



Alternative Education Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ contains information regarding the Indiana Department of Education's (IDOE's) requirements for alternative education.

Number	Question	Answer
Definitions		
1	What is alternative education?	<p>Alternative education, as a grant program in Indiana, was established by the state legislature in 1999. School corporations may create programs for students in grades 6 through 12 that instruct eligible students in a manner that is different from that found in a traditional school. Alternative education programs are designed to meet the needs of highly at-risk students who are not succeeding in the traditional setting. In alternative education programs, students are provided with a variety of options that can lead to graduation, and are supported by services for themselves and their immediate families that are essential to success. While each program is unique, they share characteristics identified in research as “common” to successful alternative schools and programs, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maximum teacher/student ratio of 15:1;• Small student base;• Clearly stated mission and discipline code;• Caring faculty with continual staff development;• High expectations for student achievement from staff;• Learning programs specific to the student's stated goals and learning style; and• Community involvement and support.
2	Are there different types of alternative education programs?	<p>Yes. Alternative education types include, but are not limited to: alternative classrooms, school-within-a-school programming, separate alternative schools or programs, and second or last-chance schools or programs for students who are disruptive. Just as there are many types and settings for alternative schools, there are many delivery models based on the programs' philosophy and the needs of the students they serve. Some focus primarily on helping academically at-risk students become successful. Others may combine academics, vocational programs, and/or school-community partnerships to make school meaningful and relevant while preparing students for the future. Still others employ a behavioral intervention model to guide students back on the right track. In Indiana, the programs and models designed to meet the needs of disaffected youth are as diverse as the students themselves, but every program must address the academic and behavioral needs of the student as well as services required by the student, and the student's immediate family to meet the educational and behavioral goals in the student's Individual Service Plan (ISP), in accordance with IC 20-30-8-11.</p>
3	What is the difference between an alternative education school	<p>Alternative education programs are considered to be part of the traditional school. The program's accreditation status flows from this association. Alternative programs are included in their traditional school's School Improvement Plan (SIP), and test scores are reported through the traditional school.</p>



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	and an alternative education program?	Alternative schools have separate school numbers and must follow the same process as any school to become accredited. They submit their own SIP and test scores are reported directly to the school. Accredited alternative high schools are eligible to award diplomas.
4	What is an ISP?	An Individual Service Plan (ISP) outlines the educational goals, behavioral goals, appropriate alternative education program for the student, and the services required by the student and the student's immediate family to meet the educational and behavioral goals specified in the ISP. An ISP is required for each student in an alternative education program or school.
Identification		
5	What is the criteria to qualify as an eligible student in an alternative education school or program?	To qualify as an eligible student, a student must meet at least one of the following criteria, according to IC 20-30-8-10 : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intends to withdraw or has withdrawn before graduation, ● Has failed to comply academically and would benefit from instruction offered in a different manner from the traditional school, ● Is a parent or expectant parent, ● Is employed and employment is necessary for the support of the student or the student's immediate family, or ● Is a disruptive student.
6	Who determines placement of a student in the alternative education program or school?	Ultimately, the placement of a student is the decision of the school corporation. Research indicates students who choose to enroll in an alternative education setting have better outcomes than students who are placed into the programs or schools. Some programs have students complete an application and an admissions committee makes the final decision. Other programs have teachers, counselors, or administrators make referrals that are then reviewed by a panel or the alternative administrator. Still other programs are created as alternatives to suspension or expulsion, but still take parent input into consideration when making the placement decision. Alternative programs generally involve the parent in the intake process and try to take into consideration parent requests and concerns.
7	Can students be mandated to attend an alternative education program or school if the parents don't agree?	While parent and student concerns are certainly considered in the placement process, the final determination for placement rests with the school. However, students who disagree with the placement in an alternative setting may appeal to the governing body of the school corporation in which the student is enrolled. (See IC 20-30-8-12)
8	Can students over age 21 attend the alternative education program or school?	Yes. Indiana does not have an age limit for individuals to earn a high school diploma. Placement in the alternative program is at the discretion of the school district or LEA.
Alternative Education Staff		



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9	Do alternative education teachers have to be licensed?	Yes. All teachers in alternative education settings must be licensed teachers.
Alternative Education Program Requirements		
10	What is the minimum instructional time for an alternative education program?	<p>To be eligible for funding under IC 20-30-2-2. Sec. 2. (a) A student instructional day in grades 1 through 6 consists of at least five (5) hours of instructional time. Except as provided in subsection (b), (c), or (d), a student instructional day in grades 7 through 12 consists of at least six (6) hours of instructional time.</p> <p>(b) Except as provided in subsection (c), an instructional day for a school flex program under section 2.2 of this chapter consists of a minimum of three (3) hours of instructional time.</p> <p>(c) A student instructional day for a qualified high school (as defined in IC 20-24.2-1-3) consists of any amount of instructional time.</p> <p>(d) A high school student who is enrolled in at least twelve (12) credit hours of on-campus dual credit courses (as described in IC 21-43-1-2.5) is not required to comply with subsection (a) during the semester in which the student is enrolled in at least twelve (12) credit hours.</p>
11	Where can an alternative education school or program be located?	Programs and schools may be located within a traditional school, in a separate school corporation facility, in a vocational or career center, or in a community setting. Whatever the setting, all sites must meet health and safety codes and provide access to appropriate materials and technology.
12	Are school corporations required to offer an alternative education program?	No. School corporations may establish an alternative education program on their own, or participate in an area alternative education program. There is no requirement that a school corporation must provide an alternative to the traditional school program.
13	Must transportation to the alternative education program be provided?	No. Schools, including alternative education programs or schools, are not legally required to provide transportation.
14	May a student attend an alternative education program or school and the traditional school in the corporation at the same time?	Yes. The student can attend both settings. In order to be included in the FTE Report for alternative education funding purposes, the student must be enrolled and attending the alternative education program or school for a minimum of three hours each day. If a student is attending both an alternative education school (not a program) and a traditional school, the student may be enrolled in only one school, either the alternative school or the traditional school. This is important for reporting, testing, and funding considerations.
15	Do alternative education programs or schools take students who are on probation?	The placement of students in an alternative education program or school is the decision of school personnel and depends on the mission and admissions criteria for the program. An alternative education program or school may, but is not required to, admit these students. If juvenile judges want to court order placement in an alternative education program or school, there should be communication with



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		the alternative education administrator prior to that decision in order to ensure that it would be an appropriate placement and that the program was not full.
Supporting Academic Success		
16	Can certain diploma requirements be waived for students in alternative education programs?	Students in alternative education programs or schools must meet the same state diploma requirements as students in traditional high schools. However, if the school corporation has added additional local requirements for graduation, they are free to waive those additional requirements for students in the alternative education program.
17	Is there a separate course catalog for alternative school education?	There is not a separate course titles and descriptions document for alternative education. The Course Descriptions published each year also apply to alternative education programs including maximum amount of credits allowable.
18	Do alternative education programs or schools have their own graduation ceremonies, or do their students participate in the traditional high school ceremony?	Since most programs grant diplomas through their traditional high school, students in the alternative education program participate in the traditional high school ceremony, although some programs choose to have celebrations within the program as well. Alternative schools that award their own diploma have their own ceremonies.
19	Can an alternative education program or school award a Core 40 Technical Honors Academic Honors Diploma, or New Indiana Diploma with readiness seals?	Yes. As long as the students in the alternative program or school have completed the requirements associated with the diploma. Some small programs do not have the resources available to offer all the courses needed for honors diplomas and readiness seals. Students who wish to pursue honors diplomas and readiness seals would need to return to the traditional school for the courses not offered in the alternative education program or school, with the approval of both the alternative education program or school and the traditional school. Students enrolled in both an alternative education program and the traditional school need to be enrolled and attending the alternative education program for a minimum of three hours each day.
20	What are Graduation Pathways?	Beginning with the graduating class of 2023, students must satisfy at least one option from each of the three boxes in order to graduate. The three boxes are: 1) High School Diploma: Students must complete the course & credit requirements for the high school diploma, 2) Learn & Demonstrate Employability Skills: Students must complete a project-based, service-based, or work-based learning experience, 3) Postsecondary-Ready Competency: Students must complete at least one approved option.
21	Do students in an alternative education setting	Yes. Graduation requirements for students enrolled in alternative education settings are the same as those for students enrolled in a traditional school.



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	have to complete the Graduation Pathways?	
22	What is the New Indiana Diploma?	Per statute, the new diploma is effective for all graduating seniors in the 2028-2029 school year and beyond. The new diploma includes minimum requirements for every student, plus the opportunity to earn readiness seals aligned with their unique path. The new seals provide additional intentionality to maximize readiness and are designed to be permeable, allowing students to update their graduation plan and pivot, if their original interests and goals change. Students who do not earn a seal must still complete components two and three of Graduation Pathways. Resources can be found on the IDOE Redesigning the Indiana Diploma webpage.
23	How do alternative education programs or schools involve community groups and services?	Community groups often serve on alternative education advisory boards during their developmental process. They often serve the same population and may collaborate with the alternative education program by offering their services on site or through referrals, acting as mentors, or donating space. Many groups and businesses get involved in service learning projects with the alternative school or donate services or supplies.
Special Education		
24	May a special education student be enrolled in an alternative school where there are no certified special education teachers?	In the development of the Individual Education Plan (IEP), the case conference committee would have to recommend the alternative program or school placement as the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the placement to be made. The key issue is whether the services indicated in the IEP could be delivered at the alternative program or school. In addition, the teacher of record (TOR) requirement would have to be met (e.g. a properly certified teacher in the student's exceptionality area), though the TOR would not necessarily have to be physically located at the alternative program or school. If these conditions are not met, the school might be out of compliance, which could jeopardize funding or open the school corporation to litigation.
25	Is it legal to deny a special education student access to the alternative education program or school?	No. Access to the alternative program or school should be an option available to students with disabilities. That is, students with disabilities should not be excluded on the basis of disability. The case conference committee should make the recommendation based on what constitutes a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the LRE for the student. If the alternative program or school is that place, then the student should be served. Alternative education programs are not intended as special education programs so the case conference committee would need to determine if the appropriate staff and services are available and whether the student meets the eligibility criteria listed above.
26	How is funding affected when a special education student is enrolled in an alternative school? Do special education dollars	Though it might seem reasonable that dollars would follow the student, it is not a requirement. Rather, the state funding support generated by a special education student goes into the general fund and is drawn upon as needed, or in conjunction with other funding sources, to provide special education and related services. The federal funds generated flow to the special education planning district to provide overall administrative support and provide eligible resources (instructional materials, transportation, etc.) and related services.



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	need to follow the child to the alternative school?	
Fiscal		
27	Is there a funding formula for alternative education programming grant funding?	<p>IDOE Approved alternative education programs and schools can receive up to the maximum of \$750.00 per actual FTE as reported on the FTE Report each June.</p> <p><i>*It is important to note that the grant amount per FTE can vary each year due to the number of approved alternative education programs and the budget.</i></p>
28	Can a school corporation claim a student for both special education and alternative education funding?	An alternative program or school cannot claim funding for both special education and alternative education at the same time, unless placement in the alternative school is unrelated to the disability. For example, if a student entered the alternative program or school because she was pregnant (alternative education eligibility criteria) and she also happened to be a special education student, then the program could claim both alternative education and special education funding. However, if placement was simply because it was the LRE then students could not be counted for alternative education funding purposes.
29	What is the annual deadline for Alternative Education Program Renewal applications?	<p>The deadline for alternative education program renewals for IDOE approved programs is June 30 each year.</p> <p>New alternative education program proposal applications are accepted during a specified time period. Check the IDOE Alternative Education webpage, under Documents and Resources.</p>
30	What happens if I miss the Alternative Education Program Renewal deadline?	The annual deadline to submit an Alternative Education Program Renewal application is June 30. If this deadline is missed, you must submit an Alternative Education New Program Proposal to reinstate your program's approval. The Alternative Education New Program Proposal form is posted on the IDOE Alternative Education web page, under Documents and Resources.
31	Is there a list of approved expenditures for the Alternative Education Grant?	Please reference the Alternative Education Grant Budget Code Guide .
Data Reporting		
32	Where can I find information about Data Exchange reporting?	Information about alternative education reporting in Data Exchange can be found in the Data Exchange Knowledge Hub .
33	Where can I find a template for an ISP?	The template for an Alternative Education ISP is posted on the IDOE Alternative Education web page, under Documents and Resources.



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		Alternative education programs and schools are required to have electronic ISPs on file for each student enrolled in the program. Electronic ISP templates can be found in the Alternative Education Community Moodle.
Professional Development		
34	Where can I find the Alternative Education webinar slide decks and recordings?	<p>Slide decks and recordings for the Alternative Education webinars are posted in the Alternative Education Community Moodle.</p> <p>If you do not already have access to this Moodle page, the enrollment key is: altd101.</p>

For additional information, please contact IDOE's [Alternative Education team](#).

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