

Executive Summary
Statewide Alternative Education Program Evaluation Report
2004-2005
Evaluation conducted by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center

Oklahoma has created a nationally-recognized model for statewide alternative education. This document, prepared by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center (OTAC), presents highlights from the annual evaluation of the statewide alternative education programs. The evaluation of the Statewide Alternative Education Academies was based on four independent sources of information: observational data collected during site visits by OTAC staff, student surveys, student focus groups, and student outcome data. The student outcome data included both demographic and program effectiveness information.

Statewide Alternative Grant Program Participation 2004-2005	
Alternative Education Programs	253
Districts Served	466
Program Capacity (number of students programs could serve at one time)	8,859
Total Students Served	12,802

Program Quality

Oklahoma alternative education has begun to develop a capacity for motivational, individualized instruction. In over two-thirds of all Statewide Alternative programs, course credit could be earned by demonstrating competency; students were not allowed to move forward in the curriculum until they demonstrated that they had mastered the material. On-site evaluation of alternative education programs and student surveys suggested that individualized, competency-based instruction was one of the most important and most successful features.

OTAC Field Coordinators conducted 1,029 site visits to Statewide Alternative Education programs during the 2004-05 school year, an average of more than four visits to each program. At the end of each school year, the programs are rated against the seventeen criteria established in Oklahoma school law. These ratings are made using a very specific scoring rubric and are reviewed by OTAC program evaluators for reliability and validity.

Eight of the criteria were rated on a five-point scale, from “exemplary” to “noncompliant.” Seventy-seven percent of programs were in compliance with all 17 criteria at least to a minimal degree. Seventy programs had at least one noncompliant rating this year. Nearly one-fourth of the programs (22%) were rated as excellent or better on all criteria and 17 earned exemplary rating on all (or all but one) criteria, including two nationally recognized programs in Tulsa.

Student Characteristics

- Alternative Education is designed to serve students in grades 6 -12. All but 28 students were in grades 6-12, 85.4% of students served were in high school, and seniors comprised the largest group.
- More than one-half of the students in the evaluation sample were at least one year overage for grade.
- Fifty-three percent of alternative students were male; forty-seven percent of alternative students were female.
- The racial and ethnic background of the students in the state-funded alternative programs was similar to the racial and ethnic distribution of all students in Oklahoma public schools.
- Students were referred to alternative programs for a variety of reasons. As in previous years, the principle reason for referring students to alternative education was academic deficiency.

Racial/Ethnic Identification of Oklahoma Alternative Education Participants, 2004-2005.		
Group Identification	Alternative Education	All Oklahoma Students
African American	15.5%	10.8%
Native American	16.4%	18.7%
Asian American	0.4%	1.6%
Caucasian/White/Other	60.5%	60.7%
Hispanic/Latino	7.2%	8.2%

Program Effectiveness

In order to determine program effectiveness, Statewide Alternative Programs collected data on five common variables highly related to dropping out of school. The data collected for each student included grades, courses passed, absences, disciplinary referrals, and achievement test scores. Two types of analyses were conducted: pre-post analyses, involving only students enrolled in alternative education programs, and treatment-comparison group analyses.

Key student outcomes, 1998-2005.			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Dropout Rate</i>	<i>Suspension Rate</i>	<i>Graduation Rate</i>
1998-1999	13.9	2.9	65.0
1999-2000	14.8	3.4	64.1
2000-2001	13.1	2.5	68.8
2001-2002	10.8	2.6	70.8
2002-2003	12.5	1.9	68.8
2003-2004	10.9	1.8	70.5
2004-2005	11.1	1.8	72.7

- Recovered dropouts and pregnant and parenting teens were most likely to drop out.
- Once students were enrolled in an alternative education program, they were absent less often, made higher grades, failed fewer classes, were referred less often for disciplinary problems, and improved their scores on academic achievement tests.
- Alternative education students' scores on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests were lower than those of traditional education students. This was most likely due to a combination of student factors and program characteristics.
- When considering trends over seven years, great improvements are noted in each category: the dropout rate decreased by 20%, the suspension rate decreased by 38%, and the graduation rate increased by 12%.

Pre-post means by group. Oklahoma Alternative Education Programs, 2004-05. Up/Down arrows indicate statistically significant change and direction.

Variable		Group			
		Alternative	Change	Comparison	Change
Days absent per week	Pre	0.81	↓	0.75	↑
	Post	0.66		0.84	
GPA	Pre	1.39	↑	2.02	↓
	Post	2.31		1.40	
Days suspended per week	Pre	0.22	↓	0.15	↑
	Post	0.09		0.18	
Courses failed	Pre	2.63	↓	2.05	↑
	Post	0.79		2.56	

Funding and Cost Effectiveness

- State law requires \$10,000 base funding per district. Because of budget cuts, the minimum was decreased to \$8,750. More than half of the districts (54.5%) were funded with this amount.
- Districts serving fewer than ten students were required to form or join a cooperative unless they were granted a waiver.
- The average state cost per student per year in alternative education was \$1,650. Local funds often supplemented the state dollars. The average cost per student-year in cooperative programs was \$2,120; in single-district programs it was \$1,338.
- There was a wide variation in per-pupil costs across programs. A majority of the school districts contributed local funds to the programs. A substantial number did not.

In 2001, the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) conducted a 16-year study on the costs of dropping out of school. The study, based in Texas, found that the cost to the state for students who had dropped out was “forgone income, lost tax revenue, and increased job training, welfare, unemployment and criminal justice costs.” Dividing the social service costs by the number of dropouts, it was determined that each dropout cost Texas almost \$200,000. We can estimate the *savings to government* as a result of Oklahoma’s 2004-05 investment of \$15.4 million in Statewide Alternative Education programs:

Using the dropout cost savings research conducted by IRDA, we can estimate the cost savings to the state for recovered dropouts. ***To yield the most conservative estimate, the analysis was limited to only the recovered dropouts who graduated this year.***

338 Recovered Dropouts x \$200,000 = \$67,600,000

For more information or a copy of the complete evaluation report, contact:

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