Alternative School Encyclopedia Article

Alternative School

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Alternative School

Public or private school that employs a non-traditional structure or curriculum.

An alternative school is one that offers an approach to education that varies from the traditional structure of a group of students in a self-contained classroom learning from a predetermined course of study. Examples of alternative approaches include **nongraded schools,** here students are grouped for reasons other than chronological age or year in school; **curriculum-based** independent study, where each student pursues a unique course of study; and programs designed to manage behavior or other learning difficulties. The majority of alternative schools, according to the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools (NCACS), are private.

Some public school districts are establishing alternative schools to educate **at-risk** students. For example, in 1982, one public school district outside Baltimore, Maryland, established an alternative public school to educate troubled teenagers. Special programs included a "positive **discipline"** program that awarded students points every period during the school day for behavior, attitude, and academic performance. Points could be redeemed for privileges. The school reportedly has been successful in establishing a disciplined learning environment for students who were likely to drop out or fail to complete high school.

The U.S. Department of Education encourage parents to consider the credentials of teaching faculty and a school's accreditation when selecting a school for their children.

For Further Study

Books

Koetzsch, Ronald E. *The Parents' Guide to Alternatives in Education.* Boston: Shambhala, 1997.

Periodicals

Hiraoka, Leona. "Face It: Alternative Schools for Troubled Youth." *NEA Today* 14, April 1996, pp. 4+.

Organizations

National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools
(NCACS)
Address: P.O. Bos 15036
Santa Fe, NM 87506
Telephone: (505) 474-4312

National Association for Legal Support of Alternative Schools
(NALSAS)
Address: P. O. Box 2823
Santa Fe, NM 87501
Telephone: (505) 471-6928

National Education Association
Address: 1201 Sixteenth St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: (202) 833-4000
website: http://www.nea.org