

GUIDELINES FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SETTINGS

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(Background information for Policy Review Committee)

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), as a result of P.A. 13-122, conducted a study of alternative school programs offered by boards of education and produced a report for the Connecticut General Assembly. Data was collected for four types of alternative school programs: alternative elementary and secondary programs; expulsion programs; dropout diversion/credit recovery programs; and districtwide special education and transition programs. The analysis of the data at that time indicated that approximately four percent of Connecticut's students were in alternative programs and that approximately ninety percent of the alternative schools/programs served students in grades 9 through 12. However, the study determined that CSDE only had partially accounted for alternative school programs offered by districts.

P.A. 15-133, An Act Concerning Alternative Education required the CSDE to develop guidelines for the provision of alternative education. The legislation required that such guidelines were to include:

- Description of the purpose and expectations of alternative education;
- Criteria for who is eligible to receive alternative education; and
- Criteria for how and when a student may enter or exit alternative education.

These guidelines are designed to support the operation of alternative educational settings (schools or programs) offered by boards of education. The CSDE issued the guidelines approved by the State Board of Education on October 5, 2016. The new guidelines were prepared in accordance with P.A. 15-133 prior to the passage of P.A. 16-147 and, therefore should not be construed at the present time to govern the mandatory alternative educational opportunity required to be offered to expelled students under Section 12 of P.A. 16-147. The CSDE is currently in the process of reviewing its guidelines to determine whether they need to be amended to address the circumstances of expelled students, which became effective as of August 15, 2017.

P.A. 15-133 defines alternative education as “a school or program maintained and operated by a local or regional board of education that is offered to students in a nontraditional educational setting and addresses the social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs of such students.” For purposes of the guidelines, alternative education does not include private schools, homeschooling, School Choice, adult education programs, approved private special education programs, gifted and talented programs, and schools or programs within the Connecticut Technical High School system unless otherwise indicated. Alternative education may function within a single school or be a program affiliated with one or more schools or districts.

The guidelines indicate the local districts must have a clear written policy regarding student placement in an alternative education setting. This includes the following:

Prior to considering alternative placement, the student's academic, health, and behavioral records, including planning and placement team (PPT) or 504 records, student success plans (SSP), and the efficacy of tier 1, 2, and 3 interventions, need to be reviewed, and assurance needs to be given that Child Find requirements have been complied with. Further, students may be referred by a parent/guardian, the student or a peer, or the school or district.

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The local board of education must approve the development of alternative education settings to ensure that the alternative education program/school has a transparent and defined purpose, including a description of the types of students that may benefit most from the program/school environment. Further alternative education schools and programs must develop clear and objective criteria for admission consistent with stated program guidelines that are provided to students and their parents/guardians at the time of admittance into the alternative setting.

The student and parents/guardians must be given an accurate and comprehensive description of the alternative education delivered in order for them to know and understand how the alternative education placement will benefit their child. Determination of enrollment is made by the student support team involved in the placement, which includes, but is not limited to, parent or family representative, student if in secondary school appropriate representative of the alternative environment, student's teachers, school administrator (sending school) and if the student has an identified disability, special education administrator or designee, and the PPT/504 Team.

If a family disagrees with the placement decision, a clear process delineating a family's right of appeal must be written in policy by the board of education. Also, the entrance criteria and procedures must be explicitly written in each alternative education program/school handbook and provided to parents/guardians and students in the language of the home at the time of admittance into the alternative setting.

To ensure that continued placement in the alternative setting is appropriate, LEAs must have a clear process written in policy to include an annual review process, exit criteria and a transition process.

A team reviews the appropriateness of placement at least annually. The review considers the program goals used to reinforce student and parent choice regarding placement and reviews the student's program of study and alignment to the goals of their Individualized Education Program (IEP), where appropriate.

Members of the team include, but are not limited to, parent or family representative student, if in secondary school, appropriate representative of the alternative environment, student's teachers, school administrator or designee (receiving school - if applicable), and if the student has an identified disability, special education administrator or designee.

The alternative education setting needs to adopt clear and explicit criteria and procedural exit criteria frameworks to address a return to the traditional school setting by an informed choice of the student and their family and a determination that the setting is no longer beneficial to the student.

The student transition from an alternative education setting must include transition planning for placement outside of the alternative education setting related to the annual review to ensure the continuity of support. The transition plan must provide recommendations consistent with the student's future educational plans as evidenced by their student success plan. In addition, the transition plan should be aligned with the goals of the student's IEP where it is appropriate. The team members considering the transition plan are those who were involved in the review process.

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If there is disagreement with the placement decision, there must be a clear process written in policy by the district board of education delineating a family's right of appeal.

The exit criteria and procedures must be explicitly written in each alternative education program/school handbook and provided to parents/guardians and students in the language of the home at the time of admittance into the alternative setting.

The CSDE Guidelines also contain a detailed section entitled "Best Practices for Program Implementation" to assist local districts in planning and implementing an alternative program.

For boards of education that provide a credit recovery program as part of their alternative education program, Section 25 of Public Act 24-45 requires that they also permit a student enrolled in a "traditional" school program who is at risk of not graduating to enroll in the credit recovery program while still enrolled in the "traditional" school program. Such a student would no longer be required to enroll in the alternative program to access the credit recovery program.

Policy Implications

Policy #6172, "Alternative Education Programs," pertains to this topic. It has been revised and is now available for your consideration and use. This is now considered a mandated program for districts that have a board of education-approved alternative education program. A new administrative regulation has been developed based on the content of the CSDE "Guidelines for Alternative Education Settings."

A new policy to consider. Boards of education that have approved an alternative program are mandated to have a policy on this topic.

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs

The purpose of this policy is to recognize the need for alternative education programs for some District students.

The Board of Education (Board) is dedicated to providing educational options for all students within available financial constraints. It is recognized that there will be students in the District whose needs and interests are best served by participation in an alternative education program. The Board believes alternative education is a student-focused perspective based on respect for students, the belief that all students can learn given the right environment, and participation in an alternative setting is an informed choice made by students and their families.

“Alternative education” means a school or program maintained and operated by the Board that is offered to students in a nontraditional educational setting and addresses the social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs of such students. Alternative education does not, for purposes of this policy, and Connecticut State Board of Education (CSDE) guidelines, include private schools, homeschooling, *“School Choice,”* adult education, approved private special education programs, gifted and talented programs, and schools or programs within the Connecticut Technical High School System.

The Board shall provide alternative education to students in accordance and compliance with the “Guidelines for Alternative Education Settings,” established by the State Board of Education. Such guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, a description of the purpose and expectation of alternative education, criteria for student eligibility, and criteria for how and when a student may enter or exit alternative education. The philosophy of alternative education utilizes a whole-student approach. This approach promotes individualized programming to address students' personal, emotional, social, intellectual, work skills, safety and security needs and academic achievement. The Board views enrollment in an alternative setting not as punishment but as a learning opportunity.

In providing alternative education to students, the Board may use space in an existing school, establish a new school, or establish a program affiliated with one or more schools or districts. Programs must be affiliated with at least one district with a code previously assigned by CSDE. Such programs must comply with state laws pertaining to the number and length of school days in an academic year and shall be subject to all other federal and state laws governing public schools.

The Board may form a cooperative arrangement with other boards of education to provide alternative education pursuant to C.G.S. 10-158a.

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs (continued)

Such an arrangement may include the establishment of a committee to supervise the program, with committee membership determined by cooperating boards. Such committee shall have the power, in accordance with the terms of the agreement, to (1) apply for, receive directly and expend on behalf of the school districts which have designated the committee an agent for such purpose any state or federal grants which may be allocated to school districts for specified programs, the supervision of which has been delegated to such committee, provided such grants are payable before implementation of any such program or are to reimburse the committee for transportation provided to a school operated by a cooperative arrangement; (2) receive and disburse funds appropriated to the use of such committee by the cooperating school districts, the state or the United States, or given to the committee by individuals or private corporations; (3) hold title to real or personal property in trust, or as otherwise agreed to by the parties, for the appointing boards; (4) employ personnel; (5) enter into contracts; and (6) otherwise provide the specified programs, services and activities. Teachers employed by any such committee shall be subject to the provisions of the general statutes applicable to teachers employed by the board of education of any town or regional school district.

A list of alternative programs will be approved by the Board annually. The Superintendent may/shall provide for the involvement of staff, parents and the community in recommending alternative education programs for Board approval. The alternative education program, subject to Board approval, must have a transparent and defined purpose, including a description of the students that may benefit most from the program/school environment. Clear and objective admission criteria, consistent with stated program guidelines, must be evident. Also, to be a part of the alternative education program, clear and explicit criteria and procedural exit criteria frameworks must be used to address a student's return to the traditional school setting. There shall be an annual evaluation of alternative education programs.

The Board, as required, will post information about any alternative education offered on its website, including purpose, location, contact information, staff directory, and enrollment criteria. Determination of enrollment shall be made by the student support team, which includes, but is not limited to, parent or family representative, student (if in secondary school), appropriate representative of the alternative environment, student's teachers, school administrator and if the student is identified as disabled, a special education teacher or PPT/504 Team representative. In addition, the Board recognizes its responsibility to give all children in the District who receive alternative education as nearly equal advantages as may be practicable compared to other children in the District. In addition, the Board shall annually submit to the Commissioner of Education a strategic school profile report for each alternative school or program under its jurisdiction.

All students in an alternative education program shall receive instruction based on a curriculum aligned to the Connecticut Core State Standards, unless modified in particular curricular areas as indicated by the goals and objectives of an IEP.

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs (continued)

Alternative education programs implemented by the District are meant to maintain flexible learning options regarding environment, structure, and pedagogy. Such programs include but are not limited to, a separate school, tutorial instruction, small group instruction, large group instruction, counseling and guidance, computer-assisted instruction, cooperative work experience, supervised community service activities, and supervised independent study. Before considering an alternative placement, a review of the student's academic, health, and behavioral records, including any PPT and Section 504 records, Student Success Plans, and other history of interventions, must occur.

Students may be placed in an alternative education program within available financial resources upon parent request if the District determines that the placement serves the student's educational needs and interests and assists the student in achieving district and state academic content standards. Families shall have a right of appeal if they disagree with the District's placement decisions.

(For districts that include a credit recovery program as part of their alternative school program)

The _____ Board of Education provides a credit recovery program as part of the alternative education program. A student, if deemed at risk of not graduating, enrolled in the District's "traditional" program may access the credit recovery program without enrolling in the alternative program.

Alternative language to consider:

It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent of Schools to identify alternative program opportunities to be made available to students at risk, to recommend such alternative programs to the Board for approval, and to familiarize students and parents/guardians with the availability of such alternative programs. The Superintendent shall, through cooperative efforts with other districts, schools, agencies and organizations, periodically recommend additional or modified alternative educational programs to the Board.

The implementation of this policy and any Board approval of an alternative education program are subject to the requirements and procedures enumerated in the administrative regulation.

(cf. 6172.11 – Relations with Charter Schools)

(cf. 6172.12 – Magnet Schools)

(cf. 6172.41 – Title I Program)

(cf. 6172.6 – Virtual/Online Courses)

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs

Legal Reference	Connecticut General Statutes 10-4p(b) Implementation plan to achieve resource equity and equality of opportunity. Assessment. Reports. (as amended by PA 15-133) 10-15 Towns to maintain schools. 10-16 Length of school year. 10-158a Cooperative arrangements among towns. School building projects. Student transportation. 10-220 Duties of boards of education (as amended by PA 15-133) 10-223h(c) Commissioner's network of schools. Turnaround committees. Operations and instructional audit. Turnaround plans. Report. (as amended by PA 15-133) PA 15-133 An Act Concerning Alternative Education Guidelines for Alternative Education Settings, State Department of Education, approved by CT State Board of Education, Oct. 5, 2016. Public Act 24-45 An Act Concerning Education Mandate Relief, School Discipline and Disconnected Youth §9
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Policy adopted:

cps 11/15
rev 4/17
rev 9/24

A new administrative regulation to consider.

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs

In developing an alternative education program to be presented to the Board of Education for its approval and budgetary support, these regulations provide the basis for such a program.

Program Philosophy

The basic tenets of an alternative education program shall include the following basic principles:

1. A philosophy of high expectations is evidenced through the program's documented mission and vision statements that are visible and available to all school/program community members.
2. The school/program embraces the concept that all students are capable and can be successful.
3. As part of the overall philosophy of the alternative education setting, family involvement is welcomed and actively supported. Families are considered equal partners and involved in all decision-making processes for their child's learning and personal success.
4. A climate must be created that supports receiving input from families and bi-directional communication to share information about the student's progress at home and school.
5. Enrollment in the alternative setting is an informed choice by students and their respective families. An orientation or information session is provided to explain the program and student expectations.
6. Students and their families shall be regularly informed of their progress through the mandated and personalized "Student Success Plan."
7. All students in the program shall receive instruction based on a curriculum aligned to the CT Core State Standards (CSS) unless modified by the goals and objectives of an IEP or Section 504 plan in particular curricular areas.
8. Instructional practices must be culturally relevant to promote understanding and respect for enrolled students and include their perspectives and interests within an inclusive learning environment to accommodate different learning styles and abilities through flexible groupings.
9. Students are provided support to transition into postsecondary training and employment.
10. All staff, students, and families will consider cultural differences as critical to understanding personal needs, and accommodations will be made for cultural differences to allow for personal success within the learning alternative(s).

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs (continued)

Guidelines for Student Placement

Student placement in an alternative education setting must include the following written policy direction:

1. Prior to Referral

Before consideration of alternative placement, the following need to take place:

- A review of the student's academic, health and behavioral records, including planning and placement team (PPT) or 504 records, student success plans (SSP), and the efficacy of tier 1, 2, and 3 interventions;
- Assurance that Child Find requirements have been complied with;
- Students may be referred from the following sources: parent, student (self or peer), school or district.

2. Entrance Criteria

The Board of Education is required to approve the development of alternative education settings to ensure the following:

- The alternative education program/school has a transparent and defined purpose, including a description of the types of students that may benefit most from the program/school environment.
- Alternative education schools and programs develop clear and objective criteria for admission consistent with stated program guidelines provided to students and their parents/guardians at the time of admittance into the alternative setting.

3. Process

The student and parents/guardians are provided with an accurate and comprehensive description of the alternative education delivered. There are culturally and linguistically responsive family and student engagement practices regarding all aspects of decision-making related to placement. The team will ensure that parents/guardians know and understand how the alternative education placement will benefit their child.

Determination of enrollment is made by the student support team involved in the placement, which includes but is not limited to parent or family representative, student, if in secondary school, appropriate representative of the alternative environment, student's teachers, school administrator (sending school), special education administrator or designee and PPT/504 Team (if the student has an identified disability).

If there is disagreement with the placement decision, there must be a clear process written in policy by the Board delineating a family's right of appeal.

The entrance criteria and procedures must be explicitly written in each alternative education program/school handbook and provided to parents/guardians and students in the language of the home at the time of admittance into the alternative setting.

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs (continued)

Guidelines for Continued or Discontinued Student Placement

To ensure that continued placement in the alternative setting is appropriate, the District's written policy must have a clear process to include the following:

1. Annual Review

A review of the appropriateness of placement occurs at least annually with a team. The following issues are to be considered:

- A review of program goals to reinforce student and parent choice regarding placement.
- A review of the student's program of study and alignment to their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, where appropriate.
- Members of the team include, but are not limited to, parent or family representative, student, if in secondary school, appropriate representative of the alternative environment, student's teachers, school administrator or designee (receiving school – if applicable), and if the student has an identified disability, special education administrator or designee.

2. Exit Criteria

Alternative education settings must adopt clear and explicit criteria and procedural frameworks to address the following:

- A return to the traditional school setting by an informed choice of the student and their family.
- A determination that the setting is no longer beneficial to the student.

3. Process

Student transition from an alternative education setting shall be made as follows:

- Transition planning for placement outside of the alternative education setting is related to the annual review to ensure the continuity of support.
- The transition plan provides recommendations consistent with the student's future educational plans as evidenced by their student success plan.
- The transition plan is aligned with the student's IEP goals where appropriate.
- Members of the team include, but are not limited to, parent or family representative, student, if in secondary school, the appropriate representative of the alternative environment, student's teachers, school administrator or designee (receiving school – if applicable), and if the student has an identified disability, special education administrator or designee.

Instruction

Alternative Education Programs

Guidelines for Continued or Discontinued Student Placement (continued)

If there is disagreement with the placement decision, there must be a clear process written in the Board's policy by the LEA Board of Education, delineating a family's right of appeal.

The exit criteria and procedures must be explicitly written in each alternative education program/school handbook and provided to parents/guardians and students in the language of the home at the time of admittance into the alternative setting.

Regulation approved:

cps 4/17

reviewed 9/24