

Tennessee's Alternative Schools



Alternative schools provide educational opportunities for students suspended or expelled from regular schools, and in some instances for students who request alternative placement. They generally receive less guidance, are subject to less rigorous oversight, and have access to fewer resources than mainstream school programs.

Tennessee's alternative school programs serve a broad range of grade levels. Most alternative school students are in grades seven through 12; Ninth graders represent the greatest percentage of alternative school remands. The management of student behavior in Tennessee's alternative school programs varies from "get tough" to "student support." The attention local school boards give to alternative school programs varies significantly across the state. A 2005 OEA survey showed over 40 percent of superintendents identified alternative school programs as either "rarely discussed" by the local board or an issue lacking agreement among board members.

Report Findings:

- The quality of alternative school programs varies significantly across the state
- Many alternative school programs do not thoroughly assess the academic needs of incoming students
- Not all alternative school teachers are certified for their responsibilities in the alternative school program
- The criteria used for remanding students to alternative schools are broad and vary by school system
- Behavior management standards are not uniformly followed statewide
- The transition process for students leaving alternative school is underdeveloped or not followed in most programs
- Neither the Department of Education nor school systems systematically measure performance outcomes – dropout, graduation, attendance - of alternative school students

Alternative schools are often the last chance for the state's neediest students, but many do not provide adequate staffing, curriculum, and support services.

Recommendations:

- Require tracking of the operation and performance of alternative school programs
- Consider appropriation of funds again for alternative school pilot programs
- Improve collaboration between the Department of Education and alternative schools
- Review the quality of curriculum used in all alternative school programs
- Develop appropriate guidelines for discipline and behavior modification strategies
- Target alternative school staff for professional development
- Require greater systems of accountability for student outcomes in alternative schools
- Improve integration between regular schools and alternative schools

View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>

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Comptroller of the Treasury