

Alternative High School Study Group Meeting Notes: March 2, 2009

Present: Kim Davis, Doug Neppi, Kristen Reed, Judy Card, Eric Traynor, Shane Christensen, Barb Goetchel, Sally Heaberlin, Ciel Friess

The committee divided up available best practice research on alternative education in pairs. The pairs reviewed together before reporting out to the group. Below is a review of common themes.

- I. Types of Alternative Schools
 - A) Type 1: Separate building that is developed around the needs of the students (WCC)
 - B) Type 2: Area or building whose purpose is to reform students over a short period and integrate back into a traditional school(4 Oaks)
 - C) Type 3: Building or area whose purpose is to fix students over a longer period of time and integrate them back into the traditional school (Orchard Place, Woodward Academy)
 - D) Type 4: Magnet or Vocational Schools
 - E) Type 5: Spaces within a traditional school (School-within-a-school, Alternative Classroom)
- II. Need for Alternative concepts and/or schools
 - A) 25% of all students drop out of traditional k-12 settings
 - B) Limited spots are available nationwide in alternative schools, approximately 200,000.
 - C) Only 5% of all out-of-school youths enroll in some type of alternative education program.
 - D) While graduation rates of traditional schools have decreased, the rate of individuals obtaining an alternative credential has more than doubled.
 - E) 48% of Hispanic students do not graduate. 50% are African American students do not graduate. 3.8 million students are not in school in the U.S.
 - F) The demand for alternative education is definitely higher than the supply.
 - G) Referrals statistics from VSW and VHS concur with this trend.
- III. Best Practice
 - A) Good communication between traditional and alternative high school

- B) Systemic alternative education structure with early warning signs and supports at elementary, middle and high school levels.
- C) Systems of Recovery—counseling, parenting classes, poverty, life skills, recover from academic failure, recover from being academically behind, drug prevention, forced to be adults too soon supports, and up-to-date resources.
- D) Academic structure—Focus on academic learning; relevant; applicable to life outside of school; tied to state standards and accountability systems; individualized and personalized learning plans; hands-on, project-based, and experiential learning; opportunities to catch up and accelerate knowledge and skills; access to college coursework, online classes, and self-pacing; credit awarded for competency not seat time
- E) Relationships, Rigor, Relevance
- F) Instructional Staff—Positive discipline techniques, positive relationships, high expectations, certified in content area, innovative and creative.
- G) Professional Development—academic focus, enhance teaching strategies, understanding of different learning styles and intelligences, develop alternative instructional methods, differentiation, methods to teach several classes at one time, involves teacher input, work with colleagues, opportunities to visit and observe teaching in other sessions.
- H) Mission and Purpose clearly defined and strong
- I) Leadership—strong, dynamic, engaged, competent principal, students and staff have a voice, rules should be few and simple and consistently enforced
- J) Size—Low teacher/student ratio (12-15 to 1) and small enough classes that encourage caring relationships in a building with 175-250 students.
- K) Facility—Clean, well-maintained, fosters, emotional well-being, sense of pride, safe, located away from high schools (neutral territory), close to public transportation.
- L) Community Relationships—link a variety of community organizations including city and other public agencies and the business community to provide assistance and

opportunities/partnerships, develop positive relationships with community, especially around the building

- M) Career development, vocational training, 21st Century Skills, transition planning and support
- N) Real World, Real Work, in Real Time
- O) Significant Parent Involvement
- P) Pacing—flexible schedule, year-long (Day, Night, and Summer School), with different options for different student hours.
- Q) Access to non-core activities and classes
- R) Support funding needs—high poverty rates, racially diverse, high special education numbers—should be funded above average per pupil rate.
- S) The alternative school should not be made to feel inferior, receiving hand-me-downs from other buildings. Stay away from negative connotations—accentuate the positive.
- T) Student-centered environment—social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of students addressed with a family-like atmosphere of respect (Climate and Culture)
- U) Advisory Program

IV. Data, Assessment, and Evaluation

- A) Multiple assessments used to assess student learning to accommodate a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences.
- B) Program Evaluation—implementation ratings, student outcome data, and surveys
- C) Extensive data-collection system
- D) Develop data-driven accountability measures

*The committee took a tour of WCC. We reviewed the needs survey taken by the WCC staff and discussed.

Next Steps:

- 1) Determined that we would review all the information we have learned and begin to think of facility implications of best practice to develop a “Best Practice Facility Implications List”.
- 2) Kim Davis will have students make a list of what they really like about WCC.

- 3) We will use this list and the needs survey to create a pro/con list for the WCC.
- 4) We will take a tour of Clegg Park and make a pro/con list.
- 5) Shane will contact a real estate agent for possible sites or empty plots for the last meeting.
- 6) All members are to keep their eyes open for possible sites.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 10, 4:30 at Clegg Park in the media center.