

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

Policy Code: **3470/4305**

A. PURPOSES

The board is committed to the goal of providing a safe and orderly learning environment at each school. The educational program and the student 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 successful and contributing member of the school community.

Alternative learning programs or schools are provided as an option for those instances in which a student's behavior management or academic performance needs cannot be met in a regular educational setting. The purposes of an alternative learning program or school are: (1) to intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting; (2) to reduce the risk that the student will drop out of school by providing resources to help the student resolve issues affecting performance at school; (3) to return the student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment; and (4) to preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.

B. ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

An alternative learning program or school should reflect the purposes described above. The educational program is expected to meet all board policy and state requirements. In addition, the educational programs and support services should be designed to facilitate the student's transition back to the regular educational setting when appropriate.

All school personnel at an alternative learning program or school should receive training so that students enrolled in the alternative program or school receive appropriate educational services.

Each alternative learning program or alternative school is required to develop a behavior management plan, which may include character education, conflict resolution strategies, and a parental involvement plan in accordance with board policy. The board encourages the principal and school personnel, in developing these plans, to review successful alternative education programs and make effective use of the resources provided by the superintendent.

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

Prior to implementing a new alternative learning program or school, the superintendent or

designee will develop a program proposal that is consistent with the State Board of Education standards for alternative learning programs. The superintendent will then submit the proposal to the State Board for its review. After the proposal has been reviewed by the State Board, the superintendent will consider any State Board recommendations to modify the proposal before implementing the alternative learning program or school. By July 31 of each year, the board will review whether the school system'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 his or her 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 Personnel from the Referring School

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 School Personnel at the Alternative Learning Program or School

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

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, the 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 shall arrange the process and time for the transfer. The principal of the regular educational setting shall 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 is a significant disruption to the educational environment in the regular educational setting;
- b. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue;
- c. the student has been charged with a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and/or it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment at the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains.

Prior to an involuntary transfer, the principal or disciplinary committee of the referring school shall document efforts to assist the student in the regular educational environment. 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, a school administrator should meet with the parents to try to reach consensus on how to address the student's difficulties at school.

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 that is at issue; (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the regular educational setting; and (3) documentation of circumstances that support an involuntary transfer.

A copy of the recommendation and other documentation 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 has the authority to determine who may be present at the meeting.

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

The parent may appeal the superintendent's decisions to the board. The board will hear the appeal in closed session. The board 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.

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 the 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 is to return the student to the regular educational setting as soon as practicable with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment. School personnel in the alternative learning program or school and regular educational setting shall work together to help create a successful transition for the student.

If the student is not or will not be 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 other programs offered by the school system or a community college or vocational school.

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

When assigning professional personnel to an alternative learning program or school, the superintendent shall consider the experience and evaluation ratings of the individual being assigned to the school. As school system resources allow, the superintendent shall strive to assign highly experienced personnel who have demonstrated success with at-risk students.

F. EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

1. Information To Be Reported

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

- a. referral patterns from the schools, 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 school and where they go (including the regular educational setting, community college/technical schools or dropping out) when they leave the alternative program or school;
- d. training and development of professional employees assigned to the alternative learning program or school;
- e. a list of services or programs that the alternative learning program or school coordinates with other governmental agencies; and
- f. any other measures the superintendent requires.

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

2. Items To Be Considered

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

- a. 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. school personnel at the alternative learning program or school are well-trained and provided with appropriate professional 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 in transitioning back to the regular education setting or to other educational settings.

Legal References: G.S. 14-208.18, 115C-47(32a), -105.47A, -105.48, -276(r), -288, -367, -390.9, -390.10, -390.11

Cross References: Parental Involvement (policy 1310/4002), Hearings Before the Board (policy 2500), School Improvement Plan (policy 3430), Conflict Resolution (policy 3431), Student Sex Offenders (policy 4260), School Plan for Management of Student Behavior (policy 4302), Student Discipline Records (policy 4345), Long-Term Suspension, 365-Day Suspension, Expulsion (policy 4353), Assignments/Reassignments/Transfers (policy 7440)

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