

Preface

Reflections looks back at the things that we have learned about providing high-quality alternative education services since 1989 and looks forward toward creating an even-stronger system of alternative education. The alternative education system is different in important ways from the traditional systems in Oklahoma public schools. Alternative programs may differ in the time classes are offered or teaching methodologies employed, but alternative education must not differ in one major aspect, quality. Alternative education must offer at-risk youth a high-quality education.

Alternative programs should use innovative approaches to create a caring, learning environment to enrich the mind and heal the spirit. It should never be a second-rate, watered down, nor diminished educational opportunity. Programs should take advantage of reduced class sizes to create interactive learning environments that tap into student interests and abilities. Alternative education offers one of the greatest challenges in education today, yet it entices by offering maximal flexibility in teaching and even greater personal rewards. Great alternative education teachers enjoy the heady experience of changing the direction of young lives; they also know crushing disappointment when their efforts appear to have been wasted. The victories produce the momentum to endure the defeats, and the joy of accomplishment outweighs the loss. *Reflections* is dedicated to Oklahoma's outstanding alternative educators. OTAC hopes that new teachers and administrators will be inspired by your pioneering efforts.

The Origins of Oklahoma's Statewide Alternative Education System

As the decade of the nineties began, state-funded alternative education consisted of approximately a dozen one-year Alternative Education grants and six High Challenge grants. The High Challenge funding was intended to foster the development of nontraditional and innovative approaches for high-risk children and youth. These supplemental allocations provided for the long-term implementation of these programs by providing stable funding for a period of three years, with the allocation halved during the fourth year and reduced by half again during the fifth year [if the program had demonstrated effectiveness and was deemed worthy of replication by other school districts.] Since the purpose of these grants was to develop models that could be validated as effective and replicated in other school districts, the legislation also provided for an independent evaluation agency to provide formative and summative evaluation. OTAC met the qualifications set in law and was awarded the Technical Assistance grant.

During 1994, provisions for funding eight Alternative Education Academies (in three Oklahoma counties that had reported the highest numbers of dropouts coupled with the highest numbers of juvenile arrests) were established by Juvenile Justice Reform Legislation. These academies were located in Oklahoma, Tulsa, and Comanche counties. The State Department of Education, as required by that legislation, also developed a new state plan for alternative education that envisioned a five-year program for establishing alternative education programs in every school district in Oklahoma.

The next year (1995), funding for Mid-size and Small Academies was made available. Districts competed for this funding; the Academy funding scheme paralleled that of the High Challenge funding concept – three years of level funding, followed by two years of reduced funding. Twenty-seven districts across the state received funding under this competition.

In 1996, the Statewide Alternative Education Program, which provided permanent funding for alternative education across the state, was launched. Oklahoma has created a nationally-recognized model for statewide alternative education, annually serving over 17,000 students in grades six through twelve. Until 2001, the legislature had steadily increased support for these programs to a \$19.8 million annual allocation. Due the state funding crisis that began in 2000-01, the Statewide Alternative Education program was cut 25% to \$15.2 million. The 2003-2004 budget for alternative education was set at \$17.2 million.

How to Use this Book

Reflections is organized according to the seventeen criteria that govern alternative education in Oklahoma. These criteria provide the legal framework of this important educational enterprise; the teachers, counselors, and other school personnel translate it into action. If the program is dynamic and successful, it is because of the people involved.

After a decade of learning and collecting data, we know alternative education is powerful. It can be life-changing for students and cost-effective for society. If a program is ineffective, the school personnel need to look to themselves, the resources allocated, or the constraints of the district's alternative education philosophy for answers. *Reflections* is designed to help school personnel find solutions.

OTAC evaluates all of Oklahoma's state-funded alternative education programs. OTAC's team of Field Coordinators has identified effective strategies used to meet the 17 criteria. You can use the links in this document to find colleagues who have met one (or more) of the seventeen criteria in a particularly effective or innovative manner. *Reflections* is a "living document." Resources and contact information will be updated periodically. If you believe that your program has implemented strategies that should be included, please let your Field Coordinator know. The most up-to-date version of *Reflections* will always be available on our website at <http://www.csdcotac.org>

The links are identified by the gray boxes. Clicking on:

Resources for...

will take you to the appropriate contact or resource for the criterion.

Return....

will take you back to your previous location in the document. Some resources will link to a website.

Criterion #1

Allow class sizes and student-teacher ratios which are conducive to effective learning for at-risk students.

Unlike special education regulations, the student-teacher ratio and the total number of students that may be taught by any one teacher is not specified in the alternative education legislation. This is because the ratio that is conducive for learning varies with the degree of risk associated with different populations. A program designed for adjudicated youth will require a lower student/teacher ratio than a class of highly motivated seniors working to graduate. For the same reason, a class with a high number of students with behavior problems will need a smaller student-teacher ratio than a class made up of students who need to work to support a family and are strongly motivated to complete their secondary education.

The State Department of Education's FY04 State Plan states:

The Alternative Education Section has generally deemed a 10-15:1 student-to-teacher ratio to be acceptable. It should be reiterated that this student-to-teacher ratio represents the total class load for the alternative education teacher rather than a per class period enrollment.

Remember the alternative educator is responsible for monitoring not only the academic progress of the students, but also the many behavioral adjustments necessary to ensure successful outcomes. Most Oklahoma school districts are small, and many have one-room alternative education programs. Students in one-room programs, regardless of their degree of motivation, require lower student-teacher ratios because their instructor is responsible for teaching a variety of subjects at different ability levels at one time while maintaining documentation and assessment to demonstrate that the students have mastered the requisite skills.

Why is this requirement so important? The teacher is generally the most important variable in a successful alternative education program. The teacher must maintain structure regarding *what is to be learned* while retaining flexibility in the *way that the material is taught*. The teacher must be *accepting of the student* while *expecting the student to produce high quality work*. The teacher has the opportunity to *be innovative in teaching strategies* while *adhering to curricular standards*.

Does it make a difference? OTAC evaluations during the past decade demonstrate that an appropriate ratio was present in effective programs – those that achieved desirable student outcomes. Appropriate student-teacher ratios are associated with higher graduation and promotion rates and lower dropout rates.

What if there are fewer than 10 students? According to state law, “Any school district submitting a plan for an alternative education program serving fewer than ten students shall enter into a cooperative agreement with another school district to jointly provide the program unless the program has been granted a waiver from this requirement by the State Board of Education.” While too many students has been found to be contradictory to the goals for alternative education, too few students in a class minimizes the opportunity for necessary group interaction. There will be times, however, when the waiver should be requested. Districts with very remote locations are just one example of an occasion to consider the waiver process. The Statutory Waiver Application form and instructions should be requested from the State Department of Education, Accreditation/Standards Division.

This criterion is listed first for a reason: it is essential. A good teacher with a small number of students, proper materials, and administrative support will yield positive results!

Criterion #2

Incorporate appropriate structure, curriculum, and interaction and reinforcement strategies designed to provide effective instruction.

It is amazing that something so very difficult can be stated in just fourteen words. Yet, these few words summarize the role of the alternative teacher. Structure is necessary; students, faculty, administrators, and family should know what to expect of the program of instruction. The curricular requirements for alternative education students are the same as for those of other students in the state. The curriculum must meet the Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) requirements, as well as prepare the students for the Oklahoma End-of-Instruction tests.

Yet, *how* the curriculum is taught may differ greatly. Sometimes it looks more like gifted education because it can be speeded up, individualized, and creative. Sometimes it looks more like remedial education because of an emphasis on helping students “catch up” or compensate for individual weaknesses. Regardless, learning *must* be interactive, not a passive experience in which the student receives information from the teacher, book, or computer.

This criterion mandates active learning. Effective instruction should combine individual assignments and group activities to allow for a stimulating learning environment. We are required to get students involved in the learning process. And on top of that, we must have appropriate reinforcement strategies that let students know when they have behaved appropriately or learned correctly.

Does anyone expect a teacher to be able to do all of that? Yes, we are expected to do it all. It is not easy, but it is just one of the reasons that alternative teachers are paid 5% more than others. Additionally, alternative teachers need to keep very accurate documentation that they have done exactly what is required by this criterion. Alternative teachers, far more than regular education teachers, may have to defend the credits and grades earned by their students. Having the structure and curriculum along with the reinforcement strategies firmly in place helps to document the rigor of your curriculum and the validity of the grades and credits earned by your students.

What if we use a packaged curriculum (computer-delivered curriculum or other commercial program)? If you *only* use a packaged curriculum, you have structure and curriculum, but you need appropriate interactions embracing the material, the teacher, and other students or adults. Too often, we only think of interactions in terms of “special projects.” High-quality alternative education can not occur if students are given material, computerized or otherwise, and expected to essentially teach themselves. Remember, the programs that have proven to be the most successful maintain a balance between individual and group instruction. Providing a true alternative learning experience is challenging; but when you see meaningful learning taking place, it is exhilarating.

How can I show that I have included everything in my teaching? Try keeping a folder for each student. In fact, the student can be in charge of the folder if you wish. Involve the student in preparing what is going to be covered. You can even have the student suggest activities associated with learning or have the student choose from a list of activities of which you approve. Keep a check list of the PASS skills; go so far as to record the dates on which the student demonstrated mastery (and if appropriate, keep a copy of the work in a portfolio). You may wish to have a master list of reinforcement strategies and check them off for each student if you've used that particular one. You may just jot a note in the folder...whatever system works for you. Remember that you can use student portfolios, cooperative learning, cross-curriculum learning, and computerized record management (to name a few strategies) to help you meet this criterion.

If you receive a high rating from your field coordinator in this area, be proud; it is difficult to achieve. "If there is one characteristic that all great champions share, it's an enormous sense of pride. That's true in all walks of life. The people who excel are those who are driven to show the world... and prove to themselves... just how good they are." ~ Nancy Lopez

Resources for "effective instruction"

Resources for "vocational education"

Resources for "portfolios"

Criterion #3

Include an intake and screening process to determine eligibility of students.

By now, every Statewide program has described an intake and screening process in its plan submitted to the Alternative Education Section of the State Department of Education. But you should always be alert! Don't let the rush of school or habit cause your program to subvert this incredibly important process.

Programs without screening procedures are usually programs without clear focus, and programs without focus can be easily co-opted into meeting the needs of teachers and administrators rather than meeting the needs of students. Every now and then, take a step back and review your process. How are decisions made? By whom? Is anyone ever screened out of the program? If not, you probably don't have a true screening procedure; your program is probably more of a catch-all that is used to place any student who exhibits any kind of school problem.

As the year progresses, review the roster of students to ensure that the students admitted into the program are those *most at risk* of failing to complete a high school education. All too often, alternative programs become inundated with who need to recover one or two credits in order to keep on track for graduation. While these students certainly are at some risk of failing to complete high school on time, the alternative education program is not a substitute for summer school. *The alternative education program is a replacement for, not a supplement to, the traditional school program.* When available slots are not used for true alternative education learners, the program's focus is altered – if not compromised. When the focus of a program shifts to credit recovery, the effect is a failure to provide appropriate services for the high-risk students that the Statewide Alternative Education Program is designed to serve.

During intake, all of the student's records should be available so that realistic decisions can be made. If the student enters your program, you have the information you need to make educational decisions, AND you have the pre-placement information you need for your program evaluation.

No single individual should ever have the power to make placement decisions. The eligibility or placement committee should include a representative from the alternative program, a counselor, the student and the student's family, and other school personnel. You cannot let anyone use "parent logic" and place a student "*just because ... because I said so!*"

There may be one exception to the single-source placement prohibition – juvenile court judges. Programs need to save some room to accommodate recommendations from the judicial system or from juvenile justice. If a court referral occurs, include the youth's caseworker or social worker on the intake committee. Many adjudicated youth have thrived in alternative education; students whose lives have dramatically changed have become community ambassadors for alternative programming. If a student has a history of violent behavior, be sure

to determine what safeguards and assistance you can expect from the referring entity. Don't prejudge; you just may work a miracle.

Guard against allowing the program to become a short-term punishment for undesirable behavior. Extensive research over the past ten years has found that short-term programs fail to yield long-term favorable results for the students. Students "sentenced" to alternative education, as a group, do not show improvements in academic achievement or behavior.

Generally, students in programs that they *choose* to attend show improvement. Programs of choice tend to have low dropout rates and high graduation or promotion rates even though they serve students at very high risk of school failure or dropout. Make your program a program of choice, a positive choice.

Some alternative education programs cause administrators to worry because they think too many kids want "in." But even the best alternative programs can rarely compete with all of the social and academic reasons that adolescents go to school – worries about everyone wanting "in" are unfounded.

Resources for "intake and screening"

Criterion #4

Demonstrate that teaching staff are appropriately certified teachers.

This one is pretty easy. Certificates are on file and are reported to the State Department of Education. Having the ability to establish rapport and teach alternatively are more important than certification in specific areas. Alternative education law states that teachers must be certified but allows them, when necessary, to teach outside their areas of certification. Without this provision, it would be nearly impossible to establish alternative education programs in rural areas. The law further requires that alternative education teachers be paid 5% above the scale established for the district in which they teach. This was intended to attract the best and to reward them for the extra responsibilities associated with alternative education.

If an elementary teacher, special education teacher, or other teacher is instructing outside an area of expertise, they should make arrangements to get assistance. Collaboration with the department heads from the traditional school's core subject areas can be very helpful.

Hire the best, and turn them loose!

Criterion #5

Demonstrate that teaching faculty have been selected on the basis of a record of successful work with at-risk students or personnel and educational factors that qualify them for work with at-risk students.

Criterion 5 is really an extension of the 4th criterion. The important concept here is “a record of successful work.” Although teachers need not be certified in a specific area, they must be able to work successfully with high-risk students. Schools need to establish a process that ensures that teachers who teach in an alternative school can really succeed.

The alternative school is not an acceptable place for a teacher who has not performed well in the traditional setting. Just as a student should not be sent to the alternative school as punishment, neither should a teacher or administrator. Only the very best instructors, counselors, or administrators should be entrusted with this fragile, sometimes volatile, and often difficult group of students.

How can schools show they met this requirement? A description of the application and selection processes is really all that is necessary. This need not be in writing; ongoing discussions with your Field Coordinator about the way in which applicants are encouraged and selected will usually suffice. It is important that the process be applied to every teacher selected to work in the alternative program.

Can we hire a first-year teacher? Yes, *if* that first-year teacher has a background that meets this requirement. It might include volunteer work, student teaching in an alternative environment, or non-teaching work with a high-risk population (social work, etc.). However, merely “liking kids” is not enough to meet this requirement. Teaching in an alternative education program is not the best way for a new teacher to “get a foot in the door” with an eye toward getting a “regular” teaching assignment in the district.

Also remember that first-year alternative education teachers need the same mentoring and supervision required of other first-year teachers.

The Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center has developed a new alternative teacher training program. Even veteran educators have found that they have questions about the many areas specific to the alternative setting. The one-day training provides an opportunity to learn about practices proven successful and potential conflicts to avoid. Contact your field coordinator for more information.

If the district has a good alternative program, teachers will want to work there.

Criterion #6

Reflect appropriate collaborative efforts with state agencies and local agencies serving youth.

Participants in alternative education programs are often in need of social, mental, or physical health services. School districts view students from an educational vantage point, while other agencies bring different perspectives to the table. These agencies may have experience working with the student or the family outside of school and may contribute invaluable information or services.

In order to best meet the needs of these students and to make all the resources stretch to serve this population, legislation requires districts to document efforts to work with others serving the same population. Other agencies often have information about additional services and resources that can enhance the alternative education program. School districts need to find every social, mental and physical health, and other community organization in the area. Call them; go by; put faces with names. If you talk to enough people, you'll be surprised at the results.

What if we're rural? Even if there are no service agencies located in your community, someone is designated to serve your community through juvenile justice, the health department, often mental health as well. Just talk to them. Go to the top in the state if you can not find anyone else to talk to. The Commission on Children and Youth is generally a good starting place to locate agencies that serve your locality. If service providers paid through tax dollars refuse to serve students in your community or have become unreliable, document your efforts and go over their heads! *It is easier when you remember that you are the voice for your students!*

What are some examples? The county health department can assist with a range of services including drug awareness and prevention and sex education. Health Departments will work with pregnant or parenting teens and their families, although sometimes students need transportation to get there. You may work an arrangement to get someone to take them. The county sheriff's office or local police department can offer violence prevention information. Many of the Tribal Councils have a broad range of services and resources and have been supportive of programs that have served Native American students. If you are in a larger community, don't forget to work with service organizations, such as Lions, Pilot, or Rotary Clubs. Historical Society, OSU Extension Offices, etc. Local employers can help meet academic and life-skills objectives; they can often help students see the real-life relevance of academic material. Most communities have access to mental health agencies; sometimes schools have space and can arrange to house these community services in the school. You might offer your school as a place for a wellness clinic or for getting immunizations. Look in the telephone

directory, and just see if you can find an agency that you haven't contacted in the past.

No one has enough money or resources to solve the problem alone, but together we can work on it.

Resources for general "collaboration"

Resources for "service learning"

Resources for "work study"

Resources for "rural programs"

Criterion #7**Provide courses that meet the curricular standards adopted by the State Board of Education and remedial courses.**

Alternative education students must meet the same standards as other students in the state. With exceptions protected by federal law, the State Department of Education has deemed that alternative education students are not exempt from the 4x3x3x3 state curriculum requirement or from the required Oklahoma School Testing Program. As of 2002-2003, the minimum number of credits required for graduation has increased to 23, but may have been set higher by your local school board.

The state testing schedule includes the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests in Geography (field tested grade 7, April 2004); Writing, Reading, Mathematics, Science and U.S. History (grade 8); and End-of-Instruction Tests (E-O-I) in Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History and Government, and English II (part I: Writing and part II: Reading/Grammar). If you have questions about the requirements for graduation and whether your program meets those requirements, or the testing schedules, direct your questions to your OTAC Field Coordinator or to Dr. Mary Meritt, Director of Alternative Education, at the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

All courses must meet the PASS skills enumerated for each grade and course by the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Making a dated checklist is a good way to be sure that all of the skills have been taught. It is important that students are competent and confident in those skills necessary for success; whether they return to traditional classes, go on to other educational opportunities or venture out into the world of work.

Please remember, credits may be earned through competencies mastered, as well as through the Carnegie unit which is based on “seat time.” However, you must be absolutely sure that the local school board has approved this method of granting credit. We never, ever want to be told that students will not be awarded credits that they have earned because of a misunderstanding on this issue. It has happened with new programs and in districts with a change in administration. This situation is devastating to both students and teachers.

If your program allows students to earn more credits in alternative school than students can earn in the traditional program (during the same time frame), be sure that the school board has approved and that the administration understands the situation. Alternative teachers and their students have been caught in battles over this issue. It is a no-win situation, especially for the young people who have placed their trust in us.

If you offer cross-curriculum teaching and credit, be very sure that critical issues have been addressed. Who gets what credit for what activities and competencies? Who grants the credit? How do you document the attainment of competencies?

In any event, granting credits is an area that needs thorough documentation, far more than is required of the traditional classroom teacher. So be sure you can document who did what, when, and how well. Note that this does not mean that your students have to take a paper-and-pencil test to document each competency! There are many ways to provide alternative assessments. In fact, OTAC offers “Alternative Assessments” as a staff development workshop. If you would like more information, contact us.

If you forget you have to struggle for improvement you go backward.

~ Geoffrey Hickson ~

Criterion #8

Offer individualized instruction.

At first glance, the idea of individualized instruction appears pretty simple and straightforward. Is the instruction tailored to the ability, needs, interests, and course requirements of the individual student? One would think that a student working on a computer-delivered course would be receiving individualized instruction, because the student completes the instructional material at his own pace. But the concept is more complex. Was this instruction really tailored to meet the needs of that student, or was it developed for all students everywhere?

Look at a student sitting in an isolated learning center completing work assigned by regular classroom teachers. Is this student receiving individualized instruction? He's certainly alone. But the instruction is not individualized – he is actually not receiving *any* instruction, he is expected to teach himself. It is important to realize that the pace of instruction, while extremely important, is only one aspect of individualized instruction. Isolated seat work (including computer-delivered lessons) may be wonderfully appropriate for some of the students in alternative education, some of the time. But if this is the method of curriculum delivery for all students on most days, it is not individualized instruction.

It is easy to recognize whole-group instruction when students walk into a classroom and find the assignment on the chalkboard. If the lesson is for everyone with no modifications, it is clearly not individualized. However, if you walk into a classroom and the teacher is conducting a lesson in language arts, you might find whole-group instruction for a portion of the time. The teacher may modify the writing, grammar, or literature lesson by selecting different assignments or material for each student based on ability, needs, interests, and course requirements. The basic whole-group instructional time may branch into group projects or cooperative learning that has been tailored toward individualized needs and interests.

Remember, as was discussed earlier, effective instruction should combine individual assignments and group activities to allow for a stimulating learning environment. One idea is to look for the common skills that all students need to provide for group interactions. Students could then be assigned individual assignments more relevant to the age of the learner or to the level of comprehension.

We've learned that it is not always easy to identify individualized instruction unless you dig deeper to see what the teacher has planned and where the instruction is headed. This is especially true when an alternative teacher works with several different grades and courses at the same time.

If you are teaching everyone the same thing, at the same time, in the same way, with the same requirements, it is not individualized.

Resources for “individualized instruction”

Criterion #9

State clear and measurable goals and objectives.

This criterion also appears straight-forward and non-ambiguous. It is. But its importance can not be overstated. Clearly stated goals and objectives need to be fixed firmly in mind before the program begins. The intake and screening process becomes more meaningful when understood in the context of the design of the alternative program. Who is the program meant for? What can it do? Where is it going? How does it get there? How do we know when our goals have been met?

In order to create realistic goals and objectives, the mission and program philosophy should be understood by everyone connected to the program in any way. This understanding will cut down on inappropriate referrals. Periodic review among the stakeholders can ensure that everyone is on the same page.

A dichotomy of purpose – punishment vs. salvation – still exists in the minds of many Oklahoma educators and policymakers. The direction your program will take depends upon which philosophy is being followed. If a program focuses on punishment and the student has little or no choice in the placement, the climate at the alternative school is affected. Student/teacher relationships are impacted as well. If the emphasis is on changing the educational program so that nontraditional students can succeed, the goals, objectives, and relationships will be quite different.

After more than a decade of experience in conducting and evaluating dropout prevention programs, OTAC has concluded that punitive programs do not reduce student risk levels. They do not reduce the cost to society. They do not improve students' prospects for success. Punitive programs may have a positive effect for the traditional program from which the alternative education students have been removed, but we have found little or no long-term benefit for the students who are enrolled in punitive programs.

You can not punish children and youth enough to make them compliant, happy, or successful.

Criterion #10

Include counseling and social service components with the provision that providers of services are not required to be school counselors.

This criterion is vitally important for successful programs. When we look at how long it takes for students to become identified as highly at-risk of failure and the circumstances of their lives, it is easy to see that counseling and social services are incredibly important. One teacher or group of teachers cannot solve these problems; they can help by creating an agreeable environment for learning. School counselors who have hundreds of other students to consider cannot be expected to deal with the social and psychological issues often noted in alternative education students. Despite school counselors' best intentions, students may perceive them as enforcers of discipline policies and therefore be hesitant to openly discuss conflicts.

To develop a dynamic program capable of changing the direction of students' lives, as well as to achieve high scores on this criterion, a systematic, continuous, consistent counseling program is required. This program may include, but not be limited to, guided group discussions, group counseling, family counseling, and individual counseling. While many of the topics may resemble the themes in Life Skills instruction, they are not synonymous. This is another reason to rely on the expertise of true counseling professionals.

By looking to other community, county, or state agencies, alternative program staff may secure the services of other specialists: art therapists, alcohol and drug counselors, mental health counselors, psychologists, etc. One cautionary note: Like the schools, these agencies may have experienced budget cuts. When that happens, services to the alternative program may be the first to be eliminated. Do not put all of your counseling hopes into one community service basket.

When arranging for additional counseling services from outside agencies, be certain that you have a firm commitment and a definite schedule. Again, remember you are the advocate for your students and are responsible for the quality of each aspect of the program. Make sure that the agency will commit the services of a qualified counseling professional – some agencies hire individuals with a social science Bachelor's degree and designate them as "Qualified Mental Health Professionals" – these individuals do *not* have proper training for providing any type of counseling services. Require continuity – your students should not have to deal with a different professional each time. When agencies rotate counselors, it becomes difficult for them to establish rapport; the counselors take on the personae of visitors. Young people sometimes find it difficult to trust strangers.

Counseling services that are provided on an "as needed" basis are just not enough. The students in alternative programs do need counseling, and they need it consistently and reliably. OTAC studies including large numbers of participants demonstrate a strong, positive relationship between the frequency of counseling services and positive student outcomes.

We have to help students meet their most basic human needs for trust and mental well being before we can expect them to learn.

Resources for “counseling and social services”

Criterion #11

Require a plan leading to graduation (*or promotion for middle grades) be developed for each child in the program.

The graduation or promotion plan should be developed upon entry into the alternative program. It should be more than a copy of the student transcript; it should be an *individual* plan that takes into consideration student academic and vocational interests as well as performance indicators directly linked to student success. The student’s performance on the program’s pre-test should be reviewed for areas of academic strengths and weaknesses. A review of the student’s behavioral record – including absences – should be accompanied by a plan to address behaviors that impede academic progress. Although the plan will surely identify many immediate or short-term goals, it should be comprehensive enough to extend beyond graduation and assist the student with successful transitions. If the student wishes to attend a technical school, a plan that includes the vocational prerequisites is appropriate. Many alternative students plan to pursue higher education. The plan should ensure that they will meet the requirements for admission to state colleges or universities. The plan should be maintained in the student’s file and, in most cases, a copy should be made available to the student and/or parent/guardian. Teachers, counselors, and the student should review the plan on a regular basis and make adjustments necessary to facilitate the student’s success. The plan should be updated as goals are met and as credits are earned. Life skills studies can be tailored around the graduation plan. * This wording was taken from the FY ‘04 Statewide Alternative Education Academy Plan, Directions and Reference Material.

You have to know where you’re going before you know if you’ve gotten there.

Resources for “graduation plans”

Criterion #12

Offer Life Skills instruction.

This criterion is a little harder to define simply because it can be so many different things. Life skills are the skills that we need to get along more successfully in the world. We find these skills in every area of the curriculum. Students also need instruction in life skills related to social and career contexts. You can get information about web addresses for a variety of life skills lessons (as well as links to high-quality curriculum web sites) through OTAC's home page <http://www.csdcotac.org/links.htm>

What are some examples of life skills? In mathematics, making change, developing a budget, keeping a checkbook, learning about taxes, and responsibly using credit are a few examples of valid life skills.

Obviously, English classes offer opportunities to teach communication skills. Writing business letters, recording messages, developing resumes and job interview techniques, making introductions, and learning to read transportation schedules or complete government forms are all different kinds of life skills.

In social studies or civics classes, it is important that youth learn about political processes, civil rights, and citizen responsibilities. Learning to read maps is another important life skill.

In another vein, decision-making, anger control, personal management, and cause and effect are all life skills that can be taught directly, through group counseling, and by integration into other curricular areas.

Although making the lesson relevant to the learner is an effective instructional technique, life skills instruction cannot be taken for granted by assuming that it is integrated within academic content. It is fine for several people to take the responsibility for teaching these skills, but you need to have a plan for teaching them. These skills need to be systematically taught or integrated into a curriculum.

As teachers, we like to think that everything we teach is a skill for life. We hope it is true, but life skills go beyond basic skills.

Resources for "life skills"

Resources for "student government"

Criterion #13

Provide opportunities for arts education to students, including artists in residence programs coordinated with the Oklahoma Arts Council.

Fine arts offer incredible opportunities for expanding and enriching learning. The arts help teachers develop lessons and projects that integrate a variety of skill areas. The many different learning styles of alternative education students are often accommodated by infusing fine arts into core academic instruction. Teaching an alternative curriculum through an emphasis on the arts is a creative way to engage many students who have not succeeded in text-based classrooms. It is important that alternative programs focus upon the Arts PASS skills, but don't stop there! Many alternative education teachers have seen their students come alive when they piqued their interest by using arts as a medium of instruction or communication.

Can we adequately teach the arts through a computer-assisted learning program? Students can learn about the arts in this way, but they can not experience the arts interactively if they only have a computer program. These packaged programs can offer basic knowledge. They can show pictures and components of visual art or they can demonstrate musical concepts and instruments, but they should not be the only way that students learn about the arts. Computer-delivered arts instruction leaves out the creative aspect of arts instruction.

If we don't get a grant from the State Arts Council, how can we develop a good program? Artists in Residence and the Arts in Alternative Education grants are great programs for schools. But there are other ways that innovative program directors and teachers have found to access artists/artisans and art experiences for their students. In some districts, the community gets involved in a number of ways. Some communities have local arts councils that will help. Many communities have local artists and artisans who will volunteer to teach something about their skill to alternative students. It is amazing the talent that you find in seemingly ordinary people when you start asking questions about who can do what.

If we have an art teacher and a music teacher in the traditional program and we let alternative students take those classes if they want to, is that enough? Not really. The intent of the law is that the arts be an integral part of alternative education, not an "add-on." It is beyond the need for a credit in art. It is a teaching strategy. Many alternative students have had very negative experiences in the "traditional" school, and telling them that they can enroll in those classes if they want to is not enough. The arts must be planned for in the alternative program and they must be included in the student's educational experience.

The arts make life a little brighter, a little fuller; our alternative students need this.

Resources for “arts education”

Criterion #14

Provide a proposed annual budget.

Each funded district must submit an Alternative Education Plan to the State Department of Education by September 15th of each year. These local plans must include an annual budget anticipating the use of the allocated funds. An OCAS expenditure report must then be submitted to the State Department of Education by June 30th of each year.

The Statewide Alternative Education funds were never intended to be the sole source of funding for the alternative program but were to be used to offset the additional costs of a small, intensive program for these high-risk students. Budget questions should be directed to Dr. Mary Meritt, Director of Alternative Education, at the State Department of Education.

There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.

- John F. Kennedy

Criterion #15

Include an evaluation component, including an annual written self-evaluation.

The overall evaluation plan for the Statewide Alternative Education Program has three main components: 1) site visits by the OTAC field coordinator, 2) student data (which includes pre-post data and student survey or focus group data), and 3) a written self-evaluation. You should actively participate in all three aspects.

An OTAC field coordinator will visit your program several times throughout the year. Because the Field Coordinators have many opportunities to observe alternative settings and to work with a range of program approaches, a great deal of information about your program can be assimilated in a short period of time. However, there are two areas of the evaluation process where you take the lead!

The student pre-post data has proven to be a valuable component of evaluation. You collect and record the data; OTAC conducts statistical analyses and includes the results in its annual report. Student progress is evidenced by changes in both academic performance and in behavioral changes. The analysis of this data provides important feedback at the local level. The local approach to alternative education can be validated by positive effects on students. Student data analyses can also point out weaker aspects of a local program and provide direction for changes that may need to be made. Your program's data is also a critical component of the statewide evaluation in which program characteristics are combined with student pre-post data and data from a comparison group to determine "what works" in alternative education. The accuracy and completeness of the student data is integral to the validity of the program evaluation.

The written self-evaluation is an opportunity for the project director to "toot her own horn." It lets you tell about the things that have happened that may not have been observable during on-site visits or that might be missed in a quantitative analysis of pre-post data. It is also an opportunity to reflect on ways in which your program might be improved. Your self-evaluation does not have to be stylish; it does not have to be complicated. But you should put some thought into telling about what happened, what worked, what you want to do differently.

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make noise?

Criterion #16

Be appropriately designed to serve middle school, junior high school and secondary school students in grades six through twelve who are most at risk of not completing a high school education for a reason other than that identified in section 13-101.

The phrase, “for a reason other than that identified in section 13-101,” is a reference to special education students. For these students, federal law is primary. If they can receive appropriate services in the traditional school, that is the least restrictive environment. For example, a learning disabled student would not be placed in the alternative program just because the learning disability places the student at risk. More appropriate services must be available in the school setting. But if other factors cause the student to be highly at risk for dropping out of school, the student is eligible for alternative education and cannot be discriminated against. These students should go through the same intake and screening process as others; the results should be reported back to the child’s multi-disciplinary team which makes placement decisions. When a child on an IEP enters the alternative program, the district is responsible for providing appropriate services for the child in the alternative setting. *Alternative education is a part of regular education, not special education.* A special education teacher may work with the alternative teacher in much the same way that other regular classroom teachers receive services for students who are mainstreamed into their classrooms.

If an alternative education program is populated almost exclusively by special education students, questions about the quality of the services in the special services program should be raised. Disproportionate numbers of special education students creates the appearance of a highly restrictive environment that may not be in compliance with federal regulations. Not to mention, leaving no alternative program options for those students not identified as special education students, but deemed at risk.

House Bill 2728 required all school districts to have alternative education services available in grades 6-12 by the 2000-2001 school year. This section of law has been modified in subsequent legislation. These changes have been made because of changes in the availability of funds for special middle-school and elementary-level programs. Check with your Field Coordinator or the Alternative Education Section at the State Department of Education for the most current regulations.

Alternative education is still a relatively new field. The rules continue to evolve as situations change—it is a strength and a weakness. That which is flexible does not break.

Again, the astuteness of the legislation guiding the development of the alternative programs is notable here. The design of your alternative program or school should be based on the specific needs of the students “in your district.” Therefore, the focus of these programs are as diverse as are the students that participate. A sampling of the components that may be incorporated in alternative programs are linked below:

Resources for “middle school”

Resources for “credit recovery”

Resources for “attendance”

Resources for “tardiness”

Resources for “scheduling”

Resources for “behavior”

Resources for “forming cooperatives”

Resources for “programs w/ daycare”

Resources for “night programs”

Resources for “parenting teens”

Criterion #17

Students in alternative education shall not be excluded from participation in curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities and programs, including but not limited to vocational programs.

This criterion was included in legislation passed in 1999. It responded to problems that were encountered across Oklahoma. Some alternative programs were inclusive and treated alternative students like any other students in the district. Others were reluctant to grant any privileges or opportunities to these students. Some districts felt that students who were attending alternative programs had forfeited their privileges when they dropped from the traditional school. One district insisted that alternative students were barred from attending basketball games or any extra-curricular activities.

The issue first cropped up in relation to whether alternative students were entitled to walk across the stage at graduation with other students who had earned their diplomas in the traditional program. While graduation is often seen as a right of passage, to many of the alternative education students and to their families, it is a celebration that had previously been held at arm's length. If the alternative program is a sanctioned offering of the district, the students have fulfilled their part in the requirements for the recognition and the celebration. Some career technology schools were also reluctant to open their doors to "those kids." As the programs were implemented, most technology schools found that alternative students, for the most part, were motivated to reexamine their past behavior. They were now ready to learn.

It is both a privilege and a great responsibility to change perceptions. The law now makes it clear that students can not be excluded from school programs or activities simply because they are in alternative education programs.

However, this criterion does not mean that alternative students can not be barred from participation for any reason. If they commit serious infractions of school rules, they may be individually barred because of the nature of that offense. If they fail to keep their grades up, they may be excluded under "don't pass, don't play." Simply put, they cannot be excluded *because* of participation in an alternative program. This does not mean that their enrollment in the alternative program removes all previous "debts" or that you can always run interference for them. Unless they are under some form of disciplinary or academic suspension, they have the same rights and privileges as any other student in the school district.

Students who participate in any activity or event sanctioned by the Oklahoma Secondary School Athletic Association, (OSSAA) i.e. athletics, cheerleading, drama, chorus, or band, must meet the requirements set forth in the OSSAA guidelines. These requirements should be discussed during the intake process and included in the student's graduation plan. The student's eligibility status should be reviewed periodically.

To err is human, to forgive is divine.

In looking back over the past decade, we are always impressed with the astuteness of the legislation guiding alternative education. Without widespread, first-hand experience in the field, the legislation targets what successful programs need to be about. Evaluation studies over the years support the soundness of the criteria. As more is learned, the criteria may be expanded to include additional elements. It is fortunate that the field is flexible, and that important findings can be disseminated quickly.

We at OTAC are also pleased that we've had the opportunity to get to know dedicated and successful alternative education teachers, administrators, and counselors across the state. We are proud of the work that you do and your willingness to try new things, to take on new responsibilities, and to share your successes with others. This vital network has the ability to change the way education is conducted. You can be innovators and trailblazers. You have the luxury of "thinking outside the box." By continuing to produce success where there was failure, we will continue to be allowed the flexibility and freedom to be creative. We promise that your successes will be well documented. We will tell others about your work, and we will seek out the best and most current information to make your work easier. Tell us about your networking and professional development needs; we'll try to find appropriate responses and develop systems that are responsive.

- The staff at OTAC

Resources: Alphabetical Listing

You are fortunate that there have been so many who have blazed a trail. Often through trial and error, with tremendous creativity and tenacity, and a strong sense of humor they have explored the possibilities and demanded answers where none could be found. We have included only a partial listing of the many colleagues you may contact for assistance. You may notice that several have been identified with success in more than one area. Do not hesitate to contact these educators so that you can “learn from the best!”

_____A_____

Attendance ... “Lincoln Survivors” Lincoln Alternative School (Enid), Jarry Hillman (580) 242-6170

Attendance... “Incentives” Bartlesville High School Alternative (Bartlesville), Rebecca Brown (918) 336-3311

Attendance ... “Jeopardy” Yellowjacket Academy (Kingfisher), Lynn Barnett (405) 375-5630

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

Art ... “300 Lessons in Art” Seiling Cooperative Academy (Seiling), Cheryl Davidson (580) 922-7382

Art (centered around a Civil War theme).....Atoka/Coal Interlocal Co-operative (Atoka), Mr. Chris Edgar (580)889-2664

Art.....Putnam City Academy, Janet Oden (405)495-8838

ArtNoble, Grace Ebbink (405)872-3441

Art.....Edge Middle School Academy (Duncan), Tom Bernige (580)252-2403

Art.....Lifeline Academy (Smithville), Debbie McDaniel (580)244-3333

Art (Spring Art Show).....F.A.M.E. Academy (Comanche), Darlene Cobb (580)439-2955

Art (Integrated) “Medieval Unit” Guymon Alternative Academy (Guymon), Monte Wolgamott (580) 468-1300

Return to “arts education” in main document

___ B ___

Behavior Modification (Levels Program)....Mid-Del Alternative Academy (Midwest City), Marty Cordor, (405)739-1720

Behavior Model (Boys and Girls Town)....Take Two Academy (Ardmore), James Meece (580)221-3037

Behavior Adjustment (Highly at-risk students)....Canadian County Education Center (CCEC, El Reno), Johnnie Walters (405)262-6336

Behavioral (Classroom Management).....

http://maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/pub/eres/EDSPC715_MCINTYRE/715HomePage.html

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

Block Schedule (16 day)..... PASS Middle School (Mustang), Dr. Rhonda White (405)376-7925

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

___ C ___

Collaboration (small community) ... “Canton-Okeene Academy (Canton), Karen Robinson (580) 886-2256

Collaboration. Choctaw/Nicom Park (CATS), Johnny Jump, (405)390-6152

Collaboration. Area Prevention Resource Centers. For a listing of the resource center in your area, go to <http://www.odmhsas.org/subab.htm#prevention> ... Ask about borrowing scientifically research based materials or scheduling special programming.

Collaboration.... County Health Departments. For a listing of the office in your area, go to <http://www.health.state.ok.us/phone/chdphone.html>

Collaboration.. Dimensions (Norman), Ms. Charlie Mason, (405)579-1887

Collaboration (Mentoring)....Putnam Middle Schools(Central) Christy Evans, (405)491-7626 and (Cooper), Ms. Pat George, (405)720-9887

Collaboration.....Bartlett Academy (Sapulpa), Rhonda Thompson, (918)224-7958

Collaboration.....Jenks Alternative High School, (Jenks) Elana Grissom, (918)299-4415 ext. 2420

Collaboration...“OSU Cooperative Extension Offices” for a listing of the office in your area, go to <http://countyext.okstate.edu/>

Collaboration (Curriculum) ... “Oklahoma Energy Resource Board” North Rock Creek Academy (North Rock Creek), Teresa Shivers (405) 275-3473

Collaboration (Curriculum Support and Enrichment) ... “Project WILD and Resource Trunks” for more information, go to http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/out_ed.htm

Return to “collaboration” in main document

CooperativeAtoka/Coal Interlocal Co-operative (Atoka), Mr. Chris Edgar, (580)889-2664

Cooperative.....Francis Tuttle Career Tech,Project HOPE (Oklahoma County), Kimberly Montros-Thomas (405)717-4148

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

Counseling ("Tribes")..... Mulhall-Orlando, Deb Bailey (580)455-2212

Counseling ... “Individual, Group, and Family Counseling” Cleveland Academy (Cleveland), Dan Reeves (918) 358-2529

Counseling ... Eagle Academy (Watonga), Yvonne Christensen (580) 623-7362

Counseling (art therapy)...Dimensions (Norman), Ms. Charlie Mason, (405)579-1887

Counseling.....Choctaw/Nicoma Park (CATS), Johnny Jump, (405)390-6152

Counseling and Social Services....Jenks Alternative High School, (Jenks) Elana Grissom, (918)299-4415 ext. 2420

Counseling and Social Services....Collinsville, Sally Bowman (918)371-1441

Return to “counseling and social services” in main document

Credit Recovery ... “Zero Hour for Credit Recovery” Commerce Alternative Learning Center (Commerce), Terry Tyree (918) 675-4316

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

___D___

Daycare with Parent Training....Putnam City Academy, Janet Oden (405)495-8838

Daycare with Parent Training....Emerson Outreach(Oklahoma City), Dr. Debra Thomas
(405)232-5273

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

___E___

Effective Instruction Dewey Alternative Program, Gerald Roberts (918)534-2241 ext. 203

Effective Instruction Owasso Alternative Program, Amie Hardy (918)274-3045

Effective Instruction Bartlesville Central Middle School Alternative, Sue Berry
(918)336-9302

Effective Instruction Jenks Alternative High School, (Jenks) Elana Grissom (918)299-4415
ext. 2420

Effective Instruction (Reading)... “Great Leaps Reading” Hominy Academy (Hominy), Pat
Drummond (918) 885-2141

Effective Instruction (Curriculum for English and math) “The Grand Conversation”.....
Putnam City Academy, Janet Oden (405)495-8838

Effective Instruction (Scheduling Small Groups) ... “Science Labs” Woodward Cooperative
Alternative Learning Academy (Woodward), Diana Yarbrough (580) 256-8713

Effective Instruction (Oklahoma History support materials) ... “Educonnect” Hominy
Academy (Hominy), Pat Drummond (918) 885-2141

Effective Instruction (Teacher Created Curriculum).....Choctaw/Nicomma Park (CATS),
Johnny Jump (405)390-6152

Effective Instruction (Curriculum Support and Enrichment) ... “Project WET and Project
Learning Tree” for more information, go to

http://www.okcc.state.ok.us/Divisions/Conservation_Programs/conservation_programs.htm.

OTAC contact on this topic: Rick Rogers.

Effective Instruction ... “Layered Curriculum” provides a framework for designing unit plans that is worth considering. To see sample units, order the book, or learn more about the approach, visit <http://help4teachers.com>. *OTAC contacts on this topic: Denise Parish, Rick Rogers.*

Effective Instruction (Forensic Science Unit)...Union Alternative School (Tulsa), Richard Storm (918)459-6550

Effective Instruction...Collinsville, Sally Bowman (918)371-1441

Effective Instruction (Mini Courses)...Dimensions (Norman), Ms. Charlie Mason (405)579-1887

Effective Instruction (Reading Ideas)...Putnam City Middle Schools. Central Middle School: Christy Evans (405)491-7626 and Cooper Middle School: Ms. Pat George (405)720-9887

Return to “effective instruction” in main document

___G___

Graduation Plan Review...Union Alternative School (Tulsa), Richard Storm (918)459-6550

Return to “graduation plans” in main document

___I___

Individualized Instruction... Poteau, Linda Riggs (918)647-4001

Individualized Instruction (Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI))off-line curriculum, Blackwell High School, Gayle Murrett (580)363-3553

Individualized Instruction (Creative Use of API)...OSU/Okmulgee County Cooperative, Peggy Reynolds (918)293-5370

Return to “individualized instruction” in main document

Intake and Screening...Ada STEPS Academy, Bob Odom (580)310-7280

Intake and Screening ...OSU/Okmulgee County Cooperative, Peggy Reynolds (918)293-5370

Intake and Screening... Bethany Academic Consortium, Donnie Rogers (405)789-6370

Return to “intake and screening” in main document

___ L ___

Life Skills “OSU Cooperative Extension Offices” for a listing of the office in your area, go to <http://countyext.okstate.edu/>

Life Skills “Area Prevention Resource Centers” for a listing of the resource center in your area, go to <http://www.odmhsas.org/subab.htm#prevention> ... Ask about borrowing scientifically research based materials or scheduling special programming.

Life Skills ... “County Health Departments” for a listing of the office in your area, go to <http://www.health.state.ok.us/phone/chdphone.html>

Life Skills (teacher developed point system) ... Canton-Okeene Academy (Canton), Karen Robinson (580) 886-2256

Life Skills ... “Weekly Seminars” Encore Academy (Pawhuska), TBA (918) 287-2022

Life Skills Bartlesville High School, Rebecca Brown (918)336-3311

Life Skills.... Lindsay Alternative, Jane Bryant (405) 756-3131 ext. 234

Life Skills.... Noble, Grace Ebbink (405)872-3441

Life Skills.... Pauls Valley Alternative, Theola Jackson (405)238-1233

Return to “life skills” in main document

___ M ___

Middle School Model ... Hominy Academy (Hominy), Pat Drummond (918) 885-2141

Middle School Model ... North Rock Creek Academy (North Rock Creek), Teresa Shivers (405) 275-3473

Middle School Model.... Bartlesville Central Middle School Alternative, Sue Berry (918)336-9302

Middle School Model.... Putnam City Middle Schools. Central Middle School: Christy Evans (405)491-7626 and Cooper Middle School: Ms. Pat George (405)720-9887

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

___N___

Night Program..... Choctaw/Nicoma Park (CATS), Johnny Jump (405)390-6152

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

___P___

Pregnant and Parenting Teens.....Emerson Outreach(Oklahoma City), Dr. Debra Thomas
(405)232-5273

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

___R___

Rural Alternative Program.....Ada STEPS Academy, Bob Odom (580)310-7280

Rural Alternative Program...OSU/Okmulgee County Cooperative, Peggy Reynolds (918)293-5370

Return to “collaboration” in main document

___S___

Service Learning.....Bartlesville Mid High Alternative Program, Susan Farrow (918)333-4444

Service Learning.....Tishomingo, Dave Howerton (580)371-3525

Service Learning.....Lifeline Academy (Smithville), Debbie McDaniel (580)244-3333

Service Projects....Putnam City Academy, Janet Oden (405)495-8838

Service Projects.....OSU/Okmulgee County Cooperative, Peggy Reynolds (918)293-5370

Service Projects....Putnam Middle Schools(Central) Christy Evans (405)491-7626 and (Cooper), Ms. Pat George (405)720-9887

Return to “collaboration” in main document

Senior Portfolios....Owasso Alternative Program, Amie Hardy (918) 274-3045

Senior Portfolio...Chickasha Quality Academy, Tara Smith (405)222-6507

Return to “effective instruction” in main document

___T___

Tardies (Big Yellow Bus Plan)....Union Alternative School (Tulsa), Richard Storm (918)459-6550

Return to “designed to serve” in main document

Town Hall Meetings.....Union Alternative School (Tulsa), Richard Storm (918)459-6550

Return to “life skills” in main document

___V___

Vocational Programs ... “Horticulture and Plant and Animal Science” Eagle Academy (Watonga), Yvonne Christensen (580) 623-7362

Vocational Programs....Francis Tuttle Career Tech, Project HOPE (Oklahoma County), Kimberly Montros-Thomas (405)717-4148

Return to “effective instruction” in main document

___W___

Work Study ... Lincoln Alternative School (Enid), Missy Dennis (580) 242-6170

Return to “collaboration” in main document