



Alternative Education Programs

Update to 2010 Evaluation Report

Problems Identified

- **Insufficient Performance Measures.** Measuring the performance of alternative education students is challenging because traditional performance measures, such as performance on standardized tests, may not provide a complete picture of these students' academic growth. Nevertheless, the state has typically relied exclusively on standardized tests to measure the effectiveness of alternative education programs.
- **Questionable Curriculum and Limited Oversight.** Several school districts have questioned the rigor of other districts' alternative education curriculum for their students. The resident districts have been reluctant to accept credits granted by these programs. However, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) staff have said that the department has neither the statutory authority nor the capacity to judge the rigor of an alternative education program's curriculum. Additionally, MDE does not apply the same standards to all alternative education programs.
- **Limitations on Which Districts May Provide Targeted Services.** OLA research showed that, on average, students in "targeted services," such as after-school programs or summer school, saw more growth in test scores than other students. However, MDE only allows area learning centers to provide targeted services. Because of this restriction, about 20 to 25 percent of Minnesota school districts have not provided targeted services.

Changes Implemented

- **Improved Performance Measures.** MDE staff have worked with alternative education programs to identify additional performance measures for their students, such as the number of credits students have earned and reading proficiency levels.

Action Needed

- **Allow All Districts to Provide Targeted Services.** MDE policies still limit which school districts may provide targeted services to their students. The Legislature has not acted to allow all school districts to provide targeted services and receive extended-time revenue, despite research indicating increased test-score growth for students in these programs.
- **Increase MDE Oversight.** MDE continues to have only one staff person oversee the alternative education program, which is administered through more than 500 sites statewide. Staff do not conduct site visits of alternative education programs on a regular basis or actively review the curriculum of these programs.
- **Allow Curriculum Review.** The Legislature should amend state law to permit MDE to review the curriculum used by alternative education programs as warranted.