



Executive Summary

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Statewide Alternative Grant Program Evaluation Report

2001- 2002 Highlights

Program Overview

When a student drops out of school, both the dropout and society incur costs. These costs have been estimated in terms of lost lifetime income, income assistance, lost tax earnings, higher health costs, and higher probability of unemployment, crime, and incarceration. Research has shown that at-risk students can benefit from carefully designed and implemented alternative programs.

Oklahoma has created a nationally-recognized model for statewide alternative education. Until this past year, the legislature had steadily increased support for these programs. Due to the state funding crisis, the Statewide Alternative Education program was cut 25% from \$19.8 million to \$15.2 million.

Statewide Alternative Grant Program Participation 2001 - 2002	
Alternative education programs	288
Districts served	468
Program capacity (number of students programs could serve at one time)	8,865
Total students served	13,216

This document, prepared by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center (OTAC), presents highlights from the annual evaluation of the statewide alternative education programs.

Student Characteristics

- The program is designed to serve students in grades 6 -12. Eighty percent of students served were in high school.
- Almost thirty-five percent (34.9) of the students in the evaluation sample were at least one year overage for grade.

- Fifty-four percent of alternative students were male.
- The racial and ethnic background of the students in the state-funded alternative programs was not similar to the racial and ethnic distribution of all students in Oklahoma public schools. African American students enrolled in alternative programs rose slightly from 14.0% in 2001 to 16.5% in 2002.
- Students were referred to alternative programs for a variety of reasons. (See figure below.)

Research on high-risk students has established that being “overage” is one of the most important factors associated with a student’s decision to drop out of school.

Reasons for Referral 2001 - 2002	
Academic	31.8%
Behavioral	19.8%
Absences	18.6%
Former dropout	9.5%
Pregnant/parenting	9.0%
Adjustment problems	7.9%
Juvenile justice	1.7%
Other	1.7%

Program Characteristics

Statewide alternative education programs were created in all shapes and sizes, from stand-alone alternative schools serving more than 350 students to solitary teachers working in substandard buildings with five to fifteen students.

The Statewide Alternative Education Program funded a variety of program types.

Full-day

- These programs operated at least 30 hours per week and offered a full array of classes within the alternative setting.
- In general, full-time programs served students that were more at-risk than students in other program arrangements.

Part-time

- These programs operated, on average, 22 hours per week.
- Many of these programs offered ways for students to earn credit outside of the alternative program, such as through technology centers or the traditional high school.

Evening Programs

- This year, 44% of the evening programs were open 20 or more hours per week.
- Evening programs were more likely to serve students enrolled for credit recovery purposes.

Credit Recovery

- Credit recovery options were designed to allow students who failed courses to catch up on credits so they might graduate with their age peers.
- Last year, 15.6% of students were classified as credit recovery. This year, 10.5% were classified as credit recovery.
- In 2001-2002, only five alternative education programs were predominantly credit recovery.

Supplemental

- This type of program did not provide a substantial proportion of the typical student's day or offered only ancillary services.
- These programs have not proven to be effective alternative education programs.

In general, program types was not related to overall program effectiveness. However, students in supplemental programs had less pre-post change than those in alternative education programs.

The number of programs classified as supplemental has declined steadily in recent years and they now comprise less than 5 percent of the statewide program.

Curricula

Oklahoma alternative education has begun to develop a capacity for motivational, individualized instruction. In over half (56%) 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.

Advocates of a competency-based system believe that it encourages students to attend to the quality of their work and build a pattern and habit of success.

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 of these programs, in terms of student engagement.

Credit Accrual Methods	00-01	01-02
Competency-based	48%	56%
Mixed methods	32%	27%
Seat-time	19%	17%
Total	100%	100%

Program Quality

State and National Recognition

In 2001-2002, several teachers in alternative education programs were selected as the Teacher of the Year within their districts. One teacher received national recognition as a "National Educator" by the Milken Foundation. This award financially supports those teachers that display quality teaching, professional leadership, engagement with families and communities, and a potential for even greater contributions to the healthy development of children.

Statewide Evaluation

Programs were visited at least four times a year by an OTAC Field Coordinator. 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.”

Most programs were rated as satisfactory or better on all 17 criteria. More than 80% of programs were in compliance with all 17 criteria. A handful of programs failed to comply with three or more of the criteria set out in state law.

Program Effectiveness

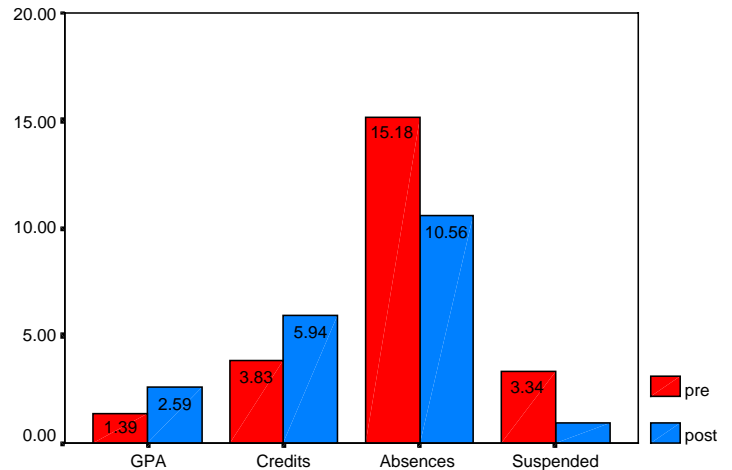
- The number of alternative education students who dropped out of school was at an all-time low.
- The dropout rate in alternative education programs decreased from 13.1% (2000-01) to 10.8% (2001-2002).
- More than two-thirds (70.8%) of seniors graduated; another 1.2% earned GEDs.
- Recovered dropouts and pregnant and parenting teens were most likely to drop out.

Student Performance

Pre-post analyses were conducted on variables most highly related to dropping out of school. Results demonstrated that Statewide Alternative Education programs had a reliable impact on reducing students’ level of risk.

Student Performance

Pre-Post Comparisons, 2001-2002



In addition, student performance was evaluated using treatment-comparison analysis.

Students on waiting lists were compared with students that participated in the statewide programs. At-risk students who participated in alternative education showed improvement on all variables measured; students who did not participate declined on all measures.

Eligible students who were placed in alternative education programs became less at-risk, and eligible students who were not enrolled in alternative programs became more at-risk.

Pre-post means by group. Arrows represent statistically significant changes and direction.

Variable		Group			
		Alternative	Change	Comparison	Change
Days absent	Pre	14.63	↘	14.60	↗
	Post	10.22		15.65	
GPA	Pre	1.41	↗	1.54	↘
	Post	2.56		1.52	
Days Suspended	Pre	4.42	↘	3.07	-
	Post	0.84		3.10	
Courses Failed	Pre	2.55	↘	2.19	↗
	Post	0.37		2.39	

Funding

- The mean funding level for Statewide Alternative Programs was \$73,158, and the median award was \$32,900.
- State law requires \$10,000 base funding per district.
- Districts serving fewer than ten students were required to form or join a cooperative.
- The average state cost per student per year in alternative education was \$2,047. Local funds often supplemented the state dollars.
- There was a wide variation in per pupil costs among programs. The majority of the school districts contributed local funds to the programs.
- Seventy-six of Oklahoma's districts have not yet been incorporated into the statewide program. These were all K-8 districts.

Cost Effectiveness

James Catterall estimated the cost to society of dropouts in 1987. His study estimated that each dropout cost government \$81,000 in direct costs and lost tax revenue.

Accepting Catterall's conservative analysis, without adjusting for the increased costs since 1987, we can estimate the *savings to government* as a result of Oklahoma's investment of \$18 million in Statewide Alternative Education programs:

$$2,894 \text{ graduates} \times \$81,000 = \$2,334,414,000$$

The most conservative cost-benefit analysis involves only those students who had already dropped out of school and were reclaimed by the Statewide alternative programs. 1,216 students were recovered dropouts and 233 of these dropped out of school again. The savings to the state for the recovered dropouts only, then, was:

$$983 \text{ recovered dropouts} \times \$81,000 = \$79,623,000$$

Without highly theoretical cost analyses, then, it is obvious that \$18 million investment in alternative education will yield a high return to state government. The state will gain even more through a better-educated workforce, greater productivity, lower health care costs, and other documented economic advantages of high school graduates.

The evaluation of the Statewide Alternative Education Academies was based on four independent sources of information: student surveys, observational data collected during site visits by OTAC, student focus groups conducted by staff OTAC evaluators, and student outcome data. The student outcome data included demographic and program effectiveness data.

For further information, or a CD-ROM copy of the complete evaluation report, contact:
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