

**ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA  
FINAL REPORT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2006, the Virginia General Assembly commissioned a survey to take inventory of local and regional alternative education programs serving long-term suspended and expelled students in the state of Virginia. From the findings of this survey, researchers delivered a final report to the Virginia General Assembly in 2009 that detailed the structure and services of existing alternative education programs, identified alternative education service gaps, and gave policy recommendations for improving the provision of alternative education in the Commonwealth. However, no analogous inventory of regional and local alternative education programs in Virginia has been conducted since the 2006 survey. The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis requested that the 2006 survey be expanded, updated and redistributed to collect current information on alternative education options in Virginia.

This report is a supplemental source of information on alternative education that complements the revised survey. As such, it provides general information on alternative education programs, reviews the state of Virginia alternative education programs in 2009, and profiles four alternative education programs to illustrate the alternative education landscape in Virginia. To close, this report offers four policy recommendations for consideration until the results from the updated survey are gathered and analyzed: 1) implement tracking procedures to measure student achievement after enrollment in an alternative education program; 2) update the state budget formula for regional programs to allow for more comprehensive provision of services; 3) formalize the provision of support services to give alternative education programs more stability, and; 4) create an updatable inventory of local programs to provide a basis for future research.

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## **I. Overview of Alternative Education**

Broadly defined, alternative education programs are educational activities that fall outside the spectrum of services offered by the mainstream school system. Under this definition, homeschooling, general educational program (GED) classes, gifted and talented programs, online education programs, charter schools and remedial programs for struggling students are all classified as alternative education programs. Although they vary widely in their target population, setting, curriculum and services, alternative education programs are typically characterized by a low student-teacher ratio, a nontraditional curriculum, and the provision of additional supportive services.

There exists a substantial body of academic literature on the many structures, methods and philosophies of alternative education programs. As the revised survey for alternative education programs in Virginia is restricted to alternative education programs that serve students who have been long-term suspended or expelled, this review primarily focuses on programs that serve the same target population. Programs serving this target group of students are characterized by compulsory enrollment, strict standards of dress and behavior, the provision of special programs including anger management classes and drug and alcohol counseling, and partnerships with community organizations.

While all alternative education programs confront significant challenges, programs and schools serving long-term suspended and expelled students face unique and multifaceted challenges. In particular, one of the most significant challenges facing these programs is measurement and quantification of student achievement and program effectiveness. The traditional indicators of student outcomes, including graduation rates, standardized test scores, and High School Assessment Program (HSAP) exam passing rates, are ill suited to measure the

complexities of reform programs.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, these indicators are rarely recorded exclusively for a specific alternative school or program. Instead, student indicators are typically reported back to the student's home school, and are not aggregated to indicate the performance of the alternative program, thus severely limiting a school district's ability to assess student performance in specific alternative programs.

#### A. Typologies of Alternative Education Programs

At present, there is no definitive typology of alternative education programs used by the academic community, although many researchers have proposed typologies based on target population, stated mission, physical setting, curriculum, administrative practices and funding sources.<sup>2</sup>

One of the foremost typologies used to analyze and discuss alternative education is that proposed by Mary Anne Raywid in her 1994 article "Alternative Schools: The State of the Art," which categorizes programs based on their goals. Within her system of categorization, Type I alternative education programs are also described as "popular innovations" to education; students enter these programs by choice, and such programs "seek to make school challenging and fulfilling for all involved."<sup>3</sup> Magnet schools, advanced placement programs, and continuing education programs are all classified as Type I alternative education programs.

Type II alternative education programs, also called "last-chance programs," are compulsory programs that emphasize behavior modification for students who have been suspended or

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Lamont Scipio, "Alternative Education: A Comparative Case Study of the Behavior Modification Programs of Two Upstate South Carolina Alternative Schools for Youth Who Exhibit Behavior that is Disruptive," PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2013, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Laudan Aron, "Towards a Typology of Alternative Education Programs: A Compilation of Elements from the Literature," The Urban Institute, 2003, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Anne Raywid, "Alternative Schools: The State of the Art," *Educational Leadership* 52, no. 1., 1994, 27.

expelled, or are at risk of suspension or expulsion.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Type III alternative education programs, or “remedial focus” programs, serve the needs of students “presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation - academic, social/emotional, or both,” with the goal of returning students to traditional schools.<sup>5</sup> Depending on the specific mission and curriculum of the program, alternative education programs serving long-term suspended or expelled students may be classified as Type II programs, Type III programs, or a combination of Types II and III; given the increasing complexity of alternative education programs, it is becoming ever more difficult to categorize alternative programs using this three-part typology. Raywid has proposed an updated typology that combines Types II and III into a single category of programs focused on “changing the student,” although there remains a troubling amount of ambiguity with this categorization system.<sup>6</sup>

Melissa Roderick from the University of Chicago has proposed a second typology, which classifies programs based on the student educational needs that they serve.<sup>7</sup> Within this system of analysis, Roderick has identified distinct target populations, including: a) students who have fallen off track and need a system of short-term services to help them return to traditional school; b) students who have prematurely transitioned to adulthood because of teen pregnancy or a troubled home life; c) older students with educational needs, including GED preparation or academic credits for community college admission, and; d) students with severe academic needs requiring long-term intervention and supportive services.<sup>8</sup> Students in programs following long-term suspension or expulsion typically fall either into the category of students requiring short-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Laudan Aron, “An Overview of Alternative Education,” The Urban Institute, 2006, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Aron, “Towards a Typology of Alternative Education Programs: A Compilation of Elements from the Literature,” 28.

<sup>8</sup> Raywid, “Alternative Schools: The State of the Art,” 27.

term or long-term support. Within this system of categorization, Roderick argues that a focus on particular student needs results in more targeted programs that are better positioned to produce results.<sup>9</sup>

## B. Legal Definitions of Alternative Education

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education defines an alternative education school as “a public elementary/middle school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met at in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special, or vocational education.”<sup>10</sup> By this definition, alternative education programs must be provided free of charge to all students. This definition is notably restrictive in that it specifies elementary and middle school programs as alternative education programs, which is not necessarily representative of alternative education programs across the country; many alternative education programs serve high school students, and in fact, few serve students at an elementary level.

Forty-three states and the District of Columbia have additional formal definitions of alternative education.<sup>11</sup> Virginia is among the states with a formal definition of alternative education, and under § 22.1–276.01 of the Virginia Code, alternative education “includes night school, adult education, or any other education program designed to offer instruction to students for whom the regular program of instruction may be inappropriate.”<sup>12</sup> The legal definition of alternative education programs provided by the state of Virginia is more expansive than the

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<sup>9</sup> Aron, “An Overview of Alternative Education,” The Urban Institute, 2006, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Sable, Chris Plotts and Lindsey Mitchell, “Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary Schools Districts in the United States: 2008-2009,” U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Washington, DC, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Allan Porowski, Rosemary O’Connor and Jia Lisa Luo, “How Do States Define Alternative Education?” U.S. Department of Education, 2014, B-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

federal definition, and more accurately captures the spectrum of services that can be categorized as alternative education.

### C. Academic Theories on Serving Non-Traditional Students

When examining alternative education programs, it is essential to discuss these programs in terms of the overarching academic theories and legislation that determine their scope and purpose. First and foremost, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) is a piece of national legislation that establishes several guiding principles for the education of children with disabilities, including a student-specific Individual Education Plan (IEP), education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and Response to Intervention (RTI). While not all alternative education programs serve students with IEPs, alternative education programs are bound by the same student-service requirements as mainstream schools, and thus must create and implement an IEP for all students with disabilities. Furthermore, LRE and RTI often guide the decision to enroll students in an alternative education program.

The LRE clause contained in IDEA states that:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.<sup>13</sup>

The principle of LRE presents some challenge when parents, teachers and administrators are determining if a student should be enrolled in an alternative program, and there remains some debate in the academic community over the precise definition of LRE. While some scholars argue that, according to LRE, a child should be kept in a mainstream classroom barring extreme circumstances, others argue that LRE suggests a student should be educated in the environment

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<sup>13</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. 20 U.S.C. § 1412 (a)(5)(A). (2004).

that best provides for their needs and thus advocate for increased use of alternative education programs.<sup>14</sup>

A three-tiered identification and instructional model known as the Response to Intervention (RTI) model also developed out of the framework established by IDEA, with additional legislative influence from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.<sup>15</sup> The general design of RTI provides universal instruction at the base level, which is effective for the majority of students. A small percentage of the student population with a minimal achievement gap are provided targeted small group intervention, which is defined as the second tier of the model. The third tier is intensive individual support for approximately 1 percent of the student population, and includes special education and alternative education programming.<sup>16</sup>

## **II. Comparative State Practices**

Among the many states to have formalized alternative education within their jurisdictions, four states in particular, North Carolina, Kentucky, Texas, and South Carolina, have developed statewide systems that have been subject to structured academic or government-commissioned studies. The summaries of the studies, which follow in chronological order, highlight the disparity in approaches to alternative education among the states as well as shared concerns, observations, and policy recommendations among the researchers who conducted the several studies. Many of the same problems encountered by researchers as early as 1998 continue to pose obstacles for policy research in alternative education today.

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Etscheidt, “Least Restrictive and Natural Environments for Young Children with Disabilities: A Legal Analysis of Issues,” *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 26, no. 3, 2006, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Seedorf, “Response to Intervention: Teachers’ Needs for Implementation in Gifted and Talented Programs,” *Gifted Children Today* 37, no. 4, 2014, 250.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

## A. North Carolina

The first case study conducted to evaluate alternative education took place in North Carolina by legislative mandate in 1998.<sup>17</sup> The North Carolina State Board of Education defines Alternative Learning Programs (ALPs) as “services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, and/or dropping out of school, and...meet the needs of individual students”.<sup>18</sup> Multiple state agencies including the State Board of Education, the Department of Public Instruction, and the Office of Instructional and Accountability Services worked together to evaluate alternative education programs with a focus on ascertaining shared characteristics that made the schools effective as well as their needs that required the greatest attention.<sup>19</sup>

The state legislature commissioned a private consultant who provided a framework for on-site case study visits that were conducted by team of six researchers.<sup>20</sup> The study was conducted in order to provide recommendations for improving alternative education in the state and as such, the study group identified eleven institutions that were known for demonstrating positive success.<sup>21</sup> Following the site visits, staff from the several government agencies involved analyzed the notes and data, developed an evaluation design, and provided a detailed summary of policy recommendations for the state’s alternative education system.<sup>22</sup>

In order to identify the most effective ALPs in North Carolina, the research team sent out letters to all ALPs seeking nominations of successful programs and any supporting data that the

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<sup>17</sup> “Case Studies of Best Practices: Alternative Schools and Programs 1998-99,” Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, Department of Public Instruction, Office of Instructional and Accountability Services, Division of Accountability Services Evaluation Section 2000, iii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Acknowledgements.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

ALPs could provide.<sup>23</sup> The research team also used the limited state-level assessment data that existed to guide their selection.<sup>24</sup> The ALPs selected for the study represented a range of grade levels, student populations, program sizes, student enrollment lengths, instructional methods, and student needs.<sup>25</sup> Despite the wide variation in programming, the research team identified a great many shared approaches among ALPs that benefited student development. These practices included: a strict philosophy and mission statement; strong leadership; a family-like atmosphere; small facilities and student-focused interventions; individualized learning structures; flexibility for struggling students with a commitment to high standards; creatively developed course offerings to cope with limited staffing, and; strong community connections to help solicit volunteer services as well as financial and non-monetary contributions.<sup>26</sup>

Notwithstanding the promising approaches developed and implemented by the state's leading ALPs, the research team provided twenty recommendations in total which addressed concerns relating to coordination between traditional and alternative schools, program availability, services and programming provided by alternative schools, teacher training and quality, and student accountability.<sup>27</sup> Among the more pressing issues, the evaluation documented a lack of coordination and communication between students' home schools and the ALPs.<sup>28</sup> For example, the team noted that home schools assumed no responsibility for students once they departed the home school and therefore recommended developing procedures to foster communication and collaboration between the institutions.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., xvi-xxi.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. xxi-xxiii.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

In regards to programming, the research team suggested that school districts work with community agencies and civic groups to create a “continuum” of services.<sup>30</sup> While a small educational setting was thought to be beneficial for specialized education, student needs were seen to be increasing in degree, severity, and type, which called for additional services that perhaps the surrounding community could provide.<sup>31</sup> Another consistent problem was a lack of transportation for students traveling to and from ALPs, despite state law that required school districts to provide transportation to students within their jurisdictions.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the research team suggested implementing maximum time lengths for transportation so that the students would not miss time at school<sup>33</sup>.

An alarming issue for all ALPs was their ability to attract fully licensed teachers to their programs. The report found that it was common practice in ALPs for teachers to work in areas in which they did not possess the proper credentials; this disparity was often a result of staff limitations and a general lack of certification.<sup>34</sup> The research team did not provide any solutions to this problem aside from increasing salaries for ALP teachers and strengthening certification regulations.<sup>35</sup> The research team also documented an alarming number of teachers who indicated a substantial lack of training to handle students with whom they work on a daily basis.<sup>36</sup> Therefore the team recommended increased training opportunities for ALP staff, especially training that would improve interactions with violent and aggressive students and students with severe social and emotional problems.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., v.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., vi-vii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., vi-viii.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

The implementation of a longitudinal database tracking student progress and intervention strategies used to help the students was perhaps the research team's greatest aspiration.<sup>38</sup> Initial but limited data suggested longer enrollment periods improved school-related outcomes for students in alternative education but only a longer-term and more sophisticated tracking scheme could provide sound information on the best ways to utilize resources for students in ALPs.<sup>39</sup>

## B. Kentucky

The Kentucky Center for School Safety, created by the Kentucky General Assembly in 1998, was established with the purpose of fostering "safe, secure learning environments where all children can successfully achieve".<sup>40</sup> The Center for School Safety, located within the University of Kentucky, represents another state's attempt to improve its alternative education system through formal analysis. In 2003, the Center for School Safety undertook a study to examine the history of alternative education, its current implementation across the United States, and steps that need to be taken to improve alternative education in Kentucky.

Unlike the study conducted in North Carolina, the Kentucky study primarily consisted of a scholastic literature review accompanied by modest policy recommendations; it did not utilize the case study form of analysis. Rather, the study made a generalized argument for the positive benefits of alternative education and highlighted successful approaches for possible implementation in Kentucky.<sup>41</sup> Specifically, the study noted that alternative schools were originally established in Kentucky with the primary purpose of limiting the negative impact of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. xi.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> "About Us", *Kentucky Center for School Safety*, accessed Dec. 5, 2014, <http://www.kycss.org/aboutus.php>.

<sup>41</sup> Dorris Settles and Bryony Orwick, "Alternative Education: Past, Present and Next Steps," University of Kentucky Center for School Safety Clearinghouse, 2003, 5-7.

school violence.<sup>42</sup> For that reason, state funding was allocated to districts to develop programming based solely on behavioral data.<sup>43</sup> Therefore no student achievement data was ever used to measure the effectiveness of alternative education in the state.<sup>44</sup>

The study does however note that Kentucky is at the forefront of states for funding alternative education.<sup>45</sup> The analysis cites KY House Bill 330 passed in 1998, which had allocated \$10 million to “safe school efforts” and earmarked 87 percent of the funding for alternative education over a span of four years.<sup>46</sup> The Center for School Safety lauded the financial commitment of the legislature but urged the state to direct its efforts to improving the learning environments of alternative education and to redefine the efficiency criteria used to evaluate program and student success.<sup>47</sup>

### C. Texas

Like Kentucky, Texas has taken an approach to alternative education that emphasizes the removal of students from traditional academic settings for the benefit of other students. Since the passage of the 1995 Texas Safety Schools Act, all Texas school districts are required to provide “disciplinary alternative education programs”, or DAEPs.<sup>48</sup> A 2007 report jointly conducted by the Texas Division of Accountability Research, the Texas Department of Assessment, Accountability and Data Quality, and the Texas Education Agency provided an overview of the DAEP’s program characteristics and best practices across the state.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>48</sup> Sue E. Mutchler, Richard Kallus, and Amanda Callinan, “Policy Research: Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Practices,” Division of Accountability Research, Department of Assessment, Accountability, and Data Quality, Texas Education Agency, Policy Research Report No. 17, 2007, i.

The 2007 report notes that the Texas Education Code allows districts to develop the program design of their DAEPs but requires that districts ensure the behavioral and educational needs of students are met.<sup>49</sup> One state requirement is that all DAEP teachers get special certification and additional certification related to their specific teaching assignment.<sup>50</sup> While DAEPs must be available in every school district, districts may partner with each other to create a jointly run program.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, all districts are required to prioritize the mission that students continue to perform at grade level.<sup>52</sup> However, the report makes it clear that the student performance goal is subsidiary to the main purpose of disciplinary alternative education in Texas, which is removing students from the traditional school system in order to keep them from detracting from the effectiveness of traditional schools.

The Texas also states that student enrollment in DAEPs may be mandatory or discretionary.<sup>53</sup> Certain egregious acts automatically require that a student be transferred to the district's DAEP but a second process for DAEP enrollment, known as discretionary placement, may occur if a teacher sends a student to the principal's office due to bad behavior.<sup>54</sup> The principal then has the discretionary authority to assign the student to a DAEP but is unable to return the student to the classroom without that teacher's consent, regardless of the principal's recommendation.<sup>55</sup> This hurdle can only be overcome by applying to the school's placement review committee to overturn the teacher's decision.<sup>56</sup> The report does however note three restrictions on assigning a student to a DAEP: 1) the student must be older than six years old; 2)

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

a student who receives special education services may have her disability taken into consideration; and 3) consideration is given to self-defense and lack of intent.<sup>57</sup> The study reports that the students assigned to DAEPS in the 2005-2006 academic year were primarily Hispanic (48 percent); black students accounted for 25.8 percent of all students while white students accounted for another 25.2 percent.<sup>58</sup> In addition, economically disadvantaged students made up 62.1 percent of the DAEP population.<sup>59</sup>

Once a student is placed in DAEP, she is afforded a review of her status at intervals that may not exceed 120 days.<sup>60</sup> The review, which is administered by an appointee of the school district's board of trustees, is conducted to ensure that student has continued to meet academic requirements and to assess the student's behavioral progress.<sup>61</sup> If the student is in high school, she, or a parent or guardian, is given the opportunity to present arguments for the student's reinstatement back into a traditional school setting.<sup>62</sup> However, the report makes no indication that an unfavorable decision by the board of trustee's appointee is reviewable.

While the study notes the disparity in program design and approaches implemented across the state, it does provide a number of overarching best practice recommendations based on studies conducted in 1999, 2001, 2002, and 2005.<sup>63</sup> In particular, the study provides three primary proposals based on findings common to all four of the case studies. The first proposition is a student management plan that emphasizes structured rewards, such as reduced length of assignments to DAEPs and sanctions including loss of privileges and an increased enrollment

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 6.

period.<sup>64</sup> The second policy proposal is increased individualized instruction; the report emphasizes that students have different learning styles and often require specific accommodations.<sup>65</sup> Finally, similar to the North Carolina report, the report advocates for a formal transition process between DAEPs and traditional schools.<sup>66</sup> This recommendation includes providing behavioral information about students to the traditional school to inform school counselors and enable them to better help the students cope with returning to their traditional school setting.<sup>67</sup>

#### D. South Carolina

The most recent case study examined in this review was conducted by a high school teacher, Timothy Scipio, for his Ph.D. dissertation. Scipio was inspired to write his dissertation on the subject of alternative education because he saw firsthand that students in his classroom were unable to re-assimilate to traditional school setting due to gaps in academic rigor between alternative and traditional institutions.<sup>68</sup> His comparative case study, which examined two alternative schools in upstate South Carolina, was similar to the North Carolina case study in that he set out to identify shared features among alternative education institutions that made them effective.<sup>69</sup>

Scipio developed four primary research questions to pose to the two schools' principals and administrators. Scipio formed his questions based on a principal leadership model that emphasizes the importance of managers in an institution. The questions included: 1) How do principals and administrators define effectiveness when assessing their school's behavior

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Scipio, "Alternative Education: A Comparative Case Study of the Behavior Modification Programs of Two Upstate South Carolina Alternative Schools for Youth Who Exhibit Behavior that is Disruptive," 57.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., v.

modification strategies?; 2) What do principals and administrators consider to be the effective components of their school's behavior modification strategies?; 3) How do principals and administrators cultivate the effective behavioral components of their schools?, and; 4) In what ways are those components identified in the literature as essential for a "successful" alternative school program by their programs?<sup>70</sup>

Scipio selected the two South Carolina schools included in his study because both had similar student-teacher ratios, reasons for student enrollment, and graduation rates.<sup>71</sup> The schools did, however, differ in meaningful ways; school number one was in an urban location, serviced multiple school districts, and had a fluctuating population of 70 to 300 students, whereas school number two was situated in a rural town, hosted 20 to 70 students, occupied a hallway in a shared community building, and was described by Scipio as not being visible to the surrounding community.<sup>72</sup> Twenty-four people in total participated in the study including school administrators, guidance counselors, service providers, a number of teaching staff, and a few students, though the school principals were the primary interviewees.<sup>73</sup> In addition to interviews, Scipio utilized focus groups, class observations, and document analysis.<sup>74</sup>

Scipio's major findings were organized in a way to respond to the research questions that he set out to answer at the beginning of study. In regards to how principals and administrators defined effectiveness, both principals stressed academic success over behavior modification.<sup>75</sup> When principals and administrators were asked what they considered to be effective components of their school's behavior modification strategies, both schools emphasized a collaborative

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 111.

approach by the entire school staff but employed the strategies in different ways.<sup>76</sup> School one highlighted their orientation program as the primary factor responsible for behavioral change.<sup>77</sup> This program served as a way to cushion the students' adjustment to alternative education while also making clear what appropriate behavior represents. The second school employed what it called "Professional Crisis Management" (PCM) as a way of training staff to vigilantly prevent inappropriate student behavior and respond in a positive manner that did not belittle the students.<sup>78</sup> Scipio found that principals and staff cultivate the effective behavioral components of their schools by making clear to students the difference between suitable behavior in a traditional settings and alternative learning setting.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, successful alternative programs provide students with a great deal of flexibility, which is fostered in small academic settings.<sup>80</sup>

The four case studies demonstrate an ideological divide in approaches to alternative education among states. States like North Carolina and South Carolina have been shown to emphasize the educational and behavioral development of the students placed in alternative education, while Kentucky and Texas have prioritized creating safe environments for traditional education students by removing troublesome students to alternative education programs. The contrast in educational practices appears to derive primarily from legislative intent; as discussed below, Virginia has espoused a system more similar to that of North Carolina and South Carolina, although Virginia is unique in that it allows localities to provide their own alternative education programs in addition to state subsidized, regional alternative education programs. Despite the difference in approaches that the states in case studies take, the studies highlight three persistent obstacles for alternative education. First, they call attention to a lack of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 118.

coordination between traditional schools and alternative education programs. Students often have difficulty transitioning in and out of alternative education, a problem that is compounded when schools fail to compile and transfer student records with detailed information about the student's behavior and academic progress. A second disadvantage that alternative education programs face is a shortage of qualified teachers and behavior professionals. To ensure that students continue to develop academically, teachers need to be qualified to instruct in their assigned field. In addition, auxiliary staff trained to deal with problematic behavior can both help the students and improve safety at alternative education schools. Finally, only a longitudinal tracking system can provide the detailed data needed to determine the most successful intervention strategies, the most efficient means for utilizing limited resources, and for determining the success of individual alternative education programs. Although these problems are not new, they continue to confront policy makers in states across the country, including Virginia.

### **III. Alternative Education in Virginia**

#### **A. Summary of 2009 Report on Alternative Education in Virginia**

Alternative education programs in Virginia follow much the same framework as programs nationwide, serving students who have not succeeded in traditional classroom settings. Typically, students are placed in these programs after they have been removed from a regular school setting through long-term suspension or expulsion for drug or weapons-related offenses.<sup>81</sup> Virginia and the Southeastern United States as a region have a significantly greater proportion of districts offering alternative education programs than other areas of the country.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The Virginia Commission on Youth, 2009.

<sup>82</sup> NCES, 2002.

## B. Regional Alternative Education Programs

Since 1993-1994, many alternative education programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia are administered by two or more school districts as regional alternative education programs. These programs serve students who have been expelled, suspended long-term, or released from a juvenile detention center. Four regional programs were established in 1993-1994 with initial funding of \$1.2 million from the General Assembly, along with some short-term federal funding. No local matching is required, but some districts use local and federal funds to provide in-kind support such as instructional materials and facilities.<sup>83</sup> As of 2009, the Study of Alternative Education Options by the Virginia Commission on Youth identified 29 regional alternative education programs serving 4,002 students in 116 school districts, and receiving a total of \$6.7 million in state funding.<sup>84</sup>

Under the Code of Virginia, two or more school districts may apply for state funding for regional alternative education programs, provided that their proposals satisfy the requirements set forth by the General Assembly. These include an objective of promoting personal and social responsibility, a procedure for obtaining parental support, a low student-teacher ratio, and a set of specific goals to reduce crime and violence, reduce the dropout rate, and improve academic performance of students enrolled in the program.<sup>85</sup> As of 2009, 84 percent of enrolled students, many of who had been in danger of dropping out or who were placed in alternative education as a last resort, remained in school.<sup>86</sup>

While the overall objectives of Virginia's regional alternative education programs are largely uniform, individual characteristics vary widely. Of the 29 programs, 28 offer standard

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<sup>83</sup> Virginia Board of Education, 2008.

<sup>84</sup> The Virginia Commission on Youth, 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Virginia Code Ann. §22.1-277.2:1.

<sup>86</sup> The Virginia Commission on Youth, 2009.

diploma courses, with 73 percent offering GED courses. Additionally, 60 percent offer vocational programs, 60 percent offer independent study, and 33 percent offer work-study programs. Evaluation of students in alternative education programs varies according to the goals of the program, but approximately 97 percent of programs in Virginia use traditional A-F grading and end-of-year exams, and about 80 percent of students are evaluated using nontraditional methods such as oral presentations, portfolios, and behavioral evaluations.<sup>87</sup>

### C. Local Alternative Education Programs

Many local school divisions have elected to implement local alternative education programs in lieu of, or in addition to, regional programs. At this time, no central inventory of these local programs exists. A survey conducted during the 2005-2006 school year identified 124 local programs serving approximately 15,000 students. Types of programs reported include online courses, court educational services, GED preparation, and the opportunity to make up coursework missed while serving short-term suspension.

In general, the goal of local programs is to transition students back to their home school. As such, the vast majority of programs allow for students to earn verified credits. Of those programs not offering verified credits, most are designed to serve students with diverse needs, such as elementary and middle school students. Programs tend to operate fewer hours per week than traditional schools and have lower student-teacher ratios. As a whole, local programs are structured to focus on academic remediation in order to reduce the likelihood that at-risk students will leave school before earning a diploma or GED.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Virginia Board of Education, 2008.

<sup>88</sup> The Virginia Commission on Youth, 2009.

#### D. Availability of Alternative Education Programs

A major finding of the 2005-2006 survey was that of 123 school divisions offering alternative education to disciplined students, 57 reported cases in which a disciplined student was not offered access to an alternative program. Only half of districts responding offered alternative opportunities to all disciplined students. In total, the number of students not offered alternative services was 8,820 in 2005-2006.

Among school divisions in Virginia, 65 had access to regional programs, 54 had access to both regional and local programs, 16 had access only to local programs, and four had no access to alternative education. Districts gave a number of reasons for not having their own local alternative education programs, including lack of financial resources, lack of adequate or appropriate facilities, infrequency of expulsions or suspensions, use of homebound instruction in discipline cases, use of creative methods to educate students in their home schools, and local school division support of student discipline.<sup>89</sup>

#### E. Challenges Facing Alternative Education Programs in Virginia

A major issue facing alternative education in Virginia is lack of information regarding availability of programs and the role that programs play in their school divisions. While standards exist for regional programs, there is very little in the way of regulation for local programs. These programs serve a diverse population of students with diverse needs, but the lack of standards for these programs inhibits their ability to obtain funding and perform program evaluation. In addition, many districts and students remain underserved by alternative education programs, despite increasing need.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Some of the most significant problems surrounding alternative education in Virginia have to do with information and guidance on various types of programs. No centralized inventory of local programs exists, which limits the ability of educators, courts, human services workers, and caregivers to make informed decisions about the placement of individual students. Additionally, there is no central point of contact for information regarding alternative education. Finally, there is a lack of information tracking student outcomes after leaving alternative education. Such information would be extremely valuable in evaluating practices and identifying promising strategies for aiding students who do not thrive in traditional classrooms.<sup>90</sup>

#### **IV. Updates to the 2006 Survey on Alternative Education in Virginia**

The 2006 survey developed and deployed by the Virginia Commission on Youth provided a basis for understanding the alternative education landscape in the Commonwealth. For the purposes of the survey, the Commission limited the scope of alternative education to programs that worked with short-term suspended, long-term suspended, and expelled students. The stated goal of the survey was to collect and share information regarding, “1) existing programs and promising practices throughout the state and 2) unmet service needs.” Therefore the survey, which was administered by email or by hard copy to the superintendent’s office in every Virginia school district, focused on developing an inventory of alternative education programs that included whether the program was regionally or locally administered, the number of students served, program capacity, and basic information regarding the program’s offerings.

One characteristic of the 29-question survey was that it asked a number of questions that required open-ended responses. The qualitative portion of the survey allowed the superintendents to express what they thought to be the strengths and weaknesses of their programs, significant

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

challenges that their programs faced, and provide additional comments that they viewed as important. An important realization from the free-response section of the survey was that alternative programs operate in a multitude of locations including their own academic building, a separate wing of a traditional school, at a traditional school at night after normal classes had ended, at the home of the student in the form of one-one-one tutoring (homebound services), and online.

The 2014 survey retained and reworked a subset of the 2006 survey questions to update the inventory of programming and obtain current information about program capacity and services. However, the 2014 survey also includes many new questions developed to better understand the cost of educating students in a variety of alternative education settings. This will allow for systematic documentation of school format and environment for the first time in the state of Virginia and enable specific costs associated with different types of programming.

The 2014 survey also asks questions relating to the average length of student enrollment periods, student-teacher ratios and other personal information, whether the alternative program sells classroom seats to other school divisions that have limited space in their home divisions, and asks superintendents to provide specific reasons for lack of programming in their district. In addition, after conducting onsite interviews and reviewing the academic literature about alternative education, a question was added to the survey about tracking student progress after leaving alternative education. Tracking is a potentially powerful but underdeveloped tool for evaluating program effectiveness. Therefore the survey asks if divisions track their students after leaving their alternative program and requests detailed information about their tracking system with the hope that the Department of Education will take the information from the survey and begin to develop a statewide tracking scheme.

Finally, the 2014 survey puts much greater emphasis on line-item budget questions in order to give economically sound policy recommendations to the governor. Specifically, respondents are asked to report the cost and funding sources associated with faculty and staff, facilities and utilities, and non-instructional support, including psychological counseling and career training.

## **V. Case Studies**

In order to broaden understanding of alternative education programs in Virginia, four cases studies were completed through interviews and background research. The case studies encompass a regional program, two local programs currently in operation, and a local program that closed in 2011. The cases explored topics including the teaching model, funding, and general demographics of the programs.

### **A. Enterprise Academy**

Enterprise Academy is a regional alternative education program located in Newport News that services four school divisions: Newport News, Williamsburg-James City County, Hampton, and Poquoson. Analysis of the program was completed through background research and interviews with Principal John Day and Newport News Public School Accounting Supervisor Steven R. Kanehl. Principal Day has been in the education field for 25 years, served as an alternative education administrator with Newport News juvenile detention for over 20 years, and became the principal at Enterprise Academy a year and half ago. Mr. Kanehl has been in his current position for 30 years.

Principal Day and his faculty follow a business model of instruction that requires a shirt and tie uniform, and that incorporates at least thirty minutes of character education into every school day. Character education is in place to instruct the students on becoming active and

productive members of society, a goal that is accomplished by reinforcing positive personality traits while engaging the students in community service activities. The ultimate goal of the program's instructional model is to return students to their home school fully prepared for success in a traditional academic setting.

Enterprise Academy serves students in grades 3-12. Due to the nature of the program, daily student numbers fluctuate, starting with low numbers in the beginning of the academic year and peaking between December and January. According to Principal Day, at peak there will be approximately 125 students in grades 9-12, 60 students in grades 6-8, and 12 students in grades 3-5, with all individual classes capped at 12 students.<sup>91</sup> The low student-teacher ratio allows more dedicated attention to the students both academically and behaviorally.

The program is primarily composed of Newport News students, with 95 percent of the student population coming from Newport News Public Schools. However, four other municipalities purchase seats on a per diem basis. At the time of the interview, Williamsburg was utilizing twenty-six seats, York County held eight seats, Poquoson held five seats, and Hampton had twelve. The per diem seats are funded through a state grant with municipalities allotted a set portion.<sup>92</sup> However, a municipality may exceed their allotment for the year. If this happens, Mr. Kanehl relayed a cost of \$56.00 per day is charged.<sup>93</sup> According to Principal Day the general demographics of the student population are representative of this type of program with 85-90 percent eligible for free or reduced lunch program, 80 percent below the poverty line, 75 percent African American, and 90 percent male.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Principal John Day (principal of Enterprise Academy) in conversation with the authors, 12 November 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Steve Kanehl (Newport News Public School Accounting Supervisor) in discussion with the authors, 21 November 2014.

<sup>93</sup> Principal Day conversation with authors, 12 November 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

A student may be referred to the program for two reasons. Most commonly, students are sent to Enterprise Academy following disciplinary infractions, as any infraction at a student's home school requiring a short-term suspension, long-term suspension, or expulsion makes the student eligible for enrollment at Enterprise. Students may also be sent to Enterprise Academy due to pending criminal charges; for example if a student is arrested on a Friday evening for a severe charge, such as assault, the student will attend Enterprise Academy until the courts have resolved the charges. The student becomes eligible to return to his or her home schools after the charges are resolved. Disciplinary infractions require a minimum nine-week stay, but the full length of an enrollment period is based on the severity of the actions, behavior, and school performance. The maximum stay is a full academic year.

Enterprise Academy receives 60 percent of its funding from the Newport News school district and 40 percent from the state.<sup>95</sup> According to Mr. Kanehl, the financial needs of Enterprise Academy always exceed what the state provides. The academy has seen a 1-2 percent increase for inflation and the state does not respond as Enterprise expands, but the budget is based on a complicated model that differs from traditional schools. In fact, the state considers Enterprise a "completely separate school division."<sup>96</sup> Demand for the program is not a primary consideration with the state portion of the budget. In response to underfunding, Enterprise must rely on the other divisions' per diem fees and heavily relies on volunteers for the provision of counseling and other vital services

#### B. York River Academy

York River Academy is a local alternative education program in York County, Virginia. Analysis of this program was completed through background research and an interview with

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<sup>95</sup> Steve Kanehl (Newport News Public School Accounting Supervisor) in discussion with the authors, 21 November 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Principal Walter Cross. York River Academy began as a grant charter school in 2003 for 9-10 grades. In 2009 the program expanded to encompass grades 9-12 and transitioned to its current status as a local alternative education program serving York County. Unlike Enterprise Academy's stand-alone structure, York River Academy is housed in York Middle School. The program instructional model is technology based, whereby students are immersed in technological training and engage with the community through application of acquired skills. For instance, in a recent community partnership, the students worked with the US Coast Guard to help build a website.

York River Academy serves students in grades 9-12 and only receives students from York County Public Schools. According to Principal Cross, attendance has increased from 65 in 2012 to 78 students in 2014; as the program expands, a low student-teacher ratio is maintained by capping classes at 14 students per class in grades 9 and 10 and 16 students per class in grades 11 and 12.<sup>97</sup> In order to apply to the program, a student must be at risk of educational failure. Since students with disciplinary infractions are sent to Enterprise Academy, York River Academy does not accept referrals based on disciplinary reasons, and only students who are failing to thrive in the traditional setting will be considered. A majority of the students apply to enter the program as 9<sup>th</sup> graders, but students may also apply to enter the program as 11<sup>th</sup> graders, and approximately 10-15 percent elect to do so.<sup>98</sup> Regardless of when a student enrolls at York River Academy, they will stay and graduate from the program, which is a significant difference from Enterprise's goal of returning students to their home school. According to Principal Cross, the students are dominantly Caucasian, which he relays may not be fully reflective of the community at large. Students are 70 percent male and 30 percent are eligible for the free or

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<sup>97</sup> Principal Walter Cross (principal of York River Academy) in conversation with the authors, 20 November 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

reduced lunch program.<sup>99</sup> Per the 2015 approved budget, 13 students graduated from York Academy with 53 percent college bound, which is approximately 30-40 percent below the other York High School programs.<sup>100</sup> While the percent of college bound students is comparatively low, Principal Cross relayed the skill set acquired within the program allows students to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. In order to track students progress post graduation, Principal Cross or another faculty member completes a one-year follow up with students to gauge career or college developments.

As previously noted, York River Academy began as a grant charter school, and eventually became fully funded through York County School Division. The York County budget allocates educational funds to 16 line-item specifications, such as art, music, and English. York River Academy is one such line-item specification, and is thus considered a program rather than an institution. The funding for York River Academy is projected to increase from \$430,530 in 2014 to \$453,039 in 2015, which is an approximate 1 percent increase similar to those reported by Mr. Kanehl for Enterprise Academy.<sup>101</sup>

#### C. Tabb Middle School

Tabb Middle School is a mainstream middle school located in York County, Virginia that both houses a small program for special needs students and uses Response to Intervention to identify and help students who are struggling in the mainstream setting. Principal Antonia Fox provided information on this program. Currently, Tabb Middle School hosts York County's special education program, allowing students from other schools within the district to utilize the program. At the time of the interview, 10 students were participating in the special education

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Approved 2015 Budget Executive Summary, 23.

<sup>101</sup> Approved 2015 York County Budget, 99.

program with varying issues, such as autism or other disabilities.<sup>102</sup> The ultimate goal of the program is to integrate the students into regular classrooms and to return outside students to their home schools. These goals are accomplished through mentoring, counseling, and direct parental involvement.

At the same time, schoolteachers and administrators at Tabb Middle School also utilize Response to Intervention techniques to address the needs of students with minor recurring disciplinary infractions. Teachers and administrators thus attempt to intervene before a student commits a violation that requires suspension or expulsion. However, if suspension or expulsion is required, students are referred to Enterprise Academy.

As part of Tabb Middle School's small group intervention structure, students may be removed from their traditional classroom, paired with mentors, and counseled with parental involvement until they are permitted to return to their assigned classroom. In order for the student to return to a traditional class, the student or parent can request return and a judgment is made by the principal after consulting with the mentor and counselor. The student is also reevaluated after the semester to determine if support services are still required.

Principal Fox relayed that no additional funds are dedicated to the provision of these support services, and as a result, teachers often provide support services during their duty time. While she believes there is currently enough funding and resources to serve the general population, a rise in special education students and behavioral concerns have created a demand for additional staffing that is stretching school resources. For the special needs program to continue operating effectively, both training and staffing need to increase.

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<sup>102</sup> Dr. Antonia Fox (principal of Tabb Middle School) in conversation with the authors, 21 November 2014.

#### D. Academy of Life and Learning

The Academy of Life and Learning was a local Williamsburg-James City County program housed in the James Blair Middle School annex that closed in 2011. ALL provided services for 7-8<sup>th</sup> grade students at risk of educational failure, and was specifically designed to prevent rising high school dropout rates. As with York River Academy, ALL focused solely on students who were failing to perform adequately due to a lack of motivation, while students with disciplinary infractions were referred to Enterprise Academy. Like Enterprise Academy, students at ALL were required to wear a shirt and tie uniform and to complete character education to build self-esteem and community awareness. The program housed 43 students from Williamsburg-James City County middle schools that were referred by teachers or parents. In the 2009-2010 academic year, ALL students scored well on the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) exams, with 91 percent of students passing the writing exam, 89 percent passing the reading exam, 83 percent passing the science exam, 77 percent passing the math exam, and 57 percent passing the social studies exam. The program had an approximate annual cost of \$570,000 per year, which was provided entirely by the Williamsburg-James City County School Division.<sup>103</sup>

During the initial development of the Williamsburg James City County 2010-2011 school budget, the ALL program was slated to move to the James Blair Middle School building, following the closure of the middle school.<sup>104</sup> However, in December 2010, the school board proposed an alternative approach to address high school dropout rates while saving approximately \$300,000. The alternative approach proposed training three deans to recognize students at risk of educational failure and to develop educational plans for those students. The

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<sup>103</sup> "Alternative Education Program Settles into James Blair," *Daily Press*, n.p., 13 September 2010, accessed on 5 December 2014.

<sup>104</sup> "WJCC Proposes Closing Academy for Life and Learning to Create New Alt Ed Program," *Daily Press*, n.d., accessed on 5 December 2014.

board believed this would almost triple the amount of students aided, and estimated the three deans would impact 120 students each year.<sup>105</sup> In spite of student success in ALL evidenced by increased test scores, as well as vocal community support for ALL, the board decided to adopt the new proposal, and ALL was consequently closed down. Ultimately, the board believed the new proposal would reach a larger number of students in a more cost effective manner than the alternative education provided by ALL.

## **VI. Policy Considerations**

The case studies discussed above imply four policy recommendations that may help improve the quality and effectiveness of alternative education programs in Virginia. While the programs profiled in the case studies are only a snapshot of alternative education programs in the Commonwealth, these recommendations focus on state-level policy alterations that will benefit the multitude of alternative education programs in Virginia, irrespective of their particular mission and design.

### Policy Consideration 1: Implement tracking procedures to measure student achievement after enrollment in an alternative education program.

At present, there are no formal tracking measures in place to determine where students go after their time in an alternative education program. While some programs may record tracking measures, including standardized test scores and graduation rates, such records are not comprehensive, which severely limits the degree to which researchers and administrators can judge program effectiveness.

Such formal tracking should be conducted by the alternative education programs, and should be kept separate from the data recorded by students' mainstream home schools.

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<sup>105</sup> "General Operating Fund," C-50.

Currently, data on students in alternative education programs is sent back to the students' home school and incorporated into the school's overall indicators, which severely limits the program analysis that can be performed on alternative education programs.

There are concerns about student privacy to consider when implementing such a tracking system, but as formal tracking is crucial to gauging program success and cost effectiveness, it is pivotal for the state of Virginia to establish the framework for a general alternative education tracking system.

Policy Consideration 2: Update the state budget formula for regional programs to allow for more comprehensive provision of services.

The current formula that the state of Virginia uses to calculate the annual budgetary amount granted to regional alternative education programs is a complex formula based on a plethora of factors. As it is currently set, this formula results in state provision of funds for approximately 40 percent of the total alternative program costs. Consequently, 60 percent of program costs must be covered by local funding or outside funding, which is a significant burden for many school divisions. Altering the formula to cover a higher percentage of program costs, particularly when a program is in severe need of funding for staffing, will greatly alleviate the financial burden on school divisions that host regional alternative education programs. Granted, the money spent on these programs is concentrated on meeting the needs of a relatively small percentage of students. However, funding for effective, high-quality alternative education programs is an investment in the academic and social success of the most at-risk students, which then often results in high future returns for society.

Policy Consideration 3: Formalize the provision of support services to give alternative education programs more stability.

At present, alternative education programs frequently rely on voluntary provision of supplementary services to fully provide for their students. These partnerships are often essential to the continued operation of alternative education programs, but their voluntary nature leaves the alternative programs in a vulnerable position, should an organization determine that it is no longer willing or able to provide services to a school on a voluntary basis. Formal provision of key services by the state of Virginia, including counseling and drug and alcohol rehabilitation classes, will offer alternative education programs increased stability and allow them to better serve current students and plan for the future. Furthermore, increased financial and programming stability will allow programs to focus on strengthening crucial community relations, and will permit the state to impose regulations on these services to ensure their quality.

Policy Consideration 4: Create an updatable inventory of local programs to provide a basis for future research.

As previously discussed, there is no central inventory of local alternative education programs in Virginia, which represents a significant information gap for researchers, as well as district administrators, school principals, and parents. The Commonwealth would do well to establish an online inventory of local programs on the Virginia Department of Education website that is updated on a regular basis. In the same manner of the online inventory of regional programs, such a system should include information on each program's location, target student population, basic curriculum, and contact information. This relatively simple step would go far toward increasing information literacy on alternative education programs, thus informing future research on alternative education in Virginia, and helping parents, teachers and students make more informed decisions about program enrollment decisions.

Further analysis using the data from the updated survey will allow for more detailed policy recommendations to address specific trends in alternative education programs in the state of Virginia. Until that data becomes available, the state would do well to begin considering some basic policy changes to increase the amount of information available on alternative education programs.

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**APPENDIX A: UPDATED MEMORANDUM FOR SUPERINTENDENTS**

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
P.O. BOX 2120  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218-2120

SUPT. MEMO NO. \_\_\_\_\_  
DECEMBER 5, 2014

INFORMATIONAL

TO: DIVISION SUPERINTENDENTS

FROM:

SUBJECT: Survey of Alternative Education for Suspended and Expelled Students

The Virginia Department of Education is assisting with a study of alternative education options in Virginia that is being conducted by the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. The purpose of the study is to learn how many divisions currently provide educational material and/or services to students who are suspended or expelled from school, to identify various challenges divisions face in serving these youth, as well as the costs associated with providing alternative education. The survey will focus on the provision of educational material and/or services to suspended and expelled youth during the 2013-2014 academic year.

“The Survey of Alternative Education for Suspended and Expelled Students in the Commonwealth” may be accessed at **[\[Insert Survey Link\]](#)**. A printable version of the survey is attached for your convenience, although we do request that all survey responses be submitted online. Questions regarding the survey content should be directed by email to [aepsurvey@gmail.com](mailto:aepsurvey@gmail.com). Thank you very much for your participation.

## APPENDIX B: UPDATED SURVEY ON ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### Survey of Alternative Education Programs in Virginia

The purpose of this survey is to collect data on school divisions' policies and the educational services they provide to students during periods of short-term suspension, long-term suspension, and expulsion.

The goal of the survey is to understand what school divisions currently provide, the cost of these services, and the resources school divisions need to provide these educational services or to expand the provision of educational services to students during periods of short-term suspension, long-term suspension, and expulsion.

For the purposes of this survey, the Code defines

- Short-term suspension as a suspension from school for not more than ten school days. (Va. Code § 22.1-277.04)
- Long-term suspension as suspension from school for more than ten days and less than 365 days (Va. Code § 22.1-277.05), and
- Expulsion as removal from school for one calendar year (365 days). (Va. Code § 22.1-277.06)

For purposes of this survey, alternative education services are services provided to students when they are short-term suspended, long-term suspended, or expelled from their traditional schools. These services can include, but are not limited to, **online services, homebound services, or services in a school facility.**

We are only interested in the services provided by the school division free of charge to all students who have been long-term suspended or expelled. Please note that services that are offered at the parents' expense are not included in the scope of this survey.

A staff person knowledgeable about services for youth who are suspended or expelled in your division should complete this survey. **Respondents should copy and submit Sections IV for each regional and local alternative education program in your division.** Thank you for your participation.

**I. RESPONDENT INFORMATION**

Please fill in the following information:

Name of Person Completing the Survey: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

School Division: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**II. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL DIVISION POLICIES**

1. Does your school division have a written policy of allowing students who are short-term suspended (10 days or less) and long-term suspended (10 days or more) to complete missed assignments and take missed tests or quizzes?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Depends on the policy of individual schools or teachers
- d. We have a practice, but not a written policy. Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Does your school division have a written policy requiring that educational services be provided to all students who are long-term suspended or expelled?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Depends on the policy of individual schools
- d. We have a practice, but not a written policy. Please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Does your school division provide alternative education services to all students who are long-term suspended or expelled?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Provided at the discretion of the school board
- d. Provided upon request from parent

4. If yes, how many students received alternative educational services through a division-sponsored program or school during their long-term suspension or expulsion during the 2013-2014 school year?
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. If no, how many students received no educational services provided by the division during their long-term suspension or expulsion in 2013-2014?
- \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many students received services during their long-term suspension or expulsion due to their status as a student with a disability?
- \_\_\_\_\_
7. What types of alternative educational services does the school division provide? Check all that apply.
- Alternative education services in a traditional school building
  - Alternative education services in a separate school building
  - Night school services in a school building
  - Homebound services
  - Online alternative education services
  - Other? Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
8. For alternative education services in a traditional school building, please provide an estimate of how many students received those services in 2013-2014, and approximately how much that service cost per student.
- a. Number of students served: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Cost per student: \_\_\_\_\_
9. For alternative education services in a separate school building, please provide an estimate of how many students received those services in 2013-2014, and approximately how much that service cost per student.
- a. Number of students served: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Cost per student: \_\_\_\_\_
10. For night school services in a school building, please provide an estimate of how many students received those services in 2013-2014, and approximately how much that service cost per student.
- a. Number of students served: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Cost per student: \_\_\_\_\_

11. For homebound services, please provide an estimate of how many students received those services in 2013-2014, and approximately how much that service cost per student.
  - a. Number of students served: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Cost per student: \_\_\_\_\_
  
12. For online alternative education services, please provide an estimate of how many students received those services in 2013-2014, and approximately how much that service cost per student.
  - a. Number of students served: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Cost per student: \_\_\_\_\_
  
13. For any other services, please provide an estimate of how many students received those services in 2013-2014, and approximately how much that service cost per student.
  - a. Description of Service: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Number of students served: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Cost per student: \_\_\_\_\_

**III. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL-BASED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

1. During the 2013-2014 school year, did your school division provide any alternative schools/ programs provided free of charge to long-term suspended or expelled students? If no, go to question 10.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. How many alternative schools/programs were there in your division in 2013-2014?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. As of October 1, 2014, about how many students in your division were enrolled in alternative schools/programs?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Does your division track students after they leave alternative schools/programs?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. If yes, what information does the division track?
  - SOL test scores

- Grades
- Suspensions or expulsions
- Graduation rates
- Other

6. If you answered yes to questions 4 and 5, please provide the most recent data for that information.
7. Does your division purchase seats at a regional alternative school program?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
8. If yes, how many seats does your division purchase?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How many seats does your division use on average?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. If your division DOES NOT utilize an alternative education program/school, please identify the reasons why. Please check all that apply.
- Lack of financial resources
  - Lack of information on alternative education models
  - Lack of time and staff resources available to create a program
  - Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Not applicable

**IV. INFORMATION ON SCHOOL-BASED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM/SCHOOL** *(Copy and submit this section for each regional and local alternative education program that your division operates or utilizes.)*

Regional or Local Alternative Education Program/School information:

School Division: \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative Education Program/School: \_\_\_\_\_

Address/City Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Email: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What time of year does this alternative education program/school operate? (Select all that apply.)

- Traditional school year (September to June)
- Year-round
- Summer
- Other. (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. During the 2013-2014 school year, what grades were taught at this alternative school?

Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<input type="checkbox"/>													

**Program Enrollment**

---

3. What is this program or school’s capacity of students from your division?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. During the 2013-2014 school year, how many students from your school division were enrolled at any time in this local alternative education program?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Are all students who are long-term suspended or expelled provided the opportunity to attend an alternative program or school?

- Yes
- No

6. What is the student/teacher ratio for this program or school?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What was the average length of enrollment in this program for students from your school division?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the length of the school day?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Is there currently a waiting list for this program or school?

- Yes
- No

10. If you answered yes to question 9, approximately how many students from your school division are on the waiting list?

11. How do students become enrolled in the program or school? (Select all that apply.)

- Outside service provider referral
- Parent/Family referral
- Required by school division or school board policy
- Self-Referral
- Teacher or staff referral
- Other (please describe \_\_\_\_\_)

12. What percentages of participants are represented by categories below?

Student with a disability (students with an IEP or 504 plan)	
Are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program	
African-American	
Hispanic	
Asian	
Caucasian	
Male	

**School-Based Program Costs**

13. What was the total budget for the alternative program/school for the 2013-2014 school year?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. For this program/school how much was spent to pay the costs of staff salaries and benefits during the 2013-2014 school year? \_\_\_\_\_

15. For this program/school how much was spent to cover the costs of facilities, utilities, and maintenance? \_\_\_\_\_

16. For this program/school how much was spent to cover the costs of other, non-instructional support services? \_\_\_\_\_

17. How many teachers were employed during this school year? \_\_\_\_\_
18. How many other instructional staff members were employed? \_\_\_\_\_
19. How many counselors or school psychologists were employed? \_\_\_\_\_
20. How many school administrators (principals and assistant principals) were employed?  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. How many other support staff members were employed? \_\_\_\_\_
22. What percentage of the funding for this program/school in the 2013-2014 school year came from local sources? \_\_\_\_\_
23. What percentage of the funding for this program/school in the 2013-2014 school year came from state sources? \_\_\_\_\_
24. What percentage of the funding for this program/school in the 2013-2014 school year came from federal sources? \_\_\_\_\_

**Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please remember to submit the requested information for all regional and local Alternative Education programs in your district.**

# Assessing Alternative Education Programs in Virginia

*Client: The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis*

**Group Members:** Chris Erickson, Christian Bale and Emily Wavering  
**Research Assistant:** Catherine Mahoney



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# Presentation Outline

## **I. General Literature Review**

- A. Overview and Typologies of Alternative Education
- B. Legal Definitions of Alternative Education
- C. Least Restrictive Environment and Response to Intervention

## **II. Alternative Education in Virginia**

- A. State of Alternative Education in the Commonwealth
- B. Alternative Education Program Survey Progress

## **III. Alternative Education Program Case Studies**

- A. Enterprise Academy
- B. York River Academy
- C. Tabb Middle School
- D. Academy of Life and Learning

## **IV. Plans for Future Research**

# Overview of Alternative Education

Alternative Education: Educational activities that fall outside the spectrum of services offered by the mainstream school system. Such programs vary widely in a number of key factors.

## TARGET POPULATION

- Under- or over-achieving students
- Students with severe behavior issues
- Older students

## STRUCTURE

- Online
- Homebound services
- Separate school building
- Housing in a traditional school

## SUPPORT SERVICES

- Psychological counseling services
- Drug/alcohol counseling
- Mentoring programs

For the purposes of this project, the scope of alternative education was limited to **programs serving long-term suspended and expelled students.**

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# Typologies of Alternative Education

Raywid Typology: Categorizes alternative education by program goals.

Type I: Popular innovation programs targeting advanced students

Type II: Last chance programs that emphasize behavior modification for suspended or expelled students

Type III: Remedial focus programs serving students in need of academic, social or emotional remediation

Roderick Typology: Categorizes alternative education by the target student population.

1. Students who have fallen off track and need short term support
2. Students who have prematurely transitioned to adulthood
3. Older students with educational needs, including GED preparation
4. Students with severe academic needs

# Legal Definitions of Alternative Education

## U.S. Department of Education definition of alternative education:

“A public elementary/middle school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special, or vocational education.”

## §22.1–276.01 of the Virginia Code definition of alternative education:

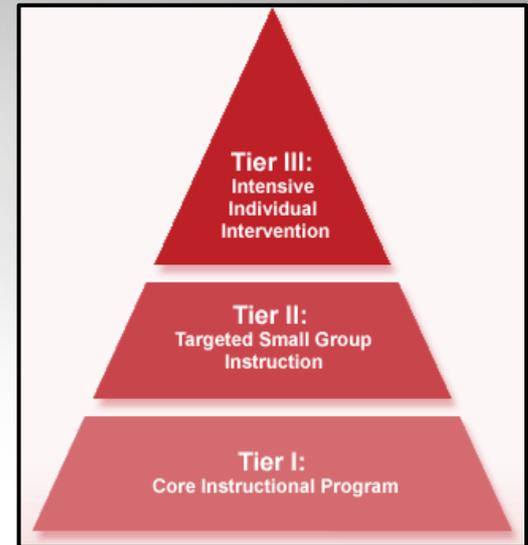
“[Alternative education] includes night school, adult education, or any other education program designed to offer instruction to students for whom the regular program of instruction may be inappropriate.”

# Least Restrictive Environment and Response to Intervention

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) is a piece of national legislation that establishes guiding principles for educating students with disabilities.

Least Restrictive Environment: The principle that **disabled students should be educated with their abled peers to the greatest extent possible.**

Response to Intervention: A tiered system that guides identification of and response to student challenges in the classroom.



# Regional Programs in Virginia

## Creation and Operation

- Since 1993-1994, many Alternative Education Programs in Virginia are administered by two or more school districts
- Four regional programs established in 1993-1994
- Two or more school districts may apply for Regional Alternative Education programs status

## Growth and Success

- As of 2009: 29 Regional Alternative Education Programs serving 4002 students in 116 school districts, receiving a total of \$6.7 million in state funding
- As of 2009, 84% of enrolled students remained in school
- Of the 29 programs, 28 offer standard diploma courses, with 73% offering GED courses

# Local Programs in Virginia

## Increasing Number of Local Programs

- Many communities have their own local programs
- No central inventory exists
- In 2005, 124 local programs were identified serving approximately 15,000 students

## Programing and Capabilities

- Tend to operate fewer hours per week than traditional schools
- Programs include online courses, court educational services, GED preparation, and short-term suspension programs
- Majority of programs allow for students to earn verified credits
- Goal has been to transition students back to their home school

# Alternative Education Program Survey Progress

## The 2006 Survey by the Virginia Commission on Youth

- Inventory of programs
- Specifically gauged towards short-term suspended, long-term suspended, or expelled students
- Program type
- Program capacity

## Continuing the Commission's Work

- Updates the inventory of programs and determines program capacity and type
- Calculates the total number of Virginians enrolled in alternative education
- Expands information regarding the nature of a student's enrollment in the alternative programs

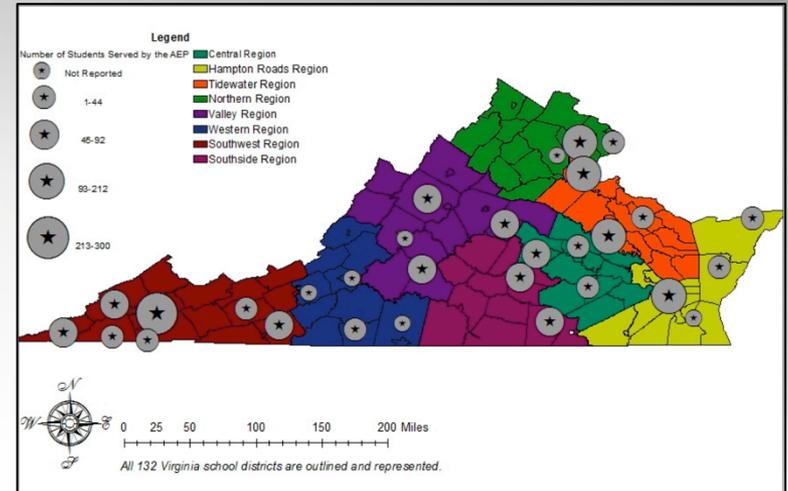
# Expanding the Scope of the Survey

## New Areas of Focus for the 2014 Survey

- Cost of the program per students
- Reasons for enrollment
- Student demographics
- Length of enrollment periods
- Student/teacher ratios
- Interactions among school divisions
- Reasons for lack of programming
- Tracking student progress

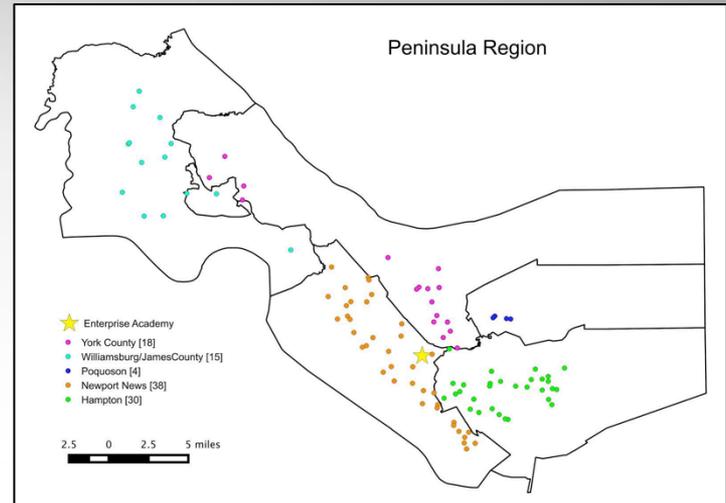
## Greater Emphasis on Budgetary Concerns

- Faculty and staff salaries
- Facilities, utilities, and maintenance
- Non-instructional support
- Origin of resources (local, state, or federal)



# Alternative Education Program Case Studies: Enterprise Academy

- Regional program
- Business model
- Provides opportunities for grades 3-12
  - 125 for 9-12
  - 60 for 6-8
  - 12 for 3-5
- 95% Newport News students
- Other municipalities pay per diem
  - Williamsburg: 26 seats
  - York County: 8 seats
  - Poquoson: 5 seats
  - Hampton: 12 seats



# Alternative Education Program Case Studies: Enterprise Academy cont.

- Two reasons for referral
  - Disciplinary
  - Criminal charges
- Minimum of 9 week stay
- Up to an entire year
- Funding
  - 60% Newport News School District
  - 40% State Funded
  - Volunteers
  - Per diem

## General Demographics:

- 85-90% on free/reduced lunch
- 80% below poverty line
- 75% African American
- 90% male

# Alternative Education Program Case Studies: York River Academy



- Local program in York County
- Technology based instruction
- Community outreach
- Grades 9-12
- Application enrollment
- Students remain until graduation

- York County funded

## General Demographics

- Dominantly caucasian
- 70% male
- 30% free or reduced lunch

# Alternative Education Program Case Studies: Tabb Middle School



- Local middle school program in York County
- Two programs of intervention
  1. Special Education
  2. Disciplinary Intervention
- 10 students in Special Education
- Range of students in disciplinary program
- Mentorship
- Zero additional funding

# Alternative Education Program Case Studies: Academy of Life and Learning

- Local program
- Referral required
- 43 students
- \$570,000 Cost
- 2010 Proposal
  - Training
  - Closing the Academy
  - \$300,000 Savings
- Closing delayed until 2011
- Tracking issue



WJCC Proposes Closing Academy for Life and Learning to Create New Alt Ed Program

*December 1st, 2010 by Amber Lester Kennedy*

# Policy Implications

- Tracking student progress post-alternative education
  - Cost effectiveness
  - Gauging success rates
- Updating budget formula for regional programs
- Formalize provision of support services
  - Continuity
  - Regulation
- Create an updatable inventory of local programs

# Plans for Future Research

Our survey was recently approved by the VDOE and was deployed on Friday, Dec. 5.

## Proposed Components of Further Research:

- Examine the relation between education inputs and the length of student enrollment periods.
- Use tracking data to look at student progress post-alternative education for the first time in Virginia
- Analyze program cost and effectiveness based on location and type
- Review how demographic differences and regional patterns affect student enrollment and eventual success in the alternative education setting.

# Questions?

