing concerns regarding the child's behavior or academic performance.

Voluntary transfers are encouraged whenever possible. A voluntary transfer is an agreement by the parent or guardian, principal and the disciplinary review committee that the transfer is an appropriate option for the particular student. After agreement has been reached, the principals of the regular educational setting and the alternative learning program or school will arrange the process and time for the transfer. The principal of the regular educational setting will notify the superintendent of the transfer.

4. Involuntary Referral

A student may be required to be transferred from the regular educational setting to the alternative learning program or school under any of the following circumstances:

- a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel;
- b. the student is a significant disruption to the educational environment at the regular educational setting;
- c. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion and additional or different resources from what is available at the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue;¹⁵
- d. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment at the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains.
- e. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Prior to an involuntary transfer, the principal or disciplinary committee of the referring school will document efforts to assist the student in the regular educational. The principal or disciplinary committee must also document the student's behavior and academic performance. A voluntary transfer is preferable to an involuntary transfer. Therefore, the school should meet with the parents to try to reach consensus on resolution of the performance or behavior issues.

If an agreement is not reached and a basis for involuntary transfer exists, the principal may recommend transfer to the alternative school to the superintendent. The principal must provide in writing (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance which is at issue, (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the

student in the student's regular educational setting; and (3) other existing circumstances which support an involuntary transfer.

A copy of the recommendation and report must be provided to the parents by certified mail or in person. The parent may request an informal meeting with the superintendent to discuss the transfer. The superintendent may determine who can be present at the meeting.

If the superintendent approves the transfer, the principals of the regular educational setting and alternative school are to make all necessary arrangements.

The parent may appeal the superintendent's decisions to the board. The board will hear the appeal in closed session and will follow its procedures as provided in policy 2500, Hearings Before the Board. During the period of the appeal, the student may be transferred to the alternative learning program or school.

5. Assignment During a Long-Term or 365 Day Suspension

A student who receives a long-term or 365-day suspension may be offered services in the alternative learning program or school for a portion or the full duration of the suspension. See policy 4353, Long-Term Suspension, 365-Day Suspension, Expulsion. Any student who receives a long-term or 365-day suspension must be offered alternative education services unless the superintendent provides a significant or important reason for declining to offer such services. Alternative education services include, but are not limited to, the alternative programs or schools established in this policy in accordance with G.S. 115C-105.47A

6. Assignment of Student Sex Offenders

The board may decide, pursuant to G.S. 115C-390.11 (A)(2), to assign a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 to an alternative learning program or school.

D. TRANSITION FROM ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

In most instances, the goal of the alternative learning program or school will be to return the student to the regular educational setting as soon as practicable with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment. The alternative learning program or school and regular educational setting will work together to help create successful transition for the student.

If the student is not returned to the regular educational setting, the alternative learning program or school will assist in the transition of the student to other educational settings, including any other programs offered by the school district, community colleges or vocational schools.

E. ASSIGNMENT OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF TO ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

In assigning professional staff to the alternative learning program or school, the superintendent will consider the experience and evaluation ratings of professional staff. As district resources allow, the superintendent shall strive to avoid assigning to the alternative school less experienced professional staff and professional staff who have received an evaluation rating of "less than above standard" within the last three years.

F. EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

1. Information To Be Reported

Each year, the board will evaluate the alternative learning program or school based upon the report provided by the superintendent and any other information the board wishes to consider. In addition to data required by board policy 3430, School Improvement Plans, the alternative learning program or school must report the following information annually to the board:

- a. referral patterns from the regular educational settings, including age, race, gender and method of transfer (voluntary, alternative to suspension or expulsion, or involuntary);
- b. drop out rates;
- c. how long students stay at the alternative learning program or school and where they go when they leave the school (including the regular educational setting, community college/technical schools or drop out);
- d. training and development of professional employees assigned to the alternative learning program or school;
- e. a list of services or programs in which the alternative learning program or school coordinates with other governmental agencies; and
- f. any other information the superintendent requires.

To assist the board with evaluating the alternative learning program or school, the local safe schools plan also must include measures as to the effectiveness of the alternative school.

2. Items To Be Considered

In addition to any other outcomes the board deems important, the board will determine whether:

- a. diverse group of students is referred to the alternative learning program or school;
- b. the alternative learning program or school complies with State Board of Education standards
- c. the alternative learning program or school incorporates best practices for improving student academic performance and reducing disruptive behavior;

- d. staff at the alternative learning program or school is well-trained and are provided appropriate staff development;
- e. the alternative learning program or school is organized to provide coordinated services;
- f. students at the alternative learning program or school receive high quality and rigorous academic instruction; and
- g. the alternative learning program or school assists students with transition back to the regular education setting or to other educational settings.

Legal Reference: G.S. 115C-47(32a), - 105.47A, -105.48, -276(r), -288, -367, -391

Cross Reference: Hearings Before the Board (policy 2500), School Improvement Plans (policy 3430), Conflict Resolution (policy 3431), Parental Involvement (policy 1310/4002), School Plan for Management of Student Behavior (policy 4302), Theft, Trespass and Damage to Property (policy 4330), Assaults, Threats and Harassment (policy 4331), Weapons, Bomb Threats and Clear Threats to Safety (policy 4333), Student Discipline Records (policy 4345), Long-Term Suspension, 365 Days Suspension, Expulsion (policy 4353), Assignments/Reassignments/Transfers (policy 7440)

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