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Alternative Middle School Models in North Dakota: An Overview

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Project Overview

- Inform policymakers and educators about alternative middle school models.
- Focus was on the 17 schools that received grant funding through ND DPI.

Schools Receiving DPI Grants

Beulah Middle School	Beulah
Horizon Middle School	Bismarck
Simle Middle School	Bismarck
Wachter Middle School	Bismarck
Devils Lake Central Middle School	Devils Lake
A. L. Hagen Junior High School	Dickinson
Ben Franklin Middle School	Fargo
Carl Ben Eielson Middle School	Fargo
Discovery Middle School	Fargo
Grafton Central Middle School	Grafton
Valley Middle School	Grand Forks
Jamestown Middle School	Jamestown
Mandan Middle School	Mandan
New Town High School	New Town
Warwick Public School	Warwick
Cheney Middle School	West Fargo
Williston Middle School	Williston

Importance of the Study

- Students who lack academic readiness or are chronically in trouble for behavior issues are at high-risk for dropping out of school.
- Drop-outs are more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system.
- Drop-outs earn less income over a lifetime than those who earn a diploma.
- Alternative middle schools are a way to meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the traditional school format.
- The state of ND and 13 school districts have invested significant resources into developing alternative middle school programs.
- The importance of determining the impact of alternative middle schools.

Alternative Middle School Programs

- Target students who are considered “at risk.”
 - dropping out of school, truancy, academic failure, social and peer issues, violence, crime, and emotional and behavioral issues
- Many alternative programs are closely linked with the juvenile correction system.
- Not only content-focused instruction, but also skills related to personal development.

Study Participants

Beulah Middle School	Beulah
Horizon Middle School	Bismarck
Simle Middle School	Bismarck
Wachter Middle School	Bismarck
Devils Lake Central Middle School	Devils Lake
A. L. Hagen Junior High School	Dickinson
Ben Franklin Middle School	Fargo
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Grafton Central Middle School	Grafton
Jamestown Middle School	Jamestown
Cheney Middle School	West Fargo
Williston Middle School	Williston

Study Methodology

- Structured interviews using pre-determined questions.
- Interviews were conducted via conference call, Skype, or face-to-face.
- Interviews were transcribed and coded for the following elements: program structure (location and physical space, staffing, population served and admission process), program goals and services, and program funding.

Findings

- Location and physical space
- Staffing
- Population served and admission process
- Program goals and services
- Funding

Location and Physical Space

Three different models were found among the nine districts.

1. School-within-a-school
2. Separate site
3. Contract with another entity

Staffing

Several different staffing combinations were employed involving the following:

- Social worker
- Certified teacher in a particular content area
- Certified special education teacher
- Paraprofessional

Population Served & Admission Process

- Extreme student behavior
- Academic remediation and support
- Student willingness to participate
- Parental support
- Numerous other interventions had failed

Program Goals & Services

- Program services focused on three areas
 - Behavior, social skills, and academic success
- Boys Town model
- Social worker for family intervention and support

Funding

Funding came from a variety of sources:

- District allotments
- State juvenile corrections system
- Private, community funding
- State allocations for alternative middle schools

Programs are expensive, and most districts are unable to afford the costs.

Recommendations

1. Alternative middle school educators should document processes that are being used in the alternative programs.
2. Maintain student records of achievement and behavior while in program to document impact of program.
3. Track the students after they leave the alternative middle school programs.
4. Neighboring schools/districts should consider sharing/pooling resources as needed in order to bolster services.
5. Broaden the service mission of alternative high school programs or build bridge programs to fill the gap between middle and high school alternative programs.
6. Allocate both state and local funding to support the development of middle and high school alternative programs, creating accessibility for as many students as possible across the state.