

Why Alternative Programs?

Schools continually face the issue of what to do to create success for all students, and especially those students who struggle in school. Teachers and school administrators know that they must take into consideration the students who are unable to engage in regular learning environments and who need specialized programming in order to succeed.

There is a concern for the significant number of students whose classroom behavior is so disruptive that the learning environment is compromised for themselves and their classmates. There also exists a group of students who are so discouraged that they do not participate at all in the regular program. While integration of all students and the use of individual education plans are the preferred methods for educating those students who have difficulty working in the regular school environment, alternative education is a need for some students.

The usual criteria for placement in an alternative setting require that students “fit into” one or more of the following categories:

- students whose behavior interferes with the learning of other
- students or disrupts the overall educational process, including
- severe ADHD
- students with chronic discipline issues, who show disregard for
- school authority, including persistent violation of school policy
- or rules
- students who display violent or threatening behavior
- students who are habitually truant
- students who need an intense, highly structured educational and
- clinical setting in order to achieve measurable behavior changes
- students who use banned substances on school property
- students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders.

Admissions to an alternative program are based on the students having exhausted the resources of the regular school programs. These students have displayed behaviors to such a degree that no improvements are noted after the interventions of the school administration, guidance and/or psychology departments, and the in-school special education services.

Primarily these students require care and treatment services, with the educational component serving to complement these services. They require curriculum to be taught in non-traditional ways.

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Providing A Different Culture

The Nature Of Alternative Programs

Although differing in service delivery, the various types of alternative programs all share some basic principles that define them as *alternative*.

First and foremost is that alternative programs are a temporary departure from regular school programs, in order to provide social and educational activities for students whose behavior places them at risk in traditional schools.

Secondly, these programs strive to provide positive interventions and skill development to enable students to return successfully to regular programs or to manage the necessities of adult life.

Alternative programs, in their diverse forms, are considered to be more of a perspective on student needs, rather than a specific procedure or program. Alternative education options encompass a range of programs and include:

- in-school suspensions
- separate part-time or full-time alternative education classes
- schools within schools
- a combination of academic and work-based programs
- schools on alternative sites.

The underlying principles of successful alternative programs assume that:

- the program must be more than a 'last chance' before removal from the school system
- the program is educational, building on social and behavioral skills, and is not punitive in orientation
- the program is not only intended for the toughest cases but for all students who need to build their personal management skills in order to benefit in the educational system
- there must be a true educational alternative, where the environment is designed to meet individual needs
- a structured discipline approach is used to teach students to make responsible behavior choices
- a therapeutic-based component is present, helping students make individual, personal changes through the use of counseling.

Generally, the goals of all alternative education programs are:

- to help students develop educationally, emotionally, and socially
- to teach and learn responsible behavior
- to create a safe, caring, nurturing environment

... students who have difficulty engaging in the regular school setting, alternative programs must provide a different culture and climate.