

Executive Summary
Statewide Alternative Education Program Evaluation Report
2003-2004
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 2003-2004	
Alternative Education Programs	252
Districts Served	467
Program Capacity (number of students programs could serve at one time)	8,865
Total Students Served	13,161

Program Quality

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. 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.

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.

Student Characteristics

- Alternative Education is designed to serve students in grades 6 -12. All but 14 students were in grades 6-12, approximately eighty-six percent (85.9) of students served were in high school, and seniors comprised the largest group.
- More than two-thirds (68.3) 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. The principle reason for referring students to alternative education was academic deficiency.

Racial/Ethical Identification of Oklahoma Alternative Education Participants, 2003-2004.		
Group Identification	Alternative Education	All Oklahoma Students
African American	14.4%	10.9%
American Indian	16.2%	17.9%
Asian	0.5%	1.5%
Caucasian/White	60.1%	62.6%
Hispanic/Latino	7.9%	7.0%

The top reasons for referring males were academic deficiency (45%) and behavioral difficulties (23%); for females they were academic deficiency (31%), pregnant or parenting teen (19%), and excessive absences (15%).

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, test scores, 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.

Table 3. Key student outcomes, 1998-2004.				
<i>Year</i>	<i>Dropout Rate</i>	<i>Suspension Rate</i>	<i>Negative Exit Rate</i>	<i>Graduation Rate</i>
1998-1999	13.9	2.9	16.8	65.0
1999-2000	14.8	3.4	18.2	64.1
2000-2001	13.1	2.5	15.6	68.8
2001-2002	10.8	2.6	13.4	70.8
2002-2003	12.5	1.9	14.4	68.8
2003-2004	10.9	1.8	12.7	70.5

- More than two-thirds (70.5%) of seniors graduated. In addition to the 2,850 who graduated, 156 earned GEDs.
- Recovered dropouts and pregnant and parenting teens were most likely to drop out.
- The outcomes this year were, overall, the best in the history of the program. The graduation and dropout rates were the second best in program history; the dropout rate was only one-tenth from the lowest ever recorded. The "negative exit" rate, which is the sum of the dropout and suspension rates, was 12.7%, easily the lowest in the history of the program.
- Students in alternative education were absent less often, made higher grades, failed fewer classes, and improved their scores on tests of basic skills.
- Preliminary findings suggest that 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.

Table 12. Pre-post means by group. Oklahoma Alternative Education Programs, 2003-04. Up/Down arrows indicate statistically significant change and direction.

Variable		Group			
		Alternative	Change	Comparison	Change
Days absent	Pre	14.06	↓	14.19	-
	Post	9.21		13.79	
GPA	Pre	1.40	↑	1.90	↓
	Post	2.51		1.32	
Days Suspended	Pre	3.07	↓	2.47	-
	Post	.50		2.44	
Courses Failed	Pre	2.56	↓	2.05	↑
	Post	0.21		2.78	

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 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 \$1,089. Local funds often supplemented the state dollars. The average cost per student-year in cooperative programs was \$2,332; in single-district programs it was \$1,418.
- 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 1987, James Catterall estimated the cost to society of dropouts. 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 \$15 million in Statewide Alternative Education programs:

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. 1,069 students were recovered dropouts and 189 of these dropped out of school again. The potential savings to the state for the graduates and recovered dropouts can be estimated as follows:

3,006 Graduates x \$81,000 = \$2,434,860,000
880 Recovered Dropouts x \$81,000 = \$71,280,000

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

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