



Blueprints

Redesigning High Schools for the 21st Century
Volume 7, Issue 3

Minnesota Students Alternative Learning Programs: Many Paths, One Goal- Graduation for ALL

By: Mary Barrie, Minnesota Department of Education

As we work towards closing the achievement gap and increasing global competitiveness, we have come to understand that there are many paths for student success and that clearly one answer does not fit when we have so many questions. While we strive for quality schools for all students, we know that many students are looking for and needing a different answer.

Alternative Education Programs provide multiple opportunities for students to be successful in gaining their high school diploma. In Minnesota, these programs come in all shapes, sizes and grade configurations. There are currently more than 600 programs in over 200+ districts across the state that carry a designation as an Alternative Program: Area Learning Centers, Alternative Learning Programs, Contract Alternative Schools, Targeted Services and Learning Year Programs. While there are more than 160,000 students in these programs, the majority of our alternative programs students are not in our day programs, but rather participate in our extended learning year programs, which occur primarily after school and in summer.

Minnesota is unique in the resources that are placed in these extended learning programs for at-risk students. Designed to allow students to close the opportunity gap that often exists between our students in poverty and their better-off peers, these programs allow our high school students to earn credits they have missed in order to graduate from high school. National and Minnesota research has shown the impact of these programs.

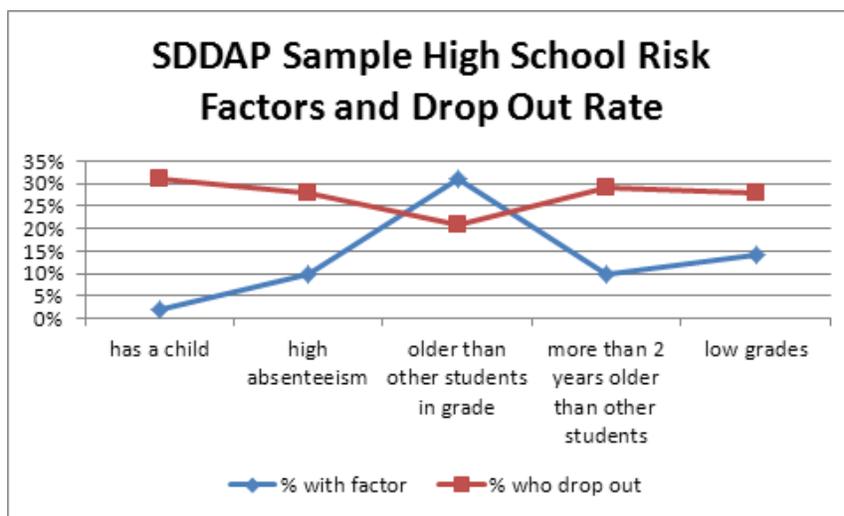
In February of 2010, the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) published a report on alternative programs. The OLA report concluded that, "Students who received targeted services had greater gains on the MAP exam than other students" and "More students enrolled in targeted services showed high growth than low growth on the MCA-II tests" (OLA Report on Alternative Programs, February, 2010). [View the Office of the Legislative Auditor Report on Alternative Education Programs.](#) [View the You Tube video.](#)

Many people feel that alternative schools were the seed that led to charter schools. Alternative schools were first approved by the Minnesota Legislature back in 1987 and over time have served hundreds of thousands of students. Minnesota defines at-risk and student eligibility to attend alternative programs in statute (Minnesota Statutes 124D.68, Subdivision 2).

Critical to the viability of these programs is a student's ability to choose to attend an alternative program. School personnel cannot mandate a student's attendance to an alternative program. Programs work with each individual student to develop a plan to bring them to graduation. Each student has a continual learning plan (CLP) that establishes support for the student in grade promotion and completion of a high school diploma. These programs offer hope and engagement to many students who are looking for a path that fits them.

Measuring Up.

In the [Drop-Out Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs, a Technical Report](#), Hammond, et al, reviewed available research factors that might identify a student as being at-risk of dropping out. One of the reports they highlighted listed the following as some of the factors that might indicate a student was at-risk of dropping out. However, as the authors noted, many more students with these factors remained in school than dropped out. In Minnesota, we have identified similar at-risk factors for our Alternative Programs. These programs are one step in our efforts to prevent drop outs by offering alternative ways for students to earn their diploma.



* Source: Data from Table 2, p. 36, P. Gleason & M. Dynarski, 2002, *Do we know whom to serve? Issues in using risk factors to identify dropouts*, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 7(1), 25-41.

High School Toolbox – Strategies and Resources

[Visit the Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs \(MAAP\) web site](#) for information on programs throughout the state.

[Visit the National Summer Learning Association web site](#) for information and research on summer learning programs.

[Synthesis of Research on Alternative Schools Report](#) Copyright © 1994 by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

[Visit the National After School Association web site](#) for information on after school programs.

[Visit Charles Mott web site](#) to read an article on Alternative way of educating at-risk students.

[National Dropout Prevention Center for effective strategies for dropout prevention.](#)

[A New Vision for Summer School Report](#) is about programs for at-risk students - National Summer Learning Association.

Designer Showcase

Minnesota's State Approved Alternative Programs

By Steve Allen, Executive Coordinator Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs

Alternative education in Minnesota is “different by design”! If you tour the state, you will see programs varying from single-focused programs to comprehensive service delivery agents and everything in between.

In 1987, legislation was created to allow at-risk students and their families' educational options outside of their local communities. This legislation was some of the most influential legislation ever written on behalf of at-risk students and their families! At-risk students almost immediately started leaving some of their local high schools to pursue educational options to meet their unique needs. In essence, they were “voting with their feet!” Over the years, alternative services have evolved, but the single identifying characteristic is that they usually attempt to provide students with “another way” of attaining their education.

If you go to Hopkins, Hutchinson or Princeton, you will see outstanding school-within-a-school models. The Hopkins Alternative Program (HAP) was started in 1989, and is one of the longest, continuous running programs in Minnesota.

Roseville's Fairview Alternative High School (FAHS) opened in 2007. It serves students who have not had success in the mainstream schools and English learners who are newcomers to the country.

In New Ulm, you'll find a cooperative program that provides services for seven different schools in the area. In Rochester, you'll see middle school and high school programs at the Golden Hills Area Learning Center, intervention services provided at the local elementary and middle school programs, and various inter-agency partnerships. The Minnesota Valley Area Learning Center (MVALC) is an alternative program that operates in Southwestern Minnesota. This school is a cooperative of 4 districts (Montevideo, Yellow Medicine East, Lac Qui Parle Valley, and Dawson-Boyd).

The Willmar Area Learning Center (WALC) is located in the heart of Willmar in the historic Garfield School Building (built in 1930). The WALC program has 15 staff members and serves more than 100 students in grades 7 through 12. WALC utilizes a Career Assessment Center which serves students from across the region, a traditional day school program and an independent student night school program.

The Detroit Lakes Area Learning Center (DLALC) is a prevention- and intervention-based alternative program. There are currently 35 sites and multiple-layered programs managed through DLALC. Every program is driven by the unique needs of the students.

Alternative education is not intended to be a “one-size-fits-all” method of operation. The “best program” is the program that best serves the students and families in that community!

[Visit MAAP web site](#) to read the full unedited article.

District 287: Student Voices - Changing the way students see their education

By: Molly Garrett, Senior at City West Academy

A recovery school is a place where students can continue their education with others who are experiencing the same challenges. City West Academy is a place where one can realize their full potential without having to worry about the distraction of drugs and alcohol. Both the students and staff help the program be a safe and supportive place to grow, both educationally and emotionally.

It has been my experience that young adults who are struggling with recovery from substance abuse often find it difficult to succeed in a more traditional learning environment. City West Academy works with the student to accommodate their educational needs, and to ensure a drug-free environment.

If City West Academy was not an option for me, I would not have been able to succeed academically. Now, because of this program, I am not only graduating on time, but I have been accepted into the four-year university of my dreams. I am so very grateful for City West Academy; it helped me regain my motivation and my confidence.

Helpdesk

Explore the [Ready, Set, Go web site](http://readysetgo.state.mn.us/RSG/index.html) - Minnesota offers many options for high school students to earn college credit before graduation. Find out how these challenging courses can benefit you!
<http://readysetgo.state.mn.us/RSG/index.html>

For information on the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program [visit the Postsecondary Enrollment Options web page](#), a opportunity for students.

Look into all that is offered through [MDE Career and Technical Education](#)

[GradMinnesota Initiative](#) – Find out about Minnesota’s involvement with America’s Promise Alliance and Minnesota’s goal to boost our graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020.

On the Drawing Board - Calendar of Events

Events sponsored by MDE, unless otherwise noted

It's About Time! Conference
(St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN) **June 20, 2013**
[Email Cindy Jackson](#) for more information.

[Learning Forward 2013 Conference](#)
(Minneapolis) **July 21-24, 2013**

[eLearning Summit](#)
(St. Paul) **July 29-30, 2013**

Health Teacher workshop
(Roseville) **August 15, 2013**
[Email Michael Mitchell](#) for more information

Regional Workshops for Alternative Programs
Various locations and dates
[Email Mary Barrie](#) for more information

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