

Title: Summary of resources on alternative education

Date: June 2015

Question: >> Please provide information on the effectiveness of alternative schools, especially non-public schools serving students in the juvenile justice system and students with disabilities.

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with references on alternative education programs. The resources are grouped into two parts: (1) alternative education programs for the general student population; and (2) alternative education programs that serve students in the juvenile justice system and students with disabilities.

Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

PART 1: Alternative education programs for general student population

Carswell, S. B., Hanlon, T. E., Watts, A. M., & O'Grady, K. E. (2014). Prevention-related research targeting African American alternative education program students. *Education and Urban Society*, 46(4), 434–449. Retrieved on March 19, 2015, from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2801878/>

Abstract: This article reports on a program of research that examined the background, planning, implementation, and evaluation of an after-school preventive intervention program within an ongoing urban alternative education program targeting African American students referred to the school because of their problematic behavior in regular schools. The research undertaken involved the examination of three separate, but interrelated, investigative components: (a) the relationship of risk and protective factors to the sexual activity of individuals in the targeted population; (b) the problems associated with the implementation of an after-school preventive intervention found to be effective within a regular school setting; and (c) determination of the effectiveness of the after-school preventive intervention, the results of which were largely compromised by the problems encountered during the implementation of the intervention.

de Bilde, J., Van Damme, J., Lamote, C., & De Fraine, B. (2013). Can alternative education increase children's early school engagement? A longitudinal study from kindergarten to third grade. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 24(2), 212–233. Retrieved on March 19, 2015, from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1004737>

Abstract: The current study examines the impact of alternative education on children's early school engagement in terms of school enjoyment and independent participation. A sample of 2,776 children from traditional (e.g., mainstream) and alternative Flemish schools was followed from their 3rd year of kindergarten until 3rd grade. The present study does not evidence a positive effect of alternative education on school engagement. In contrast, it was found that in alternative education children acted less independent compared to traditional schools. Furthermore, differential effects in terms of children's socioeconomic status and initial language achievement are explored. In alternative schools, children's initial level of language achievement tends to be less determinative for their school engagement compared to traditional schools.

Eichorn, R., Garza, R., Jones, K., & Sobers, M. (2010). Graduation credit cards—immediate buy in, immediate payoff. *International Journal on School Disaffection*, 7(2), 50–52. Retrieved on March 19, 2015, from <http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/library/2010/graduation-credit-cards-immediate-buy-immediate-payoff>

Abstract: New Directions Alternative Education Center, Prince William County Public School's (PWCS) alternative high school, serves approximately 1,000 students on a rolling-enrollment basis each year. The 2009–2010 school year marks the sixth year of operation for the center. The school program continues to develop and grow in exciting and “new directions.” New Directions Alternative Education Center has several initiatives in place to enhance student performance. Effective school-wide discipline (ESD), standards based remediation, and academic mentoring highlight the strategies used to positively support the whole-student. While support for student success creates interconnected approaches between instructional methods, initiatives, interventions, and support systems, one particular initiative has sparked excitement in the students and staff at New Directions. This article discusses the birth of the “Graduation Credit Card” which allows students at New Directions Alternative Education Center to earn credits through classroom based courses, digital instruction via NovaNET and by participating in Learn and Serve Projects. To kick off the initiative, the professional school counselors visited each classroom where they introduced the concept of the “Graduation Credit Card.”

National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2013). *Anecdotes aren't enough: An evidence-based approach to accountability for alternative charter schools*. Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved on March 17, 2015, from <http://www.pageturnpro.com/National-Association-of-Charter-School-Authorizers/53998-Anecdotes-Arent-Enough/index.html#1>

Abstract: New from a workgroup of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), this report maps an oft-overlooked space in the charter-accountability world: How charters that serve special populations, such as students who have dropped out, are held accountable for performance. Two key points emerge (which are really applicable to all charters): (1) Make the charter contract the central instrument of accountability and (2) be open to different yet detailed and rigorous approaches to evaluating academic success or failure. Interestingly, the report recommends not making significant changes to operational and financial indicators or methods of oversight for alternative schools. Approaches to the performance frameworks can vary from setting different cut scores to wholly different accountability measures specific to alternative schools. The report discusses proficiency, growth, and multiyear graduation rates, as well as providing credit for re-engaging students who have dropped out and improving attendance, mastery of material, and college/career readiness. Some of the more thought-provoking proposed measurements included job stability and time employed in a particular position, reconnecting with family members, personal growth, and volunteer work. For programs targeting formerly

incarcerated students, recidivism rates could be examined; for programs that work with addiction, perhaps the time a student remains drug/alcohol free might be a measure. Additionally, the authors also include a synthesis of several studies of dropout prevention (including one that starts in first grade). In Ohio, we as an authorizer are considering re-writing our own accountability agreements with the schools we authorize. Several of the measures—especially the idea of weights given to different indicators—seem promising as a means to fairly gauge whether and to what degree schools are educating their students, regardless of the focus of the program.

Quinn, M. M., Poirier, J. M., Faller, S. E., Gable, R. A., & Tonelson, S. W. (2006). An examination of school climate in effective alternative programs. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(1), 11–17. Retrieved on March 20, 2015, from <http://dropout.heart.net.tw/information/1-1an%20examination%20of%20alternative.pdf>

Abstract: The alternative education field lacks a common definition and has a major divide between the differing philosophies of alternative programs; little empirical evidence is available to identify the components necessary to create effective alternative educational programs. Tremendous growth in the availability of alternative programs in the United States over the past several decades, however, illustrates continuing demand for such programs as well as the need for research on the characteristics that constitute effective alternative programs. In this article, the authors study exemplary alternative programs in 3 racially and economically diverse communities to characterize the school climate as viewed by the students and the staff. At this relatively early stage in the field of alternative education, it is essential to examine the similarities, as well as any differences, in the social climate of highly effective alternative programs and to consider their potential relationship with student academic and behavioral success. Furthermore, it is important to recognize how these findings might be one foundation for future inquiry and research on alternative education.

Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy. (2014). *Alternative education: Exploring innovations and learning*. Rennie Center Policy Brief. Cambridge, MA: Author. Retrieved on March 17, 2015, from: <http://www.renniecenter.org/research/AlternativeEducation.pdf>

Abstract: In this policy brief, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy provides a first-of-its-kind baseline assessment of Massachusetts' alternative education offerings. Research findings highlight existing alternative practices and examine how programming for the state's at-risk students might be improved and better leveraged to guide broader, system-wide reform. Discussion is based on analysis of statewide data and interviews with district and alternative leaders in seven school districts. The policy brief is organized into several major sections: a national overview of alternative education, including evidence of best practices; programmatic characteristics of alternative education in Massachusetts; characteristics of students participating in Massachusetts alternative education; opportunities and impediments for scale; and considerations for policymakers.

Rutschow, E. Z., & Crary-Ross, S. (2014). *Beyond the GED: Promising models for moving high school dropouts to college*. New York: MDRC. Retrieved on March 23, 2015, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED545454.pdf>

Abstract: As globalization and technological change remake the labor market, it has become increasingly clear that the United States must create better educational and workforce training programs if we are to remain competitive. In order to help disadvantaged and low-skilled workers advance in the new labor market, educational opportunities are needed that can boost their ability to succeed in high-demand career areas that pay better wages. America's federally funded adult education programs represent an underutilized resource in meeting this goal. Targeting the nearly 39 million adults in this country who have yet to earn a high school credential, these programs have served as a lifeline for decades in helping millions of high school dropouts build their reading, writing, and math skills. However, despite their promise, such programs have generally been less

successful in helping students make the transition into postsecondary education and training required for better-paying jobs. As a result, many students who have obtained an alternative high school credential such as the General Educational Development (GED) certificate have remained on the sidelines as our labor market has moved forward into the 21st century. This report provides a much-needed review of innovations in the adult education field aimed at helping high school dropouts overcome these barriers and make the transition to postsecondary education and training. Highlighting results from rigorous studies, the report documents reforms that have a number of promising methods for promoting dropouts' transition to college, including the development of new, more rigorous college- and career-readiness curricula; enhanced supports such as assistance with college admissions and applying for financial aid; and increased on-the-ground connections with postsecondary institutions. The review finds that the most promising program reforms integrate basic skills and GED instruction within specific career fields and provide enhanced supports to ease students' entry into college. The following are appended: (1) Journals, Organizations, Initiatives, and Programs Reviewed; (2) Full List of GED-to-College Bridge Programs; and (3) Full List of Concurrent Enrollment Programs.

Ruzzi, B. B., & Kraemer, J. (2006). *Academic programs in alternative education: An overview*. Washington, DC: National Center on Education and the Economy. Retrieved on March 19, 2015, from http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services/pdf/ae_overview_text.pdf

Abstract: This paper, second in a series of papers on alternative education, examines the academic programming in alternative education programs by reviewing the literature specifically focused on the academic programs in alternative education and summarizing a survey of fifteen alternative education programs. It suggests options for further research on this topic based on the literature review and reports from the programs surveyed. The programs surveyed for this paper include: (1) The Biotechnology Career Academy in San Jose, California; (2) The California Department of Juvenile Justice's Johanna Boss High School in Stockton, California; (3) Diploma Plus' Champion Charter School in Brockton, Massachusetts; (4) The Fairfax County, Virginia Public Schools GED Program; (5) Fresh Start in Baltimore, Maryland; (6) Portland Community College's Gateway to College in Portland, Oregon; (7) Griggs Academy On-line Diploma Program; (8) The Horizonte Instruction and Training Center ESL Program in Salt Lake City, Utah; (9) Jefferson County High School in Louisville, Kentucky; (10) The Latin American Youth Center's (LAYC) YouthBuild Public Charter School GED Program in Washington, DC; (11) Portland Community College's Multicultural Academic Program (MAP) in Portland, Oregon; (12) Open Meadow High School in Portland, Oregon; (13) Philadelphia's Educational Options Program; (14) SIATech Charter School at Job Corps Centers in several states; and (15) The Tallahassee Community College GED Plus program in Tallahassee, Florida.

PART 2: Alternative education programs that serve students in the juvenile justice system and students with disabilities

Atkins, T., & Bartuska, J. (2010). Considerations for the placement of youth with EBD in alternative education programs. *Beyond Behavior*, 19(2), 14–20. Retrieved on March 18, 2015, from <http://amywagner.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/considerations+-+alternative+placements.pdf>

Abstract: Alternative education programs (also called alternative schools) first appeared on the American landscape in the 1960s. Despite the proliferation of these programs, a generic description of what constitutes an alternative education program, historically, has been elusive. Most alternative education programs have the general criteria of serving youth who are at risk of school failure, including students with disabilities. Although alternative education programs exist in both rural and urban areas, research documenting the effectiveness of the programs is scant. The purpose of this article is threefold: (a) to describe the characteristics of a small group of youth with

disabilities before and during their attendance at an alternative education program; (b) to describe several characteristics of the alternative education programs they attend; and (c) to provide recommendations for parents and practitioners to consider when deciding if an alternative education program is an appropriate placement for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) or other disabilities.

Bowman-Perrott, L. (2009). Classwide peer tutoring: An effective strategy for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 44*(5), 259–267.
Abstract: Effective intervention procedures are essential to breaking the cycle of school failure. Tobin and Sprague (2000) conducted a review of strategies that have shown to be effective with youth served in alternative education settings. Among those were instructional strategies, including tutoring. ClassWide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) is a well-researched instructional strategy that has proven effective for students with and without disabilities and is an intervention that helps prevent school failure. CWPT uses a reciprocal peer-tutoring format that allows students to serve both as tutor (teacher) and tutee (student) to review and learn content material. This article describes part of a 1-year pilot study and discusses how CWPT was implemented in two high school biology classrooms during the 2003–2004 school year in an alternative school setting. Students' academic gains and on-task behaviors were measured during CWPT and teacher-led instruction.

Flower, A., McDaniel, S. C., & Jolivette, K. (2011). A literature review of research quality and effective practices in alternative education settings. *Education & Treatment of Children, 34*(4), 489–510. Retrieved on March 20, 2015, from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ951810>

Abstract: Effective behavioral practices for students with emotional/behavioral disorders (E/BD) are critical. Students with E/BD are often served in alternative education (AE) settings due to behavior that cannot be supported in a typical school setting or due to court adjudication based on delinquent activity. Like other settings for students with E/BD, AE programs must utilize effective intervention practices for students to get the most out of the program and make appropriate behavioral changes. This review examined the literature base of behavioral interventions implemented in AE settings from 1970–2010 to assess the inclusion of nine effective practices recommended for use in alternative settings (Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, & Tobin, 2009). A total of 39 articles were identified and analyzed that met the study criteria. Results indicated that only 29 studies included any of the effective practices. Additionally, small class size was the most frequently noted effective practice. Finally, the quality of research concerning behavior in AE settings appears to be quite low. Implications of this study and directions for future research are presented.

George, M. P., George, N. L., Kern, L., & Fogt, J. B. (2013). Three-tiered support for students with EBD: Highlights of the universal tier. *Education & Treatment of Children, 36*(3), 47–62. Retrieved on March 19, 2015 from <http://centennial.coe.lehigh.edu/content/three-tiered-support-students-ebd-highlights-universal-tier>

Abstract: The scant data available suggest there is a critical need for improving service delivery within alternative education (AE) settings for children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD). A promising approach for improving student outcomes in AE settings is school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS), an approach that has been used successfully in many typical school environments. This case study describes school-wide practices and structures that were instituted and sustained at Centennial School of Lehigh University for the past 15 years and highlights those practices and structures associated with the universal tier. Longitudinal data are shared that illustrate the effectiveness of the practices over time positively affecting the outcomes of youth with E/BD.

Jolivet, K., Swoszowski, N. C., & Ennis, R. P. (2013). Introduction: PBIS as prevention for high-risk youth in alternative education, residential, and juvenile justice settings. *Education & Treatment of Children, 36*(3), 1–2. Retrieved on March 19, 2015, from <http://www.pbis.org/Common/Cms/files/pbisresources/ETC2013SpecialIssue.pdf>

Abstract: Provides an overview of the present special issue of *Education & Treatment of Children*. This issue explores the use of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) as a means of prevention for high-risk youth being served in non-traditional, more restrictive educational settings including alternative education (AE), residential, and juvenile justice (JJ) settings. The goal of this special issue is to provide empirical and practical information on the PBIS framework to educators and a wide-range of service providers who work with high-risk youth in AE, residential, and JJ settings to improve youth outcomes and teacher effectiveness.

Marshall, A., Powell, N., Pierce, D., Nolan, R., & Fehringer, E. (2012). Youth and administrator perspectives on transition in Kentucky's state agency schools. *Child Welfare, 91*(2), 97–119. Retrieved on March 20, 2015, from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23362616>

Abstract: Students, a large percentage with disabilities, are at high risk for poor post-secondary outcomes in state agency education programs. This mixed-methods study describes the understandings of student transitions in state agency education programs, from the perspectives of youth and administrators. Results indicated that: transition is more narrowly defined within alternative education programs; key strengths of transition practice are present in nontraditional schools; and the coordination barriers within this fluid inter-agency transition system are most apparent in students' frequent inter-setting transitions between nontraditional and home schools.

Simonsen, B., Britton, L., & Young, D. (2010). School-wide positive behavior support in an alternative school setting. A case study. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12*(3), 180–191.

Abstract: Students with disabilities who display serious (e.g., dangerous) problem behaviors are frequently educated in alternative school settings. Although there is considerable research on intervention approaches (e.g., function-based support) to support individual students with challenging behaviors, there is a lack of research on school wide intervention approaches to support all students in alternative school settings. A 3-year, descriptive, single-subject case study (AB design) was conducted to examine the impact of introducing School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) into an alternative education setting. Results indicate that introducing SWPBS is associated with an overall decrease in serious incidents and an increase in the percentage of students who refrain from serious physical aggression. The limitations and implications of this study are described.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“Alternative education” / “alternative schools” AND (“effectiveness” OR “juvenile justice” OR “students with disabilities”)

Search of Databases

ERIC, EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.