
Alternative Education Committee
A Community Advisory Committee to the Chief Academic Officer
Seattle School District

FINAL REPORT

June 15, 2007

Submitted By:
Elaine Packard
Chair

“Nothing is possible without individuals; nothing is lasting without institutions.”

Jean Monnet
prime mover, European Common Market

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Charge of the Committee:

- To develop a list of the quality indicators for alternative schools in the Seattle School District for alternative schools to use for self-study and school improvement. The list is based on “The 12 Key Elements of the Best Practices of Alternative Education” from the *Final Report of the Alternative Education Committee*, An Advisory Committee to the Seattle School Board, June 30, 2005, and Seattle School Board Policy C54.00 on Alternative Education, June 21, 2006.
- To make policy recommendations about alternative education.

B. Membership: Of the twenty-one nominations submitted, ten were selected to represent principals, teachers, parents, university faculty, students and Seattle Council Parent Teacher Student Association with a balance of differing gender, ethnicity, race, age, geographic and stakeholder interest groups. The ten members were an experienced and diverse blend of practitioners, parents, students and academicians in alternative education, kindergarten through higher education.

C. Outreach: Nominees who were not selected for committee membership and other interested parties were placed on our email advisory list. Committee meetings were open to the public. All committee minutes and handouts were available to the public.

D. Process: Each member of the committee, including the Chair, had an equal vote. Voting was by consensus.

E. Resources:

- *Final Report of the Alternative Education Committee*, An Advisory Committee to the Seattle School Board, 2005.
- “ ‘...well, that begs the question...’ A response to ‘Making a Difference: Alternative Education in Indiana’,” John Loflin, Indiana Alternative Education Conference, 2003.
- Seattle School Board Policy C54.00 on Alternative Education, 2006.
- edumail account and use of copier provided by the District.

II. Quality Indicators for Alternative Schools In the Seattle School District*

The focus of alternative schools has always been to help all students achieve. They serve the entire spectrum of children who come to them for many different reasons. They offer a range of options that serve the educational needs of many students and families whose needs are not met by traditional schools. While many of these indicators may be found in traditional schools, alternative schools will practice all of them on a school-wide basis.

1. Clear and Coherent Mission and Objectives

The mission and objectives of an alternative school go beyond academic achievement to include the intellectual, physical, personal, social and emotional well-being of each student.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
The school's mission and objectives address the intellectual, physical, personal, social and emotional well-being of each student.			
Students, staff and families sustain the identity of the school's program by working in collaboration to create and renew the school's mission and objectives.			
The school's curriculum, instruction, assessment and governance structures are aligned with the school's mission and objectives, within District parameters.			
Structures are in place to actively engage and educate both the school community and the District's central office staff to understand and support the school's mission and objectives.			
Students, staff and families understand, share and support the school's mission and objectives.			
There is a clear process to assess the school's performance based on its mission and objectives.			

* Based on "The 12 Key Elements of the Best Practices of Alternative Education" from the *Final Report of the Alternative Education Committee*, An Advisory Committee to the Seattle School Board, June 30, 2005, and Seattle School Board Policy C54.00 on Alternative Education, June 21, 2006.

2. Informed Choice

School choice increases educational effectiveness by responding differentially to diverse student needs and interests, enhances students’ interest in education and commitment to their schools, and contributes to the vitality and democratic structure of public education. Students, staff and the principal have chosen to be at an alternative school because of the school’s philosophy, mission, core values and practices.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven’t Started	Moving Towards	There
Students and families make an informed choice to attend the school, within the parameters of student assignment policies.			
Students and families inform themselves about the school by visiting, observing and/or making direct contact with a school designee (e.g. in person, by phone, or at an open house).			
Students and families request assignment to a specific school because they understand, share and support the school’s philosophy, mission, core values and practices.			
Instructional and support staff are at the school by choice and chosen by the school community, within the parameters of negotiated contracts.			
The administrative staff is chosen by the school community, contingent upon appointment by the superintendent and parameters of negotiated contracts.			
Staff understands, shares and supports the school’s philosophy, mission, core values and practices.			

3. Open to All

Assignment to an alternative school is available to all students in the District, within the parameters of student assignment policies.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven’t Started	Moving Towards	There
Assignments are made based on matching student need and program resources.			
The school’s orientation process includes special events that are inclusive and welcoming to all students and families.			

4. Continuousness

Students must not only be able to choose to attend an alternative school but they must also have the option to stay.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
The school provides a comprehensive academic program that meets District requirements and standards and is designed for students to graduate to the next school level.			

5. Shared Decision-making

In alternative schools there is a shared commitment to democracy as a significant element in the life of the school. School governance is open to all members of the school community. Decision-making on school-wide issues is informed by the school's philosophy, mission and core values. It is embedded in the curriculum and valued as part of the educational experience. Decision-makers are responsible for being fully informed about issues.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
Students, families, staff and administrators are all active participants in decision-making about the school's vision, mission, policies, rules, budget, hiring, curriculum and other aspects of school operation.			
Student, staff and family voices are equally valued.			
Structures are in place to provide equal access to information and decision-making in order to maximize community participation.			
There is an institutionalized commitment and plan to increase the outreach to and participation of all members of the school community.			
Students, staff and families participate throughout program planning, implementation and evaluation processes.			
The school administrators agree to actively participate in the collaborative decision-making processes of the school.			
Appropriate time is structured for the school community to plan and collaborate on decision-making.			
A structured class-meeting model is used to teach and practice problem-solving and decision-making skills in order to ensure democratic classrooms and prepare students for participation in school-wide issues and governance.			

6. Deeply Caring, Respectful and Safe School Culture That Creates Community

Alternative schools are likened to families because of the strong sense of belonging experienced by the students, staff and families. The relationships that are created emphasize personalization, acceptance and cooperation.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
The relationships between staff and students are authentic, supportive, compassionate, respectful, caring and trusting.			
Every student is known by an adult who serves as mentor and advocate. The staff is readily accessible.			
Opportunities exist for each member of the school community to experience success individually and as part of a group.			
School norms are well-designed, sustained collaboratively by the school community, made public, discussed freely and modeled by all members to create a caring, respectful and safe school culture.			
Power and decision-making authority are shared in ways that foster leadership skills and self-esteem in all members, create a sense of fairness and equity throughout the community and nurture positive relationships among its members.			
There is an emphasis on activities that develop interconnectedness and interdependence and build community.			
Staff creates and supports cooperation and collaboration rather than competition in the classroom and school.			
The school community recognizes and addresses social, economic and health issues that may hinder learning and/or inclusion in the community.			
As much as possible, the hiring of school staff will reflect both the diversity of the student population and the larger community of the Seattle School District.			

7. Social Justice and Equity

The program includes a focus on social justice and equity by actively recognizing the talents and hopes of all students and actively addresses issues of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism and other issues of discrimination. Cultural diversity is central to school decision-making, design and implementation to ensure personal success for all students, staff and families. Structures and practices are in place on a school-wide basis to address social justice and equity within the school community.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
School rules are clear, made public, discussed freely and applied consistently to guide behavior, monitor progress and manage the school environment.			
Social justice and equity are integrated into the school's formal and informal curriculum, governance structures and staff development.			
All school activities are explained, modeled and implemented with consistency that ensures full inclusion and comprehension for all students, staff and families.			
Outreach to families is culturally relevant, sensitive, accessible and inclusive.			

8. Many Ways to Learn

Curriculum and instruction are challenging and meaningful in order to actively engage and motivate each student to grow. The teacher's work is to learn about each student's needs, talents, learning style, interests and academic background and to create a safe community that supports each learner.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
Instruction is designed to provide opportunities for students to develop internal motivation for learning.			
The goal of the staff is to understand and respect the developmental, emotional, cultural and social characteristics of each student.			
Teachers design resources, activities and products to meet, enrich and expand the unique needs, interests, talents and learning style of each student.			
Class configurations are designed with students' developmental differences as the central criteria for organization; such as looping, multiage, or team-teaching for flexible grouping.			
Students and teachers collaborate to identify learning outcomes, activities and curriculum products.			
Curriculum is developmental and emphasizes inquiry, constructivism, inter-disciplinary studies and projects.			

Students have opportunities to develop the skills of independent learning.			
Students' learning is collaborative and interactive.			
Curriculum and instruction provide various paths, such as individualization, differentiation and/or self-pacing, to the same goal of meeting curriculum standards and fostering the development of each student.			
Curriculum and instruction draw upon community-based resources and learning experiences beyond the school walls.			
Teachers seek opportunities to include service learning and leadership development in the curriculum.			
Family members are encouraged to be active participants in their children's education.			

9. Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessment is created **for** learning. It is holistic and helps the student to develop a view of self as learner and a willingness to put forth best effort. Curriculum and instruction are designed to enable students to communicate what they need to know and why it is important. A variety of assessment methods provides authentic evaluative information to and about the student.

<i>Indicators:</i> Alternative assessment	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
is based on competencies that are teachable, socially-valued and address both common and individual needs.			
uses multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative evidence from both academic and non-academic areas that allow students to communicate or display mastery in different forms (e.g., performances, portfolios, projects).			
provides for the student's collaborative participation in self-reflection, self-evaluation, goal-setting and ownership of the assessment process.			
utilizes the observations of the student, teacher, familiar adults and peers to share information which will benefit the student.			
is descriptive and formative with focus on timely feedback.			
has standards that meet District requirements with rubrics that identify competencies that each student needs to succeed and avoids grades, marks or labeling that sort or stratify students.			
tailors the assessment to the individual.			

10. Caring and Challenging Teachers

Teaching in a personalized, student-centered environment requires teachers who care, motivate and challenge. Teachers balance support for the student with high expectations of the student. The focus is on helping students fulfill their potential as learners, thinkers and creators.

<i>Indicators:</i> Teachers	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
learn about students as individuals and as members of their families and communities.			
form and maintain with students authentic relationships based on compassion, respect, care and trust.			
communicate often and effectively with families.			
are receptive and responsive to students unique needs, interests, learning styles, talents and work habits to develop curriculum and instruction for their individual progress.			
develop a rigorous curriculum that builds upon student interest.			
help and encourage students to acquire the attitude and knowledge to meet their interests within the goals of the curriculum.			
engage in dialogue with students about ethical life and confirm them in developing their best selves.			
have the training, skills and proclivity to foster a democratic school environment by encouraging student voice and participation.			
possess deep knowledge of and passion for their subject matter and have a large repertoire of skills to facilitate structured and incidental learning.			

11. Alternative Scheduling and Attendance Policies

Flexible scheduling and attendance policies are designed, within the parameters of state law, to accommodate the academic and personal needs of students and also to help students take advantage of resources found both within and beyond the school walls.

<i>Indicators:</i> The school schedule is designed for	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
various and flexible blocks of instructional time.			
students to take advantage of resources beyond the school walls.			
community-building activities.			
independent study.			
substantial student decision-making regarding learning objectives and strategies.			

<i>Indicators:</i> Attendance policies are designed for	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
learning to occur outside the classroom.			
learning to occur outside the regular school day.			
graduation timing to be individualized based on the student's meeting all required competencies.			

12. Small School Community

A small school community is integral to and actualizes the philosophy, mission, core values and practices of an alternative school.

The implementation and embodiment of the preceding eleven characteristics are dependent on small schools as defined in best practice for personalized schooling and alternative education.

<i>Indicators:</i>	Haven't Started	Moving Towards	There
The school community is small by design.			
Learning and the school environment are relationship-centered and personalized by design.			

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The work of this committee needs to be carried forward by a standing advisory committee on alternative education with representatives from each alternative school as well as from other appropriate constituencies. We recommend that this committee convene at the beginning of the 07-08 school year. The committee will work in conjunction with District policy and direction and in collaboration with the Chief Academic Officer, central office staff, the Superintendent and the School Board to monitor and advise on issues such as:

- Identification of the District's alternative schools by the end of the first quarter of the 07-08 school year.
- Support for alternative schools to continue creative and experimental pedagogical and structural practices.
- A District group or administrator to advocate, inform and lead on alternative education issues.
- A job description for alternative school principal to assure building leadership that supports the school's philosophy and practices.
- Access and support to design, collect and disseminate research on alternative school practices.
- Informational outreach to District staff, the School Board and the public-at-large to improve understanding and support of alternative education.
- Student assignment and enrollment policies to maximize equitable access to alternative schools.
- Facilities that support the school's program needs and preserve its individual identity.

IV. CONCLUSION

This committee recognizes the District's consistent and stated support of alternative education, most recently affirmed in School Board Policy C54.00, adopted June 21, 2006.

It is our hope that alternative schools will embrace this report as a resource and that District leaders will use it to more fully understand the best practices of alternative education and the policies that are necessary to support and sustain the strong cohort of alternative schools in our District.

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VI. APPENDIX A

SEATTLE SCHOOL BOARD POLICY C54.00[†]

It is the policy of the Seattle School Board to affirm our commitment to academic achievement for all students by offering a system of traditional and alternative education within the Seattle School District. These offerings will enable students to maximize their opportunities for meeting high standards and to develop their potential in the most effective education settings for the individual student.

In order to affirm and strengthen alternative education throughout the District, the District will provide assistance in areas such as communications, budget, or technology, designed to maintain and expand effective alternative schools at all grade levels.

While alternative schools share many values with other schools the following characteristics in combination define alternative schools as unique:

1. Students, families and staff share and support the school's philosophy, values, practices and mission to educate the "whole" child in a community based on a high degree of personalization.

Indicators:

- Students and families have informed themselves about an alternative school and requested placement.
- Instructional, support and administrative staff are at the school by choice.

2. Program design includes a shared decision making model.

Indicators:

- School community participates in the selection of instructional, support and administrative staff.
- Students, families, instructional staff and principal collaborate in decision making about the school's vision, mission, policies, rules, budget and curriculum.
- Families, staff and students, as age-appropriate, have equal voice.
- Students, families and staff participate throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation processes.
- Structures are in place to provide equal access to information and decision-making to all stakeholders.
- All school community members have the opportunity and are encouraged to participate in decision-making.

[†] Adopted June 21, 2006.

3. Utilization of alternative assessment, which meets district requirements, that is tailored to the individual student and avoids grades, marks or labels that compare and stratify students.

Indicators:

- Is based on competencies (academic, social and emotional) that are worthwhile, teachable and socially valued.
- Is based on high standards that value both common and individual needs.
- Uses multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative evidence from both academic and non-academic areas.
- Includes descriptive and formative assessments that allow students to communicate or display mastery in different forms to authentic audiences.
- Provides for the student's collaborative participation in self-reflection and evaluation, goal setting and ownership of the assessment process.
- Depends upon the observations of familiar adults (teachers, families) in the child's life to provide convergent data on real-life functioning.

4. Curriculum is guided by the learning interests, strengths, style and needs of individual students.

Indicators:

- Teachers design instruction according to the developmental, emotional, cultural and social characteristics of their students that make each learner unique.
- Students and teachers collaborate to define learning outcomes and curriculum products.
- Students have opportunities to develop the skills of independent learning.
- Curriculum is integrated, inquiry-based, and linked to the investigation of projects.
- Teachers seek opportunities to include service learning and leadership development in the curriculum.
- Fieldwork supports and enriches building-based learning activities.
- Learning draws upon community-based resources and learning experiences beyond the school walls as needed to meet student needs.
- Class configurations designed to accommodate developmental differences such as looping or multi-aged.
- Learning is collaborative, cooperative and interactive; developing students' intrinsic motivation.

5. The program includes a focus on social justice and equity by actively recognizing the talents and hopes of all students and actively addresses issues of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and other issues of discrimination.

V. APPENDIX B

Members:

Elaine Packard, Chair, Retired High School Principal, The Nova Project
Elaine Schmidt, Co-chair, High School Parent, The Nova Project; SCPTSA
Lynn Beebe, Elementary School Teacher, Summit K-12
Carmen DiDomenico, Middle School Teacher, AS#1
Alex Kocmierski, High School Student, The Nova Project
Gordon MacDougall, High School Teacher, John Marshall
John Miner, Elementary School Principal, AEII
Jodee Reed, K-8 Principal, Salmon Bay
Rita Smilkstein, Faculty, Western Washington University
Sheri Toussaint, Elementary and Middle School Parent, TOPS

Diane Solvang-Angell, Secretary

Meeting Schedule:

November 14, 2006	April 24, 2007
December 12, 2006	May 1, 2007
January 9, 2007	May 8, 2007
January 23, 2007	May 15, 2007
February 13, 2007	May 22, 2007
February 27, 2007	May 29, 2007
March 13, 2007	June 5, 2007
March 27, 2007	June 12, 2007
April 17, 2007	

Meetings held at the John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence, 4:15-6:15 p.m.