Massachusetts Alternative Education and Other Academic Options
Overview

The following are brief descriptions of education options available in Massachusetts, including those that are specifically designed for students who are struggling academically, who are at-risk for dropping out, or who are interested in returning to high school.

Programming availability varies by community and school district. In addition, most of these options are provided at the discretion of individual school districts and may not be offered in your community. This is not an exhaustive list; there are likely additional education options available in the state that are not described below.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS

Alternative Education programs and schools are an approach under the control of a public school district that may be offered to "at-risk" students in a nontraditional setting. Alternative Education sites provide a different pathway towards a high school diploma. "At-risk" students may include those who are pregnant/parenting teens, truant students, and suspended or expelled students, returned dropouts, delinquent youth, or other students who are not meeting local promotional requirements. Alternative Education includes self-contained public schools as well as programs affiliated with a school. Alternative Education programs/schools are not designed primarily for students with disabilities.

More information about Alternative Education in Massachusetts is available at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/alted/about.html

Alternative Education programs and schools are created at the discretion of each school district (Massachusetts does not have state-run alternative education options). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) maintains a list of Alternative Education programs and schools throughout Massachusetts (please note that there may be programs/schools absent from this listing if not yet reported to the Department). This list of Alternative Education sites is available at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/

- In the “Select Organization Type” drop-down menu, select “Alternative Education”
- Select a location in the “City/Town” drop-down menu
OTHER ACADEMIC OPTIONS TOWARDS A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

Academic Support: Academic support programs are designed for students who have not yet met the Competency Determination required for high school graduation. Student grade levels and subject matter eligibility varies by program, but may include grades 8-12 and post-12th graders (up to the class of 2003).

http://www.doe.mass.edu/as

Career Development Education: Career Development Education offers students a framework for gaining the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to navigate the myriad options available for post-secondary success. Research shows that quality Career Development Education also enhances academic performance. Career Development Education encompasses three stages that help students move from the cognitive to the experiential: Career Awareness, Career Exploration, and Career Immersion.

http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect/cde.html

Career/Vocational Technical Education: Career/Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) offers students opportunities for career awareness and preparation by providing them with the academic and technical knowledge and work-related skills necessary to be successful in postsecondary education, training, and employment. CVTE programs provide students with a curriculum that combines integrated academic and technical content and strong employability skills. A list of Chapter 74 Career/Vocational Technical Education programs in the state is available here:

http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/
http://www.doe.mass.edu/cte/

Charter Schools: Charter schools are independent public schools that operate under five year charters granted by the Commonwealth’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Note that some charter schools are also an Alternative Education school designed to specifically serve students at-risk for dropping out or re-engage students the previously left school. There are two main types of charter schools. Commonwealth charter schools accept students from anywhere in the state. Horace Mann charter schools are designed to serve students in the city/town in which the charter school is located. If the number of applicants to a charter school is greater than the number of spaces available, the school must hold a lottery to select students. A list of charter schools in the state is available here:

http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/
http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/about.html

Commonwealth Virtual Schools: A Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual School is a public school operated by a board of trustees where teachers primarily teach from a remote location using the Internet or other computer-based methods and students are not required to be located at the physical premises of the school. Each Commonwealth of Massachusetts Virtual
School determines what grade levels it will serve and what particular programs it will offer. Any student in the state can apply for admission to a Massachusetts Virtual School. If more students apply than there is space available, the school will hold a lottery to determine which students will be admitted.

http://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/cmvs/

Credit Recovery: Credit recovery includes a wide variety of educational strategies and programs that give high school students who have failed a class the opportunity to redo coursework or retake a course through alternate means—and thereby avoid failure and earn academic credit. Credit recovery can take place through a traditional classroom format, in an online or blended format, or through a project experience (e.g., work-based or service-learning). Credit recovery requirements are the discretion of individual school districts.

http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/massgrad/

Dual Enrollment: Provides high school students with the opportunity to enroll in college-level coursework on a college or high school campus while simultaneously enrolled in high school. The Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Program (CDEP), the only state-funded source for dual enrollment in Massachusetts, provides funding for eligible high school students to take college-level courses free of charge at Massachusetts public higher education institutions and earn credit simultaneously toward a high school diploma and a future college degree.

http://www.mass.edu/currentinit/currentinitdualenrollment.asp

Early College High Schools: Offer students a systemic blend of high school and college (scope and sequence of coursework) in a rigorous yet supportive program, compressing the time need to complete high school and the first two years of college (students can earn up to an Associate’s degree or up to two years of transferable college credit). There are six Gateway to College early college program in Massachusetts, which are specifically designed to serve students at-risk of dropping out of school or to re-engage student that had previously left high school. Other early college high school programs include those focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math).

http://www.gatewaytocollege.org/apply.asp
http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/stem.html

Extended Learning Opportunities: Extended learning opportunities provide time beyond the traditional school day to support learning and development in children and youth. High quality programs and initiatives can complement and enhance a student's school experiences, strengthen family involvement and engagement, provide time for teacher collaboration, and fortify school-community partnerships. Through a variety of initiatives and programs, many schools and communities provide comprehensive services for youth to develop academically, physically, emotionally, and civically.

http://www.doe.mass.edu/ssce/ss.html
**Innovation Schools:** The Innovation Schools initiative provides educators and other stakeholders across the state with the opportunity to create new in-district and autonomous schools that can implement creative and inventive strategies, increase student achievement, and reduce achievement gaps while keeping school funding within districts. These unique schools operate with increased autonomy and flexibility in six key areas with the goal of establishing the school conditions that lead to improved teaching and learning. A list of Innovation schools in the state is available here: [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/) [http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/innovation/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/innovation/)

**Service-Learning:** Service-learning is a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. It is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities. It is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students and provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience. [http://www.doe.mass.edu/csl/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/csl/)

**School Choice:** The school choice program allows parents to send their children to schools in communities other than the city or town in which they reside. Tuition is paid by the sending district to the receiving district. Districts may elect not to enroll school choice students if no space is available. [http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/schoolchoice/)

**Massachusetts High School Equivalency Credential**

Students that leave high school prior to earning a diploma may be interested in the High School Equivalency Testing Program (formerly the GED®) in Massachusetts, which is now called HiSET™. Official test centers operate state-wide to serve the needs of the adult population in need of a high school credential: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/hse/list.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/hse/list.html). To locate test preparation classes contact the Massachusetts Literacy Hotline at [www.sabes.org/hotline](http://www.sabes.org/hotline), call 800-447-4488, or go to [www.doe.mass.edu/acls/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/) and click on ABE and ESOL Directory for a list of programs.