

TRANSITIONING STUDENTS FROM A DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM TO REGULAR CAMPUS

AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

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OBJECTIVE

Texas school districts are required to operate Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) to provide continued education for students removed from the regular education setting for behavior-related issues. Effective transitions from DAEPs to regular campuses are critical to long-term student success.

KEY FACTS

- ◆ Three states have developed comprehensive standards for operating alternative education programs that include details for transitioning students.
- ◆ The Texas Education Agency has established two standards to ensure students successfully transition from DAEPs to their regular campuses.
- ◆ Some Texas districts lack comprehensive procedures for transitioning students.

BUDGETARY IMPACT

The appropriation for the DAEPs was \$9.5 million in General Revenue Funds in the 2010–11 biennium. However, these programs continue to be funded from a mix of Foundation School Program and local Maintenance and Operations funds.

STATUTORY REFERENCES

The Texas Education Code, Chapter 37

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) are temporary educational placements for students who are suspended or expelled from the regular education setting. The goal is for students to return to, remain, and succeed in, their regularly assigned classrooms. Successful transition of students from DAEPs to the regular classroom is crucial to the students' academic success.

The Texas Education Code (TEC), Section 37.008 (a-1) (5), requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to adopt minimum operation standards for DAEPs, including transition-related standards. Transition standards address student transition back to the regular campus. Transition includes activities and procedures used to facilitate student placement between alternative and regular programs. Transfer procedures can include follow-up activities to track students after returning to the regular campus. The Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Section 103.1201, provides two transition-related standards. These standards include establishing a student transition timeframe and providing written and oral communication from the DAEP staff to the regular campus.

TEXAS DISTRICT PRACTICES

In 2010, the Legislative Budget Board conducted student behavior management reviews in six Texas school districts. These reviews found that four of the districts lacked comprehensive procedures to transition all students to the regular campus after the alternative educational placement. Teachers interviewed expressed concern about this process, stating that it affects the success of students at the regular campus.

Districts do not report their transition procedures to TEA. However, districts report student discipline data via the Public Education Information Management System. In school year 2014–15, districts reported 93,798 DAEP actions and 75,208 DAEP students. A DAEP action is the discipline act that resulted in the student being removed from the classroom. A student can receive multiple DAEP actions. The category of DAEP students represents an unduplicated count of students subject to a DAEP action. **Figure 1** shows the number of DAEP student actions by frequency of student assignment to a DAEP. These data show that, on average, from school years 2012–13 to 2014–15, approximately 19.0 percent of students returned to a DAEP multiple times.

FIGURE 1
STATEWIDE NUMBER OF DAEP ASSIGNMENTS, BY FREQUENCY OF STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS
SCHOOL YEARS 2012–13 TO 2014–15

SCHOOL YEAR	ASSIGNED DAEP ONE TIME	ASSIGNED DAEP TWO TIMES	ASSIGNED DAEP THREE TIMES	ASSIGNED DAEP FOUR TIMES OR MORE
2012–13	65,782	12,026	2,468	828
2013–14	62,935	11,365	2,270	763
2014–15	61,605	10,904	2,126	573

NOTE: Student assignments are unduplicated. For example, if the same student is assigned Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) twice, that student has only been counted once.
SOURCE: Texas Education Agency.

BEST PRACTICES

Some schools have established best practices that build on state requirements. For example, Austin ISD has established a formal transition process that includes employing transition facilitators at all secondary school campuses. Facilitators are usually staff on the regular campus who receive monthly stipends for this additional responsibility. Facilitators are responsible for coordinating the student's transition to the alternative program and helping establish a smooth return to the regular campus. Their duties include follow-up and continued support at the regular campus.

The National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) has established national standards in alternative education. NAEA standards define clear criteria and procedures for transitioning students from one educational setting to another. These criteria and procedures are essential elements of effective transitional practices. The Institute for Evidence-based Reform suggests that DAEP students transition back to the regular campus two classes at a time and attend the alternative campus during the other class periods. When students fully transition, students are required to check in with the alternative school teacher each morning for continued follow-up and support at the regular campus.

POLICY REVIEW

Researchers have found that transition practices can affect the academic success of students returning from alternative programs to regular classrooms. In August 2007, TEA issued a Policy Research Report, *Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Practices*, which presented an overview of program characteristics and practices in disciplinary alternative education settings. The report identified practices considered successful in these settings. Effective transition between the DAEP and regular campus was identified as a common practice of successful programs. Other studies of Texas school districts described in this report also found that an effective transition led to student success. The transition component often included follow-up and additional support to students after the students returned to the regular campuses. The Moore and King Study examined the Tennessee state system of alternative schools for suspended and expelled students. The results from this study showed that programs needed to develop more comprehensive transition processes. These effective strategies may include the addition of transition staff coordinators; collection of data on student outcomes; and ongoing communication between alternative and regular schools.

OTHER STATES

Other states have provided their districts with comprehensive direction on how to operate alternative education programs. Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee have all developed comprehensive statewide standards or guidelines to assist districts with operating alternative education programs. Each state has provided the districts with clear procedures on the transition process. The Mississippi Department of Education requires school boards to adopt policies and procedures that include a transition team for the student. This team follows the student during the process and meets with the student regularly, beginning with placement and after the student returns to the regular campus, for behavioral monitoring and support. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction established clear procedures and standards to ensure interventions and support strategies are available to facilitate students' transition success.

The Tennessee State Board of Education is required to provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure that students receive specialized attention needed to effectively reform students and prevent repeat offenders. The standards developed by the board require an effective transition process for students entering and exiting the alternative education program. These standards require a student orientation program to: develop individualized long-range plans for each student throughout the transition process; and establish a team of representatives from the original school, the alternative school, and the parents, to review referrals on transition readiness.

USEFUL REFERENCES

Texas Education Agency, *Policy Research Report No. 17, Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Practices*, 2007

National Alternative Education Association, *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*, 2009

Mississippi Department of Education, *Alternative Education Guidebook*, 2010

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, *Alternative Learning Programs and Schools: Standards and Implementation Procedures*, 2006

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