



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION GRANT EVALUATION SUMMARY Fiscal Year 2007 (School Year 2006-07)

Massachusetts State Line Item 7061-9614 – Section A

OVERVIEW

About Alternative Education

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) defines Alternative Education as an initiative within a public school district, charter school, or educational collaborative established to serve at-risk students whose needs are not being met in the traditional school setting. For the purposes of this definition, Alternative Education does not include private schools, home schooling, General Educational Development (GED) services, or gifted and talented programs. Alternative Education may serve some students with disabilities but is not designed exclusively for students with disabilities.

Grant Purpose

Per state legislation ([Chapter 194 of the Acts of 2004](#)), funding for Alternative Education programs supports the provision of educational services to suspended or expelled students, as well as to students who are at risk of educational failure due to truancy or dropping out of school.

Components of high-quality Alternative Education programs and schools may include: community service learning (CSL), work-based learning, intense academic monitoring and support, small group learning (low student/teacher ratios), parent/family involvement, life skills training, partnerships with community-based organizations including local colleges, and/or flexible scheduling for academic instruction.

In Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07), the Department allocated a total of \$672,011 in grants among 11 districts, with awards ranging from \$42,160 to \$73,000. District grant recipients included Framingham, Hampshire Regional, North Adams, Peabody, Quincy, Salem, Westport, Weymouth, Greenfield, Wareham, and Worcester. In the 11 funded schools/programs:

- A total of 504 students were served
- The average daily student attendance rate was 83 percent
- No students dropped out

- On average, the following student benefits were reported to increase from FY06 to FY07:
 - Passing the MCAS (69% to 86%)
 - Participating in career development activities (59 % to 75%)
 - Participating in community service-learning activities (48 to 58%)

Department Activities

The Department provided ongoing technical assistance to the 11 grantees and facilitated a day-long professional development event, all of which offered grantees the opportunity to network and learn about a variety of topics related to continuous program improvement. The Department also provided information and technical assistance to other school districts interested in Alternative Education through the Alternative Education website (www.doe.mass.edu/alted) as well as through responses to phone and email inquiries and on-site technical assistance.

The remainder of this report summarizes data from the Alternative Education Self-Assessment Tool, completed by all grantees at the end of the fiscal year. The purpose of this tool is to enable Alternative Education administrators to assess their program/school's strengths and areas of weaknesses in order to make the necessary steps for program improvement. The tool is also intended to provide the Department with information on grantee progress and to assist with identifying topic areas for future technical assistance.

FISCAL YEAR 2007 GRANTEE ACTIVITIES

Organization and Climate

All of the grantees implemented activities that helped to create environments that supported the needs of students enrolled in Alternative Education programs/schools (e.g. establishing a program or school philosophy that is consistent with district and school goals, mission, and vision; holding all students to high expectations and standards; and recognition of each student individually).

Grantee Highlights:

- *Greenfield:* Used student input to create a mission statement which was referenced during parent and student meetings throughout the academic year.
- *Weymouth:* Developed a mission statement in conjunction with both middle schools. Staff maintained high academic standards in the programs that are the same as for the entire middle school population.

Students

All grantees implemented several activities related to encouraging student ownership over their academic progress and student involvement in continuous program improvement.

Grantees Highlights:

- *Greenfield:* Held daily meetings with students to discuss their concerns, enrichment activities progress, and interests. This time also was used to conduct academic and behavior reviews with students.
- *Peabody:* Shared academic records with students on a daily basis. Students regularly monitored their academic progress and credits earned with program staff. Furthermore, program staff received feedback from students, which was communicated to the program's advisory group, program evaluator, and school leaders.
- *Worcester:* Encouraged students to provide feedback to school staff regarding the value of Alternative Education school/program activities, as well as to discuss any difficulties with program staff.

Parents/Guardians

Each grantees implemented two or more activities related to engaging and partnering with parents/guardians to support students' academic achievement (e.g., providing parents/guardians with regular updates regarding their child's success in the program and providing workshops for parents).

Grantees Highlights

- *Framingham:* Asked parents to complete a survey evaluating the effectiveness of the Alternative Education program/school following each parent meeting. Also collected verbal feedback from parents during an end-of-year meeting.
- *Peabody:* Contacted parents at least once each week to discuss the needs and accomplishments of students.
- *Salem:* Invited parents to entrance interviews, disciplinary interventions and hearings, and conferences with teachers to facilitate parental involvement in students' personalized education plans.
- *Westport:* Maintained regular contact with parents regarding their child's progress in the program, hosted a monthly parent support group, and employed an adjustment counselor to assist with family issues and aid families in accessing social service providers.

Staff

Examples of staff-related activities important to Alternative Education programs and schools include employing and training teachers and staff who meet state licensure requirements, enabling staff to work as part of team to maximize student achievements, and participation in professional development opportunities. During FY07 each grantee incorporated at least four staff-related activities into their program.

Grantee Highlights:

- *Salem:* Convened weekly staff meetings with teachers, the guidance counselor, and administrator to formally discuss programmatic design, progress, and necessary modifications.
- *Worcester:* Enabled all Alternative Education program staff to attend workshops on dropout prevention and conferences on topics related to Alternative Education programs.

Curriculum and Instruction

Grantees implemented two or more activities related to equipping students with **instruction** that is individualized, self-paced, goal-oriented, challenging, and appeals to students' interests, as well as with **curriculum** that holds student to high academic standards in preparation for higher education and/or careers.

Grantee Highlights:

- *Framingham:* Placed all students in Honors, Advanced Placement, or College Prep. courses in preparation for careers and higher levels of education.
- *Greenfield:* Collaborated with the Career Center, which enabled students to explore business and volunteer opportunities in the community, and to identify their strengths in relation to job opportunities. Students were also given the option to earn credits towards a high school diploma through internships, work experience, and college courses.
- *Wareham:* Created a school built on the concepts of differentiated instruction and project-based learning. Developed courses aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and that integrated service-learning, internships, and job readiness activities.
- *Westport:* Developed and implemented Student Success Plans for all students in collaboration with teachers outside of the program.

Transitions to Careers and Higher Education

Seven out of the 11 grantees implemented one or more activities that helped students transition to careers and higher education (e.g. helping students research careers and complete personal assessments to promote career development).

Grantee Highlights:

- *North Adams:* Provided students with access to Career Cruising, a web-based career exploration tool, as well as to job shadow opportunities and internships.
- *Quincy:* Offered students the opportunity to take the Accuplacer exam, a test developed by the College Board, to help determine course selection. Students were also able to take courses at Quincy College for a reduced rate.
- *Wareham:* Helped students develop and maintain a job and community service portfolio of their experiences, reflections, and goals. Through collaboration with site employers, the faculty developed criteria for the portfolio aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- *Weymouth:* Gave middle school Alternative Education students tours of their future high school and the career and technical buildings. Students also visited local colleges to motivate them to start thinking about their long-term educational and professional goals.

Assessment

All grantees incorporated one or more assessments that supported the academic achievement of students enrolled in the Alternative Education program.

Grantee Highlights:

- *Hampshire Regional:* Assessed students upon entry into the program with Holyoke Community College's Ability to Benefit Test. Ongoing formative assessments were also conducted through a software program aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- *Peabody:* Reviewed the results of student formative assessments in weekly meetings with parents and staff.
- *Quincy:* Measured academic progress using multiple assessment formats including tests, quizzes, and presentations. Personal progress was measured through a behavior modification system in which students were promoted through five levels for good behavior. This system tracked students' success, using daily behavior report cards.

Personal/Social/Life Skills

All grantees incorporated one or more activities that developed students' personal, social, and/or life skills.

Grantee Highlights:

- *Weymouth:* Included a ropes program for students through the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office to motivate students to think about their personal goals and develop trusting relationships with peers.
- *Quincy:* Implemented a mentoring program with State Street Bank. Eight students met with adult mentors once each week for 10 weeks, participated in workshops, completed community service activities, and attended a Red Sox Game. The goal of the program was to help students find a lasting connection with an adult member of the community.
- *Wareham:* Increased the availability of counseling to address each student's individual interests, and provided regular sessions in conflict resolution, peer relations, anger management, and workplace etiquette.
- *Westport:* Included a semester-long life management skills class in the curriculum for all students enrolled in the Alternative Education program.

Community and Social Services

All grantees put into practice one or more activities that involved either establishing collaborative relationships with community service providers or assisting students and their families in accessing community support services and training opportunities.

Grantee Highlights:

- *Framingham:* Provided students with internship and community service-learning opportunities through community organizations. Also, community supporters of the Alternative Education program served on the Advisory Board.
- *North Adams:* Managed classroom teacher referrals for students to connect with external service providers to assist in the delivery of support services without stigmatizing students.
- *Worcester:* Ensured that workshops and informational brochures from community organizations were readily available on site for staff, students, and their families.

Facilities and Resources

Each grantee implemented four or more activities that helped to create facilities and resources necessary to accommodate group and individualized learning, technology, and private areas for counseling.

Grantee Highlights:

- *Hampshire Regional:* Provided wireless internet in the school building to facilitate students' access to technology, and used PLATO software to complement other teaching strategies.
- *North Adams:* Constructed new classroom space for the Alternative Education program. In addition, provided all students with laptops to enhance students' access to technology.
- *Salem:* Provided a private space for students and staff to minimize distractions from other programs and to promote a peaceful and confidential learning environment.

For more information about this summary report or Alternative Education, visit the state website, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/alted> or contact coordinator Jenny Caldwell Curtin via jcurtin@doe.mass.edu or 781-338-6839.