

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

The Board believes that parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions about the education of their children. In order to exercise that right, parents need to have choices in the kind of education their children will receive. Alternative programs, pursuant to Section 19 of the *Education Act*, emphasize a particular language, culture, religion or subject-matter, or use a particular teaching philosophy that may be made available where numbers warrant and when financially feasible. An alternative program is not a Section 11 specialized services and supports program, a Section 14 Francophone education program, or a program of religious education that is approved by the Bishops of Alberta and mandated by the Board for implementation within division schools.

The Board is committed to the belief that all students ought to have access to high quality education programs that ensure optimal student learning, achievement, and engagement in school. To ensure such programming, the Board relies upon the Superintendent to recommend alternative programs for schools based on demonstrated need and parent and/or student interest in such programs.

Guidelines

1. To sustain or discontinue alternative programs, the Board relies upon the superintendent to apply criteria as outlined in Administrative Procedure 280 Program Evaluation. According to AP 280, the Board will consult with the superintendent to discern whether and how such programming will continue within the jurisdiction.
2. Demonstrated need for alternative programs is based on the Board's assessment of a request by the Superintendent for such a program based on reports of parent and/or student interest in such programming alternatives. The Board may also consider alternative programming requests as made by parents or an organization of parents who may request that the Board provide an alternative program.
3. The Board may provide an alternative program where numbers warrant subject to availability of classroom space, and rules established by the Board.
4. Where an alternative program is offered within a school, the Board shall maintain the integrity and viability of the regular education program.

5. The Board may restrict enrolment in the alternative program if there is insufficient space in a school, or to maintain the viability or integrity of programs within that school or school division.
6. The Board may designate an alternative program to operate in a separate building or within a school building offering a regular program.
7. Alternative programs shall be under the direction of the principal of a school offering the program. However, a division certificated staff member will be assigned the primary responsibility for the unique operational needs of the division alternative program.
8. The Board may designate an alternative program to be an operating school. As such, parents of students attending the alternative program may form a school council pursuant to Section 55 of the *Education Act*.
9. Where a school council has been formed for an alternative school program the Board may delegate by resolution, specific duties and functions to the school council. These same specific duties and functions may be delegated to other parental advisory bodies by Board motion.
10. All staff employed or assigned to teach or work in the alternative program shall be employees of the Board, and:
 - 10.1 Enjoy the same privileges and benefits extended to all other employees through Board policies and existing collective agreements; and
 - 10.2 Shall be subject to all Board policies, administrative requirements and requirements of the *Education Act*.
11. A school providing an alternative program shall provide courses of study and education programs prescribed by the Minister or approved by the Board and may not use any course, education program or instructional materials prohibited by the Minister or the Board.
12. A school offering an alternative program shall be operated in accordance with the requirements of the *Education Act*, Alberta Education policy and regulations, and the policies of the Board.
13. Parents of students wishing to enroll in an alternative program must become familiar with the program philosophy and rules established by the Board.
14. Budget allocations for an alternative school program will normally be outlined in the Principles for the Basis of Allocations.

15. The Board will provide allocation for an alternate program based upon established budgetary principles.
16. In accordance with legislative regulations governing fees, the Board may charge parents a fee for the purpose of defraying all or a portion of:
 - 16.1. Any non-instructional costs that may be incurred by the Board in offering the alternative program; and
 - 16.2. Any instructional material costs that are in addition to the costs incurred by the Board in providing its regular program.
17. The Board, school council or other advisory body (as approved by the Board) delegated decision making authority with respect to an alternative program, shall provide six months notice that it no longer plans to offer or support the alternative program. Notice of less than six months may be accepted by mutual agreement.
18. An organization of parents wishing to implement an alternative program shall apply to the Board in writing no later than February 1st in the school year prior to the program commencement. The application shall provide:
 - 18.1. Details about the proposed program based on demonstrated interest by a representation of students through enrolment that makes the program financially viable;
 - 18.2. Projected enrollments in future years;
 - 18.3. Information regarding services and resources being requested; and
 - 18.4. Proposed arrangements for student accommodation and transportation.
19. A decision by the Board to approve or not approve the implementation of the program will be based upon the following criteria:
 - 19.1. That the program will improve student engagement in meeting all learning goals within the provincial *Guide to Education*, and those which have been locally established by the Board;
 - 19.2. That the program, through Board allocations and / or student fees can be resourced to the same quality as any program offered throughout the division;
 - 19.3. That board allocations will not detract from the ability of all students in the division to access resources that will assure their attainment of learning goals;
 - 19.4. That the program enables staff to be resourced in a working environment that corresponds to their particular skills, interest, and expertise;
 - 19.5. That the program maintains or enhances the quality of Catholic education within the division;

- 19.6. That the program may be assigned to a school that has space and resources to promote the program, where the program is also a cultural fit for the school community.
20. The role of the principal who administers an alternative program is key to determining that the rationale for program approval, as previously outlined may be sustained on an annual basis. Therefore, as per Section 197 of the *Education Act*, the principal may be requested to evaluate any approved Alternative Program and make recommendations to assure that the basis for program approval can be sustained on an annual basis. Such recommendations must be made in writing to the Superintendent or designate for review with respect to ensuring that such changes ensure optimal learning for students.
21. Once the Board elects to accept an alternative program as presented by the Superintendent, the Board will approve such programming at a public board meeting. Additionally, the Board may enter into a written agreement with a school council or parent organization requesting an alternative program, and the agreement shall:
- 21.1. Outline specific details regarding the provision of the program: and
 - 21.2. Specify the areas of decision-making authority the Board delegates, by Board resolution, to the school council.
22. The Superintendent shall report annually on the status of alternative programs to the Board of Trustees.

References: Section 11, 14, 19, 55, and 197, *Education Act*, *AR 94/2019 School Councils*, *AR 95/19 School Fees*, AP 280: Program Evaluation

Support Reference: Alberta ECS-Grade 12 Guide to Education, [Alberta Education Alternative Programs Handbook](#)