

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

Policy Code: **3470/4305**

A. PURPOSES

The board is committed to the goal of providing a safe and orderly learning environment in each school. The educational program and the student behavior management plan developed at each school, in addition to numerous other strategies identified in board policy, are intended to create such an environment and to help each student be a successful and contributing member of the school community.

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

B. ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS/SCHOOLS

Alternative learning programs and schools should serve the purposes described above. Such alternative education programs are expected to meet all board policy and state requirements. In addition, alternative education programs and support services should be designed to facilitate students' transition back to the regular educational setting when appropriate.

All school personnel at alternative learning programs or schools should receive training so that students enrolled in such programs or schools receive appropriate educational services.

Each alternative learning program or school is required to develop a behavior management plan, a school improvement plan, and a parental involvement plan in accordance with board policy. In addition, a conflict resolution plan, as provided in policy 3431, Conflict Resolution, may be included in the school improvement plan. The board encourages the principal and other school personnel, in developing these plans, to review successful alternative education programs and make effective use of the resources provided by the superintendent.

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

Prior to implementing a new alternative learning program or school, the board will develop a program proposal that is consistent with the State Board of Education standards for alternative learning programs. The board then will submit the proposal to the State Board for its review. After the proposal has been reviewed by the State Board, the board will consider any recommendations from the State Board to modify the proposal before implementing the alternative learning program or school. The board also will review on a regular basis whether the school system's alternative learning programs and schools comply with State Board standards.

C. TRANSFER TO ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

Students generally are assigned to a school based on attendance area. However, as provided by law, the board may assign any student to a school outside of his or her attendance area in order for the student to attend a specialized school or for any other reason the board, in its sole discretion, deems sufficient.

Students may be transferred to an alternative learning program or school on a voluntary or involuntary basis. The transfer process is provided below.

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School

In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:

- a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly;
- b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school; and
- c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative Learning Program or School

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

If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral

The board encourages parental involvement in decisions regarding the child's education and in identifying effective options for addressing concerns regarding the child's behavior or academic performance.

Voluntary transfers are encouraged whenever possible. A voluntary transfer is an agreement by the parent, the principal, and the disciplinary review committee that transfer is an appropriate option for the particular student. After agreement has been reached, the principal of the regular educational setting and the principal of the alternative learning program or school shall arrange the process and time for the transfer. The principal of the regular educational setting shall notify the superintendent of the transfer.

4. Involuntary Referral

A student may be required to be transferred from the regular educational setting to an alternative learning program or school under any of the following circumstances:

- a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel;
- b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational environment in the regular educational setting;
- c. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue;
- d. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains; or
- e. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Prior to an involuntary transfer in circumstances where a student is experiencing academic or developmental difficulties or chronic social/behavioral problems, the principal or disciplinary committee of the referring school shall document the student's behavior and academic performance and efforts to assist the student in the regular educational environment. School administrators are encouraged to

meet with the student's parents to try to reach a consensus on how to address the student's difficulties at school.

The preceding steps are encouraged, but not required in the case of an involuntary transfer arising from a disciplinary reassignment or when the student's behavior immediately endangers other students or personnel.

If an agreement for voluntary transfer is not reached and a basis for involuntary transfer exists, the principal may recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred to an alternative school. The principal must provide in writing: (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue; (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable; and (3) documentation of the circumstances that support an involuntary transfer.

A copy of the recommendation and other documentation must be provided to the parents by certified mail or in person. The parent may request an informal meeting with the superintendent to discuss the transfer. The superintendent has the authority to determine who may be present at the meeting.

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

The parent may appeal the superintendent's decision to the board. The board will hear the appeal in closed session and will follow its procedures as provided in policy 2500, Hearings Before the Board. During the period of the appeal, the student may be transferred to the alternative learning program or school.

5. Assignment During a Long-Term or 365-Day Suspension

A student who receives a long-term or 365-day suspension may be offered services in the alternative learning program or school for a portion or the full duration of the suspension. See policy 4353, Long-Term Suspension, 365-Day Suspension, Expulsion. Any student who receives a long-term or 365-day suspension must be offered alternative education services unless the superintendent provides a significant or important reason for declining to offer such services. Alternative education services include, but are not limited to, the alternative programs or schools established in this policy in accordance with G.S. 115C-105.47A.

6. Assignment of Student Sex Offenders

The board may decide, pursuant to G.S. 115C-390.11(a)(2), to assign a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 to an alternative learning program or school.

D. TRANSITION FROM ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

In most instances, the goal of the alternative learning program or school is to return the student to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment as soon as practicable. The personnel of the alternative learning program or school and those of the regular educational setting shall work together to help create a successful transition for the student.

If the student is not or will not be returned to the regular educational setting, the alternative learning program or school will assist in the student's transition to other educational settings, including other programs offered by the school system or a community college or vocational school.

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

When assigning professional personnel to an alternative learning program or school, the superintendent shall consider the experience and evaluation ratings of the professional employee who may be assigned to the program or school. As school system resources allow, the superintendent shall strive to avoid assigning to an alternative school or program less experienced professional personnel or professional personnel who have received an evaluation rating of less than "accomplished" within the last three years.

F. EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS

1. Information to be Reported

Each year, the board will evaluate each alternative learning program or school based upon reports provided by the superintendent and any other information the board wishes to consider.

2. Items to be Considered

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

- a. a diverse group of students is referred to the alternative learning program or school;

- b. the alternative learning program or school complies with State Board standards;
- c. the alternative learning program or school incorporates best practices for improving student academic performance and reducing disruptive behavior;
- d. school personnel at the alternative learning program or school are well-trained and provided with appropriate professional development;
- e. the alternative learning program or school is organized to provide coordinated services;
- f. students at the alternative learning program or school receive high quality and rigorous academic instruction; and
- g. the alternative learning program or school assists students in transitioning back to the regular educational setting or to other educational settings.

Legal References: G.S. 14-208.18; 115C-47(32a), -105.27, -105.47A, -105.48, -276(r), -288, -367, -369, -390.7, -390.9, -390.10, -390.11; State Board of Education Policy GCS-Q-002

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

Adopted: