

Descriptor Term:  
ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS

Descriptor Code:  
3.4430/4.3050

Legal References: G.S. 14-208.18, 115C-47(32a), -105.47A, -105.48, -276(r), -288, -367, -391

Cross References: 3.4310 Conflict Resolution; 4.3550 Student Sex Offenders; 4.3600 Code of Student Conduct

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 community.

The alternative school is 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 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 at semester break 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 reflect the purposes described above. The educational program is expected to meet all board policy and state requirements. In addition, the educational program and supporting services should be designed to facilitate the transition of the student back into the regular educational setting when appropriate.

All school employees 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 school is required to develop a school improvement plan, behavior management plan and a parental involvement plan in accordance with board policy. In addition a conflict resolution plan, as provided in policy 3.4310 Conflict Resolution must be included in the school improvement plan. In developing these plans, the board encourages the principal and school employees to review successful alternative education programs and make effective use of the resources provided by the superintendent or his/her designee. The superintendent and board shall review these plans in accordance with board policy. While providing flexibility at the school level to develop the plans, the superintendent and board shall 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 board shall develop a program proposal that is consistent with the State Board of Education standards for alternative learning programs or schools. The board shall then submit the proposal to the State Board for its review. After the proposal has been reviewed by the State Board, the board shall consider any State Board recommendations to modify the proposal before implementing the alternative learning program or school. The board also shall review on a regular basis whether the school system's

alternative learning programs and schools comply with State Board standards.

C. TRANSFER TO ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/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/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 or as an alternative to out-of-school suspension or expulsion. 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 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, the appropriate staff of the alternative learning 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 learning program or school shall determine what support services and intervention strategies are recommended for the student.

If a student is assigned to an alternative school in lieu of expulsion under G.S. 115C-391(d)(2), the student shall be under the supervision of school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral

The board encourages parental involvement in decisions regarding the student's education and in identifying effective options for addressing concerns regarding the student'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 Student Success Team 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 or his/her designee of the transfer.

4. Referrals or Assignments as Alternatives to Long-Term Suspensions, 365 Days

## Suspensions and Expulsion

A student may be given the option or may be required to attend the alternative learning program or school for violation of board policies, school standards or rules that could result in a long-term suspension, 365 days suspension or expulsion.

Board policies shall be followed for any student who may have engaged in behavior that could result in long-term suspension, 365 days suspension or expulsion. Alternative learning programs or schools may be considered as an option for a portion or the full duration of the period of suspension or expulsion. The alternative learning program or school may be an option to a long-term suspension or 365 days suspension if approved by the superintendent.

In order to consider the alternative learning program or school as an option to expulsion, the superintendent shall make a recommendation and the board shall choose to approve the alternative learning program or school as a modification to the expulsion.

At any stage in the proceedings, a parent may request that alternative learning program or school be considered as an option to suspension or expulsion. The superintendent or his/her designee shall maintain records as required by board policy.

Once approved, the student may be transferred to the alternative learning program or school. If the alternative learning program or school does not have the capacity to accept the student immediately, the student may be suspended from school until the alternative learning program or school can accept the student.

### 5. Involuntary Referral

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.

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 subject to policy 4.3550, Student Sex Offenders;
- c. the student is a significant disruption to the educational environment at the regular educational setting;
- d. 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;
- e. 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;  
or
- f. the student is at least 13 years of age and has committed an assault on school personnel or others as provided in policy 4.3600 Code of Student Conduct.

Prior to an involuntary transfer, the principal and Student Success Team shall document efforts to assist the student in the regular educational setting and address 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 learning program or school to the superintendent or his/her designee. The principal shall 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, and (3) documentation of other existing circumstances which 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 or his/her designee approves the transfer, the principal of the regular educational setting and alternative school shall make all necessary arrangements. Notifications will be provided to parents in person or by certified mail.

The parent may appeal the superintendent's decisions to the board. The board shall hear the appeal in closed session. The board shall follow its procedures as provided in policy 2.5000 Hearings Before the Board. During the period of the appeal, the student may be transferred 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 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 shall 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, if appropriate.

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

In assigning professional personnel to the alternative learning programs or schools, the superintendent shall consider the experience and evaluation ratings of the individual being assigned to the school or program. As system resources allow, the superintendent shall strive to avoid assigning to the alternative school or program less experienced professional personnel who have received an evaluation rating of "less than above standard" or "proficient" within the last three years.

#### F. EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

##### 1. Information to be Reported

Each year, the board shall 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 board policy 3.2100 School Improvement Plan, an alternative learning program or school shall report the following information annually to the superintendent and board:

- 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 when they leave the alternative learning program or school (including the regular educational setting, community college/technical schools or dropping out); and
- 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 or designee 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 the alternative learning program or school.

## 2. Items to be Considered

In addition to any other outcomes the board deems important, the board shall 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 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;
- g. the alternative learning program or school assists with transition back to the regular education setting or to other educational settings.