



Study of Alternative Education Options

Update: Year Three

September 9, 2008

Leah D. Hamaker



Presentation Outline

- Study Mandate
- Study Activities
- Preliminary Issues
- Findings from Study
- Future Activities



Study Mandate – Year 1

- The Commission on Youth (COY) approved the following recommendations at the May 2006 meeting:
 1. Direct COY to explore data available at the Department of Education (DOE) to determine whether a problem exists in Virginia regarding the number of school suspensions and expulsions within Virginia public schools and, if so, to make recommendations to address the study findings.
 2. Conduct a review of alternative education programs for suspended and expelled youth utilized in the Commonwealth.



Study Mandate – Year 2

- COY approved the following recommendation at its April 2007 meeting:
 - COY will continue the study of alternative education program options and report findings prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.
 - Issues to be studied included:
 1. review of survey data* on local alternative education programs;
 2. school-based prevention programs and funding; and
 3. need for a second tier of regional alternative education programs.

* In 2006, COY conducted a survey of all school divisions to learn more about existing alternative education programs.



Study Mandate – Year 3

- COY approved the following recommendation at its April 2008 meeting:
 - Request COY to continue the 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 prior to the 2009 General Assembly Session.



Study Activities – Year 1

- *Reviewed expulsion and suspension data*
- *Reviewed state/federal requirements for school divisions' suspension and expulsion policies*
- *Reviewed alternative education approaches in Virginia*
- *Site visits of local and regional programs*
- *Survey of alternative education programs*
- *Convened Advisory Group*



Study Activities – Year 2

- *Completed analysis of COY/DOE survey*
- *Compiled survey results into a Guide*
- *Reviewed Virginia's school-based prevention programs and funding*
- *Assessed need for second tier of regional alternative education programs*



Study Activities – Year 3

- *Reconvened Advisory Group with representatives from Health and Human Resources*
- *Continued to investigate school-based prevention programs.*
- *Investigated alternative education options for students not succeeding in the public school system and at-risk of dropping out, including:*
 - *a second tier of regional alternative education programs;*
 - *private educational and other alternative educational options;*
 - *requirements for students who have fulfilled the pre-GED requirements, but are not otherwise eligible to test for the GED;*
 - *the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEPP) guidelines; and*
 - *special academies for over-age students.*

Study Activities – Year 3 (cont.)

- *Synthesize findings*
- *Develop recommendations*
- *Solicit feedback*
- *Present recommendations to COY
(Fall 2008)*
- *Prepare final report*



Study Activities – Years 1, 2 and 3

■ *Advisory Group**

- Department of Education
- Virginia PTA
- Virginia Education Assn.
- Association of Elementary & Secondary School Principals
- Department of Criminal Justice Services
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- School Safety Specialists
- Virginia Alternative Education Association
- Virginia School Board Association
- Association of School Superintendents
- Association of Secondary School Principals
- Association of Middle School Principals
- School Resource Officers
- School Principals
- School Administrators
- Alternative Education Principals/Directors
- Commission on Youth Members
- Just Children

* Virginia Dept. of Health, the Office of Comprehensive Services and the Dept. of Social Services added in Year 3.



Preliminary Issues

1. Review the number of school suspensions and expulsions in Virginia.
 - Prior research has confirmed that students who have been suspended from school are at a higher risk for other poor outcomes, including dropping out of school.
 - ❖ Three times more likely to drop out*
 - ❖ Leading indicator of incarceration*
2. Review alternative education options in the Commonwealth.
 - Alternative pathways to educational services help keep students connected to the mainstream educational system.
 - ❖ Regional alternative education programs
 - ❖ Local alternative education programs



Additional Study Questions – Year 1

- What do alternative education options in the Commonwealth look like?
- How do these alternatives serve students in the Commonwealth, particularly students who have been suspended or expelled?
- What can be done to better provide educational services to students at-risk of school failure?
- What does Virginia have in place already?



Findings from Study

- Students who cannot be served in a traditional public school setting may not be offered any educational services.
- There is a shortage of school-based prevention programs.
- Utilizing effective disciplinary programs help to keep students in school.
- There is a lack of clarity about alternative education programs in Virginia.
- There is no central point of contact for alternative education programs.
- There is a lack of guidance/standards for locally-created alternative education schools/programs.
- Tracking students after they have attended an alternative program would be helpful.
- An individualized plan for students at-risk of school failure would help keep students in school.
- There is a need to proactively explore other educational options for students such as career and technical education.



Suspension and Expulsion in Virginia

- The *Code of Virginia* allows for the removal of students from a class for disruptive behavior and requires all school boards to:
 - establish criteria for removal of disruptive students;
 - follow steps in reporting incidents of disruptive behavior;
 - establish procedures for written notification to a student and the student's parents;
 - offer guidelines for alternative education assignments; and
 - establish procedures for the return of students to class and teacher participation in the decision.

- A school division's *Code of Conduct* is tailored to the diverse needs of the school division.



Suspension and Expulsion in Virginia

- *Variation in School Division Disciplinary Policies*
 - Because school divisions tailor their *Codes of Conduct*, there is variation in policies among school divisions.
 - These differences affect how offenses are counted and reported, as well as the resulting disciplinary actions.
 - Suspension and expulsion rates cannot be accurately compared among school divisions.



Suspension and Expulsion in Virginia

- *Statewide Reporting of Disciplinary Actions*
 - The *Code of Virginia* requires school divisions to submit data annually to DOE on incidents of discipline, crime and violence.
 - DOE offers comprehensive training to school divisions on reporting and submission of discipline, crime and violence.
 - User guides and training are both updated regularly to clarify any reporting issues.



Suspension and Expulsion in Virginia (cont.)

- *Utilization of Suspension and Expulsion in Virginia*
 - Schools are striving to provide appropriate discipline to students while balancing public safety concerns.
 - A significant percentage of students are suspended or expelled due to “one time” bad decisions without any previous history of bad behavior.
 - Poor choices account for many of the problem behaviors (drugs, alcohol, threats).
 - Lack of parental involvement may have a significant impact upon students’ behavioral problems.
 - There is a growing “at-risk” population of students.
 - There are occurrences where suspended/expelled students were not offered educational services.*
 - Some students cannot be adequately served in a traditional school setting.

*Survey of Alternative Education Options, Virginia Commission on Youth, 2006.



Alternative Education in Virginia

- School boards may permit or require students expelled for weapons or drug-related offenses to attend an alternative education program provided by the school board for the term of the expulsion.
- School board policies may also permit or require students suspended for more than 10 days to attend an alternative education program.
- Alternative education programs are authorized but not required to be established.



Alternative Education Approaches in Virginia (cont.)

Regional Alternative Education Programs

- Virginia has 30 regional alternative education programs established to provide options for students who were suspended for violations of school board policy.
- These programs also accommodate students returning from juvenile correctional centers or those who are otherwise assigned by the school divisions.
 - 119 school divisions are served by these programs.
 - The General Assembly provides funding.
 - During the 2008-2010 Biennium, \$6,724,960 was appropriated in the first year and \$6,977,930 in the second year.

Source: *Virginia Board of Education Report on Regional Alternative Education Programs, 2008.*



Alternative Education Approaches in Virginia (cont.)

- Students served by regional alternative education programs reported:
 - academic improvements;
 - decreased violence, firearms, and weapons possession incidences;
 - decreases in substance abuse and property offenses; and
 - good parental involvement.
- 70% of students remained in school:
 - 49% plan to return to their home schools; and
 - 21% will remain in the alternative education programs.
- Regional alternative education programs appear to be achieving their program purposes.

Source: *Virginia Board of Education Report on Regional Alternative Education Programs, 2007.*



Alternative Education Approaches in Virginia (cont.)

- Regional programs are required to report data to DOE.
- There has been a lack of information/data on locally created alternative education programs/practices.



Alternative Education Approaches in Virginia (cont.)

- COY/DOE surveyed school divisions to request information on all available alternative education programs in Virginia.
 - 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)



Alternative Education Approaches in Virginia (cont.)

■ Recap on Survey

- ❖ 160 locally-administered programs/schools, with 46 located in Fairfax County.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 57 responding school divisions reported occurrences where disciplined students were not offered educational services.



Alternative Education Approaches in Virginia (cont.)

- COY published the *Guide to Alternative Education Options for Suspended and Expelled Youth* which includes:
 - local alternative education programs; and
 - regional schools/programs & privately-funded programs are also included.
- DOE will continue to publish the *Guide* and re-survey divisions in 2008-2009, with the Virginia Alternative Education Association and the Virginia Association of Independent Education Specialized Education Facilities.



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Findings from Study



Students Not Receiving 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.
- According to the survey, 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 students 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.



Students Not Receiving Educational Services (cont.)

- Students who are suspended or expelled and do not receive educational services fall behind and become disengaged from school.
- Time out of school increases antisocial acts, school vandalism, tardiness, truancy and the dropout rate.
- 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.*
 - In 2007-2008, 3,996 students were served by regional programs. The number of slots funded is 1,882.

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



Students Not Receiving Educational Services (cont.)

- In 2007-2008, there were 1,822 slots allotted among 30 regional alternative education programs.
- 26 of the 30 programs indicated that they would have placements for all slots assigned to each division in each regional program.
- 26 slots were transferred in four of the 30 regional alternative programs.
- Requested additional slots totaled 404.



Students not Receiving Educational Services

(cont.)

- Certain students have not found success in the traditional educational environment.
- No single program will address every need.
- Alternative education can serve as a proactive choice to students, rather than a “last chance” approach.
- Need for array of educational programs tailored to individual student needs.
 - Private programs – Project Recovery
 - Local initiatives – Roanoke Over-age Academy/Lancaster Phoenix Model
 - State approach – Regional Alternative Education programs, Career and technical education
- Advisory Group reviewing approaches
- Next meeting September 16, 2008



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.
 - In 2008, there was a 15% reduction.



Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs (cont.)

- Currently there are no state dollars to support prevention efforts in Virginia schools.
- In 2007 Fall Enrollment = 1,231,987 students
- Projected level of Virginia's allocation (Safe and Drug-Free School grants) = \$5,429,816.00
- Approximately \$4.41 per student



Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs (cont.)

- Virginia has an effective model already in place.
- **Student Assistance Programs (SAPs)** work with parents, school and community representatives to foster resiliency in students and interrupt behaviors that impede students' success.
- **SAPs** provide case management, substance abuse counseling, student assessment or pre-assessment, community liaison work and faculty consultation.
- The most common referrals are to community services boards, substance abuse counselors, psychologists, substance abuse treatment agencies, and the health department.
- Expected outcomes are improved attendance and grades, as well as promotion or graduation.



Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs (cont.)

- 36 school divisions have **SAP** services and served 297,700 students or at least 20% of the total student population.
- 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.



Shortage of School-based Prevention Programs (cont.)

- DOE is in the process of establishing guidelines for **SAPs** to promote uniformity and consistency.
- DOE is planning completion by June 2009.
- A statewide evaluation would allow for a more complete assessment of the efficacy of **SAPs**.



Effective Disciplinary Programs in Virginia's Schools

- Traditional disciplinary practices do not always affect desired outcomes.
- Evidence exists that imposing negative consequences for unacceptable behavior can increase antisocial acts, school vandalism, tardiness and truancy, and the dropout rate.
 - Suspension provides little more than a respite from the student's academic or behavior problems.
 - Student typically do not return to school with a more positive attitude or increased enthusiasm toward learning.
 - With each suspension, the probability increases that the student will fall further behind academically, which only serves to trigger more misbehavior to escape further classroom frustration or failure.



Effective Disciplinary Programs in Virginia's Schools (cont.)

Effective School-wide Discipline in Virginia schools

- There are 101 schools participating from first two cohorts – 29 school divisions:
 - 2 primary
 - 50 elementary
 - 3 elementary/middle
 - 35 middle
 - 10 high
 - 1 alternative education
- 53 schools in cohort group one reported a decrease in discipline referrals to the principal's office from 913 in 2007 to 562 in 2008.
- Graham Park Middle School in Prince William County had a reduction of nearly 500 discipline referrals (about 20%) from the previous year.

Source: Virginia Department of Education, 2008.



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Effective Disciplinary Programs in Virginia's Schools

(cont.)

- Results of implementing *effective schoolwide discipline* in Virginia:
 - one middle/high school reduced the number of discipline referrals by two-thirds;
 - another middle school saved the equivalent of 20 eight-hour days;
 - teachers gained 430 more hours of instruction time;
 - statewide achievement scores increased over a four-year period; and
 - the number of elementary school students who met state achievement standards in reading increased from 20% to 79% over a four-year period.*



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Effective Disciplinary Programs in Virginia's Schools (cont.)

- DOE has held awareness sessions and distributed information to divisions about this program (Supts. Memo #107, April 25, 2008).
- DOE works with schools to implement this program on a voluntary basis.
- Participation has grown from 66 schools in 29 divisions in 2006 to 102 in 33 divisions as of July 2008.
- A third cohort will join this fall.
- Other evidence-based disciplinary programs in Virginia are being successfully implemented.



Lack of Clarity about Alternative Education

- 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 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.

* 8VAC20-330-10



Lack of Clarity about Alternative Education (cont.)

- The Virginia Alternative Education Association has researched alternative education definitions.
- The following language is their recommendation:
 - *Alternative Education is any non-traditional educational program and/or service that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.*
 - *They may include but are not limited to:*
 - ❖ *ISAEF (Individual Student Alternative Education Plan program for 16 & 17 year olds)*
 - ❖ *GED*
 - ❖ *Detention*
 - ❖ *Pregnant and parenting*
 - ❖ *Academic Enhancement*
 - ❖ *Behavior Intervention*
 - ❖ *Substance abuse*
 - ❖ *Career Development/internship/apprenticeship*
 - ❖ *Transition to and from other schools/programs*
 - ❖ *Formal or informal education or training that occurs inside or outside the traditional school setting*



No Central Point of Contact for Alternative Education

- In Virginia, there is no central point of contact for information about alternative education programs.
- Local school divisions' alternative education programs are very diverse and not monitored by DOE.



Finding No Central Point of Contact for Alternative Education (cont.)

- Alternative education programs are on the continuum of educational services/dropout prevention.
- Improving coordination of alternative education programs allows for improved utilization and transition.
- Include programs related to dropout prevention, at-risk youth, prevention and discipline management.
- Advisory Group will address at upcoming meeting.



The Lack Of Guidance/Standards for Local Alternative Education Schools/Programs

- Local alternative education programs are very diverse.
 - 20% of local alternative education programs do not allow for students to earn verified credits.
 - The average cost per pupil was reported to be \$4,850.75.
 - Per pupil program cost ranged from \$100 to \$22,702.
 - Median cost was \$6,000.
 - Half of all local programs were entirely locally funded.
 - 25% of local alternative education programs operate less than 20 hours per week.



The Lack Of Guidance/Standards for Local Alternative Education Schools/Programs (cont.)

- Model guidelines may be helpful to offer consistency in programs.
- Local alternative programs are key components of dropout prevention programming.
- Guidelines for:
 - Instruction
 - Teacher/student ratio
 - Assessment
 - Parent/Community Involvement
- Advisory Group discuss at upcoming meeting.



Individualized Plans for Students At-Risk of School Failure

- Grades 8, 9 and 10 are the grades where the most students are lost and at-risk for dropping out.
- A plan similar to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) could be used to help students at-risk of school failure/disciplinary problems.



Individualized Plans for Students At-Risk of School Failure (cont.)

- DOE's Proposed Revisions to the Standards of Accreditation include provisions for a personal Academic and Career Plan.
- The Board of Education will hold five public hearings on October 30, 2008 to receive public comment regarding the proposed revisions.



Individualized Plans for Students At-Risk of School Failure (cont.)

■ *Proposed Academic and Career Plans*

- *All middle schools must develop and maintain a personal Academic and Career Plan, as established by the Board of Education, for each seventh and eighth grade student.*
- *The plan shall include the student's educational goals and program of study for high school graduation and a post-secondary career pathway based on the student's academic and career interests.*
- *The plan must be developed and signed by the student, the student's parent or guardian, and officials designated by the principal.*
- *The plan must be reviewed and updated, if necessary, before the student enters the ninth and eleventh grades.*



Tracking Students After they Attend Alternative Education

- Frequently it is unknown what happens to students in alternative education
 - Successful transition to home school
 - Remain in alternative program/school
 - Drop out
 - Leave but return
 - Acquire GED
- DOE student identifiers could be used to compare alternative education placements to students that had dropped out.
- This could help localities identify at-risk students and determine if they were coming back to re-enroll into school.
- Gauge success of alternative education programs.



Career and Technical Education Options

(cont.)

- Nontraditional educational options can help students remain in and be successful in high school.
 - High-risk students are eight to 10 times less likely to drop out in the 11th and 12th grades if they enroll in a career and technical program instead of a general program.
 - A quality career and technical program can reduce a school's dropout rate by as much as 6%.
 - Career and technical are less likely than general- track students to fail a course or to be absent.

Source: Association for Career and Technical Education, 2007.



Career and Technical Education Options (cont.)

- Returning to school is difficult for at-risk and disconnected students.
- Typically, these students have been unsuccessful in their original high school environment.
- Educational options that respond to students' diverse needs and circumstances can increase graduation rates by keeping students connected to school.

Source: Association for Career and Technical Education, 2007.



Career and Technical Education Options

- Virginia received a \$500,000 grant from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) to improve science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education in their states.
- Virginia's goal is to enhance Career and Technology (CTE) centers at the high school and postsecondary level in order to reinforce and increase Virginia's workforce.
- Need for continued enhancement as Virginia's statewide educational pipeline for skilled trades appears inadequate to meet future needs.



Upcoming Activities

- Site visit to Stafford County Public Schools in September – tour both regional and local alternative programs.
- Advisory Group Meeting – September 16, 2008 at 1:00 p.m.
 - Review findings and formulate legislation, budget language or any other policy recommendations.
 - Solicit feedback/public comment.
 - Present final recommendations to COY
- Prepare Final Report.