



Virginia
Commission on Youth

Study of Alternative Education Options for Suspended/Expelled Students

Year Two

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Study Mandate

- The Commission on Youth will continue to study alternative education program options and report findings to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.

- Issues to be studied include:
 - review of survey data on local alternative education programs;
 - school-based prevention programs and funding; and
 - need for a second tier of regional alternative education programs.



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Study Activities in Second Year

- Site Visits
 - **Project Discovery** – 22 Virginia localities
 - **Project RETURN** – Roanoke City
 - **Woodlawn Learning Center** – Hopewell City
 - **Office of Student Management and Alternative Programs** – Prince William County
 - Interviews
 - Office of Comprehensive Services
 - Virginia Department of Education
 - Local School Division Representatives
 - Probation Officers
 - Private Alternative Education Providers
 - Analysis of Survey Data
 - Survey to School Divisions on *Alternative Education Options for Suspended/Expelled Youth*
 - Three Advisory Group Meetings
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- **Survey of Alternative Education Programs for Suspended/Expelled Youth**
 - Surveyed 132 school divisions.
 - Requested information on:
 - structure of schools/programs;
 - funding source;
 - types of students served;
 - waiting lists;
 - gaps in service; and
 - students who were not offered any educational service.
 - Response rate of 95% (126/132 school divisions).



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- **Survey of Alternative Education Programs for Suspended/Expelled Youth**
 - **Recap on Findings**
 - Local program design varies significantly.
 - Students may have to wait to receive alternative education services; this is particularly true for divisions utilizing regional programs.
 - Identified program challenges include inability to provide more instructional time, lack of facility space, transportation concerns, and retaining qualified staff.
 - Lack of family involvement/interest is the challenge most frequently identified.
 - Some students not successful in a traditional school setting.
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State Funding for Alternative Education Programs

- The per pupil funding for regional alternative education programs does not "follow the student."
- Under the current funding methodology and Appropriation Act language, the per pupil funding does not allow students or associated funding to move between existing or to new regional programs.
- Reallocation of slots across programs provides some portability, but this is subject to the availability of unused slots and not at the discretion of the individual programs.
- Students enrolled in regional alternative education programs are counted in the average daily membership (ADM) of their home school division and are provided all of the typical state funding distributed on the basis of ADM like any other student.
- In addition, there is incremental state funding provided for the regional alternative education program, which is the state share of the incremental amount between each division's Basic Aid per pupil amount and the \$10,565 per pupil amount for the regional program.
- There is no authority to use these funds to directly place individual students into private programs.



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Findings



Lack of Information on Locally Administered Alternative Education Programs

- Virginia Department of Education submits an annual report on Regional Alternative Education Programs pursuant to §22.1-209.1:2 of the *Code of Virginia*.
 - There is no similar report or central inventory of locally created and administered alternative education schools/programs.
 - School divisions are unaware of local programs that exist in the Commonwealth.
 - Such a guide to local programs could provide a more complete picture of existing schools/programs for youth who are suspended/expelled or at-risk of being suspended/expelled.
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Lack of Information on Locally Administered Alternative Education Programs

- Commission on Youth has compiled a guide of all existing local alternative education programs across the Commonwealth.
- The Advisory Group requested the guide include regional schools/programs & privately-funded programs that serve disciplined students.
- The guide will be completed prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.



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Students not Offered Educational Services

- Unless the student qualifies for special education or is in the custody of the Department of Juvenile Justice, a student forfeits his right to an education when expelled.
- In Virginia, expelled students are still subject to the requirement for compulsory attendance.
- According to the survey conducted by the Commission for the 2005-2006 school year, 57 of responding school divisions reported occurrences where suspended/expelled students were not offered educational services.
 - Of the 57, the total number of students not offered services was 6,268*, with an average of 68 per division.**
 - In addition, regional and local programs have waiting lists for students who need an alternative education placement.

* Virginia Commission on Youth Survey of Alternative Education Programs, 2007.

**This may include some students suspended for 10 days or less.



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Students not Offered Educational Services

- Students who are suspended or expelled and do not receive educational services fall behind and become disengaged from school. This increases their risk for dropping out.
- There are gaps in alternative education services in Virginia, such as lack of placements for middle school students.
- Existing alternative education programs do not have the capacity to keep students permanently, even though students may be succeeding.
 - Over 50% reported their primary goal as transitioning students back to their regular academic setting.*

* Virginia Commission on Youth Survey of Alternative Education Programs, 2007.



Students not Offered Educational Services

- Time out of school can “increase antisocial acts, school vandalism, tardiness, truancy, and the dropout rate.” *
- The Board of Education recognized the connection between students’ connectedness to school and school safety in its Comprehensive Plan. As a strategy to make schools safer and more secure, the Board is encouraging school divisions to “find innovative ways to keep students with behavioral challenges in school.”**

*Virginia Department of Education, *An Introduction of Effective Schoolwide Discipline in Virginia*.

**Board of Education, *Comprehensive Plan: 2007-2012*, Adopted September 26, 2007, Objective 8, Strategy 3.



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Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs

- There is a shortage of school-based prevention programs that address issues such as violence prevention, anger management, conflict resolution, and other behavioral health needs.
 - These programs reduce suspensions and expulsions.
- Existing programs have been negatively impacted by reductions to federal Safe and Drug-Free School grants.
 - In 2006, the level of funding decreased 21%.
 - In 2007, there was an additional 11% reduction.
- There is no designated state funding for school-based prevention programs.



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Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs

- Virginia possesses a model that could meet the programming needs of local school divisions.
- Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) utilize a comprehensive systems approach of evidence-based curricula, practices, principles, and strategies to respond to K-12 student challenges.
- SAPs reduce risk factors, promote protective factors, increase asset development and foster resilience.
- SAPs create a flexible process intervention plan that is consistently monitored.
- The basic goals of SAPs are to:
 - provide collaboration between in-school and community resources;
 - encourage parent involvement;
 - increase the opportunity to help students participate in positive activities;
 - promote a safer school environment;
 - seek to improve grades, attendance and social challenges;
 - examine the best method for transitioning students back into a traditional school setting following alternative education; and
 - surround students with support services.



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Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs

- In Virginia, 36 school divisions reported having SAPs.
- In 2006, 297,700 students (20% of the total student population) were served by SAPs.
- While Virginia's SAPs have high satisfaction ratings, there is an inability to measure the effectiveness of existing SAP services.
- A study of Pennsylvania's SAPs reveal improved school outcomes, improved attendance, decreased discipline problems, increases in grade promotion, and increases in graduation rates.
 - One-third of the students who were served had improved attendance.*
 - Two-thirds of students were not suspended after a SAP referral and were either promoted or graduated from school.*
- The Board of Education, in its Comprehensive Plan for 2007-2012, is promoting the establishment of SAPs (*Objective 8, Strategy 8*).

* Retrospective Analysis of the Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program Outcome Data, 2003.



Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs

- Although most school divisions with SAPs have written policies and standard procedures to guide SAP services, there are some administrative gaps.
 - Only half of school divisions with SAPs have policies describing the purpose of their SAP, how to refer students, and the limits of student confidentiality.
 - About two-thirds of school divisions have systematic methods of informing school personnel, students, and parents about SAP services.



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Effective Schoolwide Discipline Programs & Reductions in Disciplinary Referrals

- Research indicates that exclusionary discipline approaches potentially increase poor outcomes in students.
- Training school staff and educators in effective classroom management may increase the consistency of discipline, which can reduce suspensions and expulsions.
- Results of implementing effective schoolwide discipline program in Virginia are:
 - one middle/high school reduced the number of discipline referrals by two-thirds;
 - administrators with another middle school found that they saved the equivalent of 20 eight-hour days;
 - teachers found they gained 430 more hours of instruction time;
 - statewide achievement scores increased dramatically over a four-year period; and
 - the number of elementary school students who met state achievement standards in reading increased from 20 percent to 79 percent over a four-year period.*
- National data show a gain of 10,620 instructional minutes over a two-year period. Time gained due to reduced behavioral interruptions was over 27 days in year one and 31 days in year two.**
- In its Comprehensive Plan, the Board of Education promises to “develop and support programs and initiatives that emphasize prevention and creation of a positive school climate.”

*Virginia Department of Education, *An Introduction of Effective Schoolwide Discipline in Virginia*.

**Scott, T., & Barrett, S. (2004). *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*.



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Lack of Definition for Alternative Education for Disciplined Youth

- Currently the term "alternative education" covers all educational activities that fall outside the traditional K-12 school system including:
 - vocational programs;
 - special programs for gifted children; and
 - programs for the handicapped.*
- There is no consistent and established definition of what an alternative program/school is and what components must be present.
- The idea of a unifying definition for alternative education would be helpful for both funding opportunities and evaluation purposes.
- A broad definition of alternative education programs that describes the full array of alternatives may be an important element in encouraging the development of the most effective programs.



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Recommendations



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Recommendation 1 - Lack of Information on Locally Administered Alternative Education Programs.

- **Option 1:** The Commission on Youth shall finalize its report on *Local Alternative Education Options for Suspended and Expelled Youth* and request the Virginia Association of School Superintendents to assist in disseminating it to all interested organizations via the Internet.
- **Option 2:** The Commission on Youth shall contact all child-serving agencies and inform them of the availability of the report on *Local Alternative Education Options for Suspended and Expelled Youth*. The Commission will also request the Secretariats of Health and Human Resources, Public Safety, and Education, as well as all affected agencies that deliver services to children, to link this report on their websites.
- **Option 3:** The Virginia Department of Education, in cooperation with the Virginia Alternative Education Association and Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities, will collect data on locally administered alternative education programs. Data collected will include the number of students served, service needs, funding, components of the programs, and any other information that evaluates both the performance of the programs and the students served by the program. This information will be submitted biennially to the General Assembly.



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Recommendation 2 - Students not Offered Educational Services

- **Option 1:** Introduce legislation to allow students who have not been attending school for a designated period of time and/or who are not succeeding in the public school setting to be authorized to receive instruction in a private alternative education program that assists students in achieving established academic standards. To be eligible for payments of state school funds, the educational program must assist the students in achieving defined local and state academic standards.
- **Option 2:** Introduce a budget amendment to provide funding for a second tier of regional alternative education programs. The proposal for a second tier of funding shall not dilute the funding already distributed to existing regional programs and will allow additional school divisions to create and tailor programs for students who are at-risk of school failure or not otherwise successful in a traditional school setting.
- **Option 3:** Introduce legislation and a budget amendment to provide for additional slots specifically for students who have not been attending school for a designated period of time and/or who are not succeeding in the public school setting to be eligible to receive instruction in a regional alternative education program.
- **Option 4:** Investigate methods for the Virginia Department of Education to authorize school divisions to utilize dual-enrollment as an option for providing transitional or educational services to students who are at-risk for school failure or who are currently not attending school.



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Recommendation 3 - Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs

- **Option 1:** Request that the Virginia Department of Education establish guidelines for statewide implementation of SAPs. The guidelines for SAPs will be shared with school divisions to ensure consistent and uniform application and implementation of SAP, based on best practices.
- **Option 2:** Request a budget amendment for the Virginia Department of Education to construct a database & provide for a full time equivalent for purposes of capturing data on utilization of SAPs in Virginia. Such a database will allow for ongoing assessment of the efficacy of SAPs and for the development of a framework to guide future evaluations.



Recommendation 4 – Effective Schoolwide Discipline Programming

- **Option 1:** Request the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Education’s Training and Technical Assistance Centers (T-TACs) to continue to provide information on effective schoolwide discipline programs to all school divisions, including information on its effectiveness, how to access trainings, and how to implement it in their schools.
- **Option 2:** Request the Virginia Department of Education and the T-TACs to provide information on other school-based, evidence-based programs which reduce out-of-school disciplinary sanctions to all school divisions.



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Recommendation 5 – Lack of Definition for Alternative Education

- Request the Virginia Alternative Education Association to research alternative education definitions established by the National Education Association. Request that the Virginia Alternative Education Association report its progress and any suggested language to the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2009 Session of the General Assembly.



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Recommendation 6 – Review Impact of Gaps in Service

- Request the Commission on Youth to continue its Advisory Group on Alternative Education Options and to invite representatives from all child-serving agencies. The Advisory Group will work to evaluate gaps in service in alternative education placements, as well as the reasons that students are not offered educational services. A report on the findings from the Advisory Group will be made to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2009 General Assembly Session.