

**Executive Summary**  
**Statewide Alternative Education Program Evaluation Report**  
**2005-06**  
*Evaluation conducted by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center*

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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.

In 2005-06, Oklahoma's Statewide Alternative Education Academy Grant Program recorded ten years of educating disaffected and at risk students. Oklahoma's nationally-recognized model continues to adapt to changing populations, increase resources for teachers, and expand the concept of alternative education as it was first envisioned for these students.

Statewide Alternative Grant Program Participation 2005-06	
Alternative Education Programs	248
Districts Served	467
Program Capacity (number of students programs could serve at one time)	8,559
Total Students Served	12,263

### **Program Quality**

OTAC Field Coordinators conducted 1,001 site visits to Statewide Alternative Education programs during the 2005-06 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 four-point scale, from "notable" to "non-compliant." Ninety-five percent of programs were in compliance, at least to a minimal degree, with all 17 criteria. Almost one-half of the programs (48.4%) were rated as Appropriate/Accomplished or better on all criteria and 17 earned notable ratings on all (or all but one) criteria. Seventy programs had at least one noncompliant rating this year.

### **Student Characteristics**

- Alternative Education is designed to serve students in grades 6 -12. Enrollment in alternative education increased as grade level increased. Of the students served, 87.3% were in high school, and seniors comprised the largest group.
- Two thirds of the program participants were more than one year overage for grade.
- 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.
- 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.

## Program Effectiveness

In order to determine program effectiveness, Statewide Alternative Programs collected data on five 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.

- 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.
- Recovered dropouts and pregnant and parenting teens were most likely to drop out.
- 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 the outcomes of alt ed students were compared to a comparison group of students who were on waiting lists, alternative education students showed improvement on each of the variables; the comparison students' performance declined in all but one. These findings have been consistent each year that the program has been evaluated, but the effect sizes were stronger this year. As the following table illustrates, the differences between the two groups were substantial.
- Student surveys were administered to more than 5,000 participants. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents reported positive perceptions of alternative education. Most positive comments focused on their improved academic performance.

Pre-post means by group. Oklahoma Alternative Education Programs, 2005-06. Up/Down arrows indicate statistically significant change and direction.

Variable		Group			
		Alternative	Change	Comparison	Change
Days absent per week	Pre	0.73	↓	0.59	↑
	Post	0.62		0.76	
Semester GPA	Pre	1.48	↑	1.55	↑
	Post	2.53		2.04	
Days suspended per week	Pre	0.12	↓	0.07	↑
	Post	0.06		0.16	
Courses failed per semester	Pre	2.65	↓	1.96	↑
	Post	0.31		2.47	

## Funding and Cost Effectiveness

- State law requires \$10,000 base funding per district. Because of budget cuts, the minimum was decreased to \$9,667. More than half of the districts (54.8%) 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 \$1,876. Local funds often supplemented the state dollars. The average cost per student-year in cooperative programs was \$2,267; in single-district programs it was \$1,570.

- There was a wide variation in per-pupil costs across programs. A majority of the school districts contributed local funds to the programs but a substantial number did not.

Is the Alternative Education program cost effective? Using the evaluation database as a basis of estimation, we can calculate that a minimum of 1,214 students enrolled in alternative education were recovered dropouts. Of these, 364 graduated this year and a total of 815 (63.92%) had a positive exit status. Positive outcomes included graduating, continuing in the alternative program, returning to traditional school, or earning a GED.

Using the dropout cost developed by the Intercultural Development Research Association (Johnson, 2001), we can estimate the amount of savings to the state for those recovered dropouts who graduate. Cost to state and federal government is based on lost income and tax revenue, increased job training, welfare, unemployment, and criminal justice costs. Financial assistance also includes housing, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, Medicare and Medicaid, Food Stamps and WIC, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Unemployment Compensation, and the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. The IRDA guide suggests that each dropout costs state and federal assistance programs approximately \$200,000 each, over a lifetime. If this figure is multiplied by the estimated number of recovered dropouts that graduated from alternative education, this calculation produces an estimated savings of \$72.8 million to taxpayers.

$$\$200,000 \times 364 = \$ 72,800,000$$

Taking into account *all of the recovered dropouts who had a positive status at the end of the year*:

$$\$200,000 \times 815 = \$163,000,000$$

The potential savings of \$163 million to the state and federal social services which accrued from successfully recovering 815 former dropouts was almost ten times (9.61%) greater than the state's budget for the Alternative Education Academy program for 2005-06.

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

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