

**Alternative Educational Opportunities
For Students Who Have Been Expelled:
Best Practice Guidelines for Program Implementation**



Connecticut State Department of Education

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Levy Gillespie
Equal Employment Opportunity Director/Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator
Connecticut State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 607
Hartford, CT 06103
860-807-2071
Levy.Gillespie@ct.gov

The expulsion of students from their school may be an indication that the students have intense educational needs. While students who are expelled do not have rights that exceed those of their peers in the traditional school setting, they may require more intensive supports to ensure their success and equitable access to a high-quality education. These *Best Practice Guidelines* provide a framework to support the implementation of high-quality programming for students placed in an existing alternative program or school or a different alternative educational opportunity created in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-74j, under the *Standards for Educational Opportunities for Students Who Have Been Expelled (Standards)* and the *Guidelines for Alternative Education Settings* (C.G.S. Sections 10-74j and 10-74k).

Framework for Program Implementation

This framework for effective program implementation consists of eight indicators for best practices regarding the delivery of educational opportunities to students who have been expelled from their school and placed in alternative education settings. These best practices are described within the following categories: (1) Program Characteristics; (2) Academic and Instructional Supports; (3) Climate and Culture: Discipline, Behavior Management and School Safety; (4) Counseling and Support Services for Socio-Emotional and Life Skill Development; (5) Responsibilities and Training for Educators: Administration, Teachers and Staff; (6) Parent/Guardian and Family Engagement Practices; (7) Transition Planning and Support; and (8) Program Evaluation.¹

As a reminder, and as delineated in the Standards (see p. 4), the program being provided to students should align with each student's Individualized Learning Plan (ILP), which should be developed at the commencement of the student's placement. Consistent with the Standards, *The ILP will reference student records with information relevant to the provision of an alternative educational opportunity, such as a student success plan, Individualized Education Program (IEP) under special education, Section 504 Plan, Individualized Health Plan, and/or other academic and behavioral data... The ILP must address the following:*

- *The student's academic and behavioral needs and appropriate academic and behavioral goals and interventions. Include the student's core classes at the time of expulsion and the student's current placement or progress in the curriculum of those classes so that the student has an opportunity to progress in the LEA's [Local Education Agency's] academic program and earn graduation credits, if applicable.*
- *Benchmarks to measure the progress towards goals and ultimately, progress towards graduation.*

¹ For Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: [National Alternative Education Association](#)

- *Timing and method for reviewing the student's progress and for communicating that progress to the parent/guardian or student. For most students, monitoring and reviewing the student's progress will include monitoring the student's attendance, work completion and progress toward meeting the relevant academic standards for particular coursework, and thus progressing toward graduation, if applicable. Such progress must be communicated to the parent/guardian or student with the same frequency as similar progress for students in the regular school environment is reported and communicated to parents/guardians or students.*
- *Provision for the timely transfer of the student's records both from the student's school to the alternative educational opportunity provider, and also from the alternative educational opportunity provider to the student's school.*
- *The possibility of early readmission to the school from which the student was expelled and the early readmission criteria.*

It is important to note that in the case of a student with an IEP, the planning and placement team (PPT) shall determine the appropriate services for the student during the period of expulsion, as well as the alternative educational setting, if necessary. The educational services shall enable the student to continue to participate in the general educational curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals contained in the student's IEP. The ILP and IEP should work together to meet the general educational and special education needs of students with disabilities who are eligible for special education.

1. Program Characteristics

Alternative educational opportunities that are designed to serve students who have been expelled should be designed in accordance with C.G.S. Sections 10-74j and 10-74k and demonstrate the following characteristics:

- A high-quality education that is provided in an emotionally safe, culturally responsive and physically safe environment.
 - The alternative education opportunity provides a student-focused perspective based on respect for who students are and the belief that all students can learn to make appropriate choices given the right instruction and climate. This is the foundation for the development of the ILP, which reflects high academic and behavioral expectations for students.
- Although placement is not necessarily a choice, students and their parents/guardians are active members of the planning and placement process and in the development of the ILP.
- Alternative education for students who have been expelled involves a full-time comprehensive experience comparable to what would be experienced at the sending school, which is unlikely to be fulfilled by a homebound or tutoring-only experience.
- High-quality alternative education occurs in a context of respectful, supportive, reciprocal relationships among the LEA leadership (superintendents and local boards of education), the alternative school administration and staff, as well as students and their families.

- Access to physical facilities or space that adequately accommodate students' needs, as well as those of staff. This includes the provision of adequate space to accommodate technology as a resource for students and educators and "privacy areas" for counseling and the delivery of community-based support services.
- As with all alternative learning environments, alternative education opportunities must be consistent with all local, state and federal laws and regulations regarding physical plant and environment.

2. Academic and Instructional Supports

During an expulsion, a student excluded from school should still have access to the curriculum. During the period of the expulsion, students who are on track for on-time graduation towards college and/or career readiness should be able to maintain their academic trajectory to the greatest degree possible. Conversely, students who are under-credited and/or academically underperforming should be able to accelerate their trajectory towards graduation and college and/or career readiness and receive more intensive educational supports. Academic expectations and goals of all students should be outlined in their ILP.

Alternative education settings should ensure that students' academic needs are being met through the implementation of a systematic and rigorous curriculum, high-quality instruction, appropriate digital and virtual systems, and a range of assessment and progress monitoring practices. These are outlined below.

Curriculum and Instruction

- All students should receive instruction based on a curriculum aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards (CCS).
- For students who are functioning below grade-level expectations, interventions to improve skills in identified areas of challenge should be implemented in the context of multi-tiered systems of support² with a focus in the area of literacy.
- Approaches, such as the frameworks for Mastery-Based Personalized Learning³, are encouraged due to the emphasis on the following:
 - rigorous college and career learning competencies;
 - high-quality instruction;
 - curriculum based on state content standards; and
 - learning based on authentic experiences and application of critical knowledge.
- Instructional practices include cooperative learning, team building, and other group activities to encourage the development of personal/social behaviors important to the success of the community.

² For information on multi-tiered systems of support: [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support](#)

³ For CT's Mastery-Based Learning Guidelines: [Mastery-Based Guidelines](#)

Digital and Virtual Learning

When appropriate for the individual student, opportunities for blended learning⁴ and credit recovery⁵ through online learning platforms should be explored with considerations for the following:

- Course content should be rigorous and aligned to state and local standards, including the CCS, but is flexible, allowing instructors to customize with additional activities and content.
- Course content should be aligned to the curriculum of the school from which the student was expelled, so that students may stay on track with grade appropriate coursework necessary for graduation. To address immediate questions and provide additional instruction, students should have access to a certified teacher as needed.
- Course design should be clear, incorporates multiple ways to engage in learning, and is organized in lessons and units that are aligned and sequential.
- Course assessments should be easy to understand and allow for timely and frequent feedback to inform teaching and learning.
- Students should be able to develop the prerequisite technology skills to access the course materials.
- Students should have access to ongoing teacher-directed learning and peer learning opportunities to enrich their online learning.
- Procedures should ensure that student information remains confidential, as required by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Courses should be updated regularly to adapt to changes in state and national standards and are facilitated by a highly qualified teacher.

Assessment and Progress Monitoring

- Educators should select assessments for both formative and summative purposes, to guide instruction, monitor student progress, design interventions in the context of a multi-tiered system of supports, and provide appropriate services to benefit the student.
- Staff, students, and parents/guardians should be able to clearly identify the purposes of assessment, which should be outlined in the ILP.
- Multiple measures should be utilized to guide student learning that are aligned with districtwide measures to allow aggregate progress reporting.
- Assessments should include all district and state standardized measures to identify student overall achievement, as well as student progress.

3. Climate and Culture: Discipline, Behavior Management and School Safety

Policies and practices must ensure the safety and security of students. Alternative education settings should consider the following:

⁴ For information on blended learning: [CTHSS Blended Learning Model for Delivery of Instruction](#)

⁵ For information on credit recovery: [Using Online Learning for Credit Recovery](#)

- Implement multi-tiered systems of support such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)⁶ that monitor growth and progress towards goals and may provide opportunities to reinforce students' behavioral successes through providing clear expectations and recognition of positive behavior.
- Review and address issues of bullying, discipline, safety procedures and the rules for students as a means to achieve a positive learning environment.

4. Counseling and Support Services for Socio-Emotional and Life Skill Development

Programming should be designed to meet the needs of the *whole child* to prepare the student to be a productive member of the school and larger community. To fully address the *whole child* needs of students who have been expelled and are placed in an alternative education setting, both the implementation of the student's ILP and the content of the general program should consider the following: growth mindset and the integration of culturally relevant social and emotional learning (SEL) to support the personal, social and behavioral needs of the students. SEL is the process through which students develop and apply culturally relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to achieve academic success, college and career readiness and pro-social development.

Growth Mindset

When there is a focus on student growth and development, students have greater self-efficacy and persistence⁷.

- Students should be encouraged to advocate for their needs and be fully informed about the requirements for graduation and readiness for college or career.
- Factors for students and staff to consider:
 - What are the student's attitudes and beliefs related to academic work?
 - Understand that these beliefs could have an impact on behaviors and motivation.
 - Understand behaviors that are commonly associated with being a successful student based on individual needs.
- Students and their families should be regularly informed of their progress and be able to continuously monitor their credits earned with regard to personal goals, completion and graduation.

Personal/Social/Life Skills

The development of students in the areas related to personal, social, emotional, behavioral, career and other essential learnings, which are not addressed by the CCS should be embedded in the program delivery and/or evidenced in specific course content that is culturally responsive to the students' needs. These areas are identified in the students' ILP and may include the following:

- Opportunities for mentorship should be considered as an opportunity to ensure that every child has a meaningful relationship with a trusted adult.

⁶ For information on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports: <https://www.pbis.org/>

⁷ Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine Books

- All staff, students, and families should consider cultural differences as critical to understanding personal needs.
- Critically conscious and culturally relevant approaches to academic and social-emotional learning should be integrated across the curriculum to support personal success within the alternative learning environment.

Community/Social Services

In an effort to support the needs of the *whole child*, all settings providing alternative educational opportunities should ensure that resources provided by support service agencies and relevant community organizations are coordinated to provide multiple support systems for both students and families and should include the following:

- Opportunities for mentorship and service learning, particularly if these were in place prior to the expulsion.
 - This will require strong partnerships among educators, local/ state agencies, and community organizations.
- Based on the resources available, a reasonable effort to accommodate the delivery of community-based support services to students and families; the need for such services should be documented in the ILP.
- Regular opportunities for students and their families to receive information and personal assistance to ensure access to relevant community-based support services.

5. Responsibilities and Training for Educators: Administration, Teachers and Staff

As instructional leaders, administrators ensure a quality learning environment for students that is compliant with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations and where students receive a high-quality, efficacious educational experience. Administrators work to ensure that staff members are highly qualified, choose to work in an alternative setting, and receive high-quality and relevant professional learning experiences. These are outlined below:

Staff

- Staff members display the value of high expectations for themselves and their students.
- Staff members are actively committed to building a trusting school environment and understands their position as role models for students.
- Their practices reflect a holistic perspective of care for students' overall development (i.e., personal, social, emotional, intellectual, life success) and create a climate of safety/security.
- Emphasis on the process of learning is valued, embraced, and implemented as the means for creating the primary motivation for student learning.

Professional Learning

As a part of their system for evaluation, each staff member should have the opportunity to participate in professional learning opportunities such as *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*, for self-improvement as indicated by their students' learning objectives. Administrators may prioritize the following areas for professional learning, as necessary:

- wellness/burnout;
- trauma-informed care, diffusion and de-escalation techniques, and SEL;
- building family-school-community relationships using research-based, culturally relevant, family engagement strategies for working with parents/guardians from diverse backgrounds;
- culturally relevant pedagogy and cultural competency;
- reflective practice;
- addressing the needs of students and/or families in crisis to be able to provide accommodations via the implementation of the ILP; and
- effectively collaborating with community-based support services and how to connect students and families with such support services.

6. Parent/Guardian and Family Engagement Practices

As a part of the overall philosophy of alternative education, family involvement should be welcomed and actively supported. While it is understood that a recommendation for a student's expulsion may limit parent choice, families remain equal partners. In this context, equal is defined to mean, "families and educators recognize that both bring valuable knowledge to the table. Their deep knowledge and skills are complementary, overlapping, and essential to ensuring children's success."⁸ Suggestions for family engagement include practices to ensure the following:

- Families are aware of the program policies and procedures, as well as information related to their children's educational program, curriculum and instruction.
- Families are involved in all decision-making processes for their children's learning and personal success to the degree possible.
- Structures for bi-directional communication are developed to promote the sharing of information.
- Timely and effective communication is presented in a format and language that the families can understand.
- In order to be equal partners, parents/guardians must understand their and their children's rights as it relates to the following:
 - privacy; and
 - procedures to file grievances resulting from their experiences within the alternative educational opportunity.

7. Transition Planning and Support

Transitions procedures are important for entry into and exit from the alternative education setting. Students should be enrolled in an appropriate alternative education as soon as possible after an expulsion. The following are recommended:

⁸ Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families: Connecticut's Definition and Framework for Family Engagement (Draft June 2018)

- Use the ILP for the following:
 - to formalize the expectations while placed in the alternative setting including expectations allowing an early return to the school from which the student was expelled;
 - to establish communication and coordination with the school from which the student was expelled; and
 - to assist in fostering a smooth transition back to that school for the students upon completion of their expulsion.
- Use documented admission procedures that help orient newly-entering students and their parents/families to expectations in the alternative education setting.
- Use exit procedures that facilitate ongoing communication between the school from which the student was expelled and the alternative education setting to ease the student's transition back to the sending school.
- Provide transition counseling and other services in the school from which the student was expelled to assist students, as they adjust to the emotional and social effects of reentering the schools.

8. Program Evaluation

Administration should regularly assess the alternative education program or setting to ensure that it is meeting the needs of students who have been expelled. Systematic program evaluations for continuous school improvement should be conducted regularly using the following data:

- program implementation ratings;
- student achievement data; and
- student/parent surveys.

Resources

These resources have been developed as a companion to the Best Practice Guidelines. They are organized around the indicators for best practices that are presented in the Best Practice Guidelines as well as an additional category related to educational opportunities for students who have been expelled. Additions will be made to the list of resources and will be available in the [Discipline in Schools](#) section of the Connecticut State Department of Education Web site.

Program Characteristics

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