

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Alternative Education Overview: Continuation or Alternative High School

Lou Denti, Ph.D.
Special Education Program
California State University, Monterey Bay

~ Introduction, Session 3~ Lecture Notes

Objective: Students will identify the key academic and social support components of a continuation/alternative high school.

Introduction

Students enrolled in continuation education programs include students who are employed, have adjustment problems, or need a flexible educational environment. Continuation schools assist students in acquiring a high school diploma by offering a broad-based curriculum that includes personalized instruction; a work-study program; and intensive counseling, guidance, placement, and follow-up services.

The characteristics of the typical continuation school include small class size, an individualized open-entry/open-exit program, and a competency-based curriculum. In addition, students issued a high school diploma meet minimum competencies established by their local school district as well as state-mandated graduation requirements.

Objectives of Continuation Education

Continuation education programs are designed to meet the unique personal and educational needs of students who may have been unsuccessful in their previous educational settings. To ensure that students successfully participate in continuation education programs, schools must offer flexible programs based on an open-entry/open-exit system. In addition, schools must assess each student to determine his or her own personal needs and individualize instruction so each student can proceed according to his or her own rate of achievement. The objectives of continuation education programs include helping students to:

1. Earn a high school diploma, GED and/or High School Proficiency Certificate.

2. Become productive persons by convincing them of the importance of vocational preparation and by assisting them in acquiring entry-level job skills.
3. Develop a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal satisfaction.
4. Develop a sense of responsibility.
5. Develop a tolerance and understanding of a variety of viewpoints.
6. Engage in meaningful recreational and leisure-time activities.
7. Understand and obey laws and participate in constructive civic activities.
8. Understand and practice sound money management and become intelligent consumers.

Institutional Culture

Continuation or alternative education high schools provide a supportive environment for youth. The school itself is modeled after the comprehensive high school with an emphasis on individual assistance and independent study. Vocational and survival skills are addressed. Formal and informal counseling are of major importance in continuation schools in order to ensure that students will be successful upon their return to their local comprehensive high school. Positive working relationships with parole, police, and other community-based organizations are stressed. This is quite evident in the following best practice model.

Best Practice: Abraxas Continuation High School in Poway California

Continuation schools offer a viable alternative for youth with a curriculum that mirrors the graduation requirements at local comprehensive high schools. Abraxas Continuation High School is a good example of a quality proactive program to serve youth that are disruptive or at risk of school failure. Key elements of Abraxas include strong leadership, an engaging curriculum, academic courses, and support classes and programs.

Principal's Message: Abraxas Continuation High School

Life moves quickly and is even more complicated these days. Many of our traditional high schools have become so large that some students are unable to connect with learning and become at-risk of failure in school because of academic, social or behavioral concerns. Abraxas offers these students an alternative to school failure; a second chance at success in school by providing a small, caring and academically challenging program which is learner centered, competency driven, and outcome based. Abraxas offers a fully accredited high school curriculum and an opportunity to attend a full-day schedule of classes.

The students attend a minimum of four hours each day for a total of twenty hours per week. Students significantly behind in credits attend a five-hour day and a zero period class is offered at 6:30 a.m. for those students who have to work at a faster pace. Students study independently, in small groups, or in direct-instruction settings, using a contract-based curriculum designed to allow them to work at their own ability and pace. A contract is a written agreement between the student and the teacher specifying assignments that must be completed in order to receive credits for a course. Student-teacher ratio is 19:1. Small class size contributes to our ability to address a wide variety of learning styles, in a sensitive, relevant, and motivating. We provide a variety of programs to prepare students for success in future education or employment. The Work Experience program supports employment in addition to granting up to 10 elective credits per semester for hours worked. The Career Exploration program (required for all students) provides students with an opportunity to research careers, explore aptitudes and interests, and to learn job search skills. Students may then progress to the School-to-Work program that provides a valuable link between education and employment. In the 21st century, students must be provided the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them the opportunity to be productive, responsible and competent citizens. Abraxas offers previously unsuccessful students a viable alternative to the traditional high school and a real opportunity for achieving success in school.

Abraxas Curriculum

Abraxas bases its curricular program on State Frameworks, the Poway Unified School District Course of Study, and PUSD Academic Standards. All students must complete 230 credits for graduation. 150 credits of required course work is earned by completing independent contracts or by taking direct-instruction courses. 80 elective credits are earned either by course work offered at Abraxas or at other accredited educational facilities (Adult Education, Regional Occupation Program, and community colleges) or by successfully passing elective tests.

Our flexible program is designed on an open entry/exit system, which facilitates the placement of students based on their individual learning needs. To accommodate this policy of open entry/exit and a highly transient population, the curricular program includes both independent contracts and direct instruction. All required courses can be delivered by independent contracts so that students can begin a class at any time throughout the year and can complete the work at their own pace.

Courses

Poway Unified School District requires 230 credits for graduation from all four of its high schools. In addition, minimum proficiencies must be

met in the area of Reading, Writing Skills, and Computation.

Area and Subject Credits

English 35

Freshman level 10 (English 1 & English 2)

Sophomore level 10 (English 3 & English 4)

Junior/Senior level 10 (American Literature 1 & American Literature 2)
or (English Review 2) or (Toastmaster Public Speaking)

Career English 5

Social Science 30

World History 1 & World History 2 10

U.S. History 1 & U.S. History 2 10

Civics 5

Economics 5

Mathematics 20

Students will complete 4 of the following at 5 credits per course

(Business Mathematics 1 & Business Mathematics 2, Pre-Algebra 1 & Pre-Algebra 2, Algebra 1 & Algebra 2, Geometry 1 & Geometry 2,
Intermediate Algebra 1 & 2, or Algebra 3 & 4)

Science 20

Biology 1 & Biology 2 10

Physical 1 & Physical 2 (or Oceanography 1) 10

Health 5

Practical Arts 5 (Business Mathematics 1 or Business Math 2, or Small
Engine Mechanics, or Auto Mechanics 1 & 2, Photography)

Computer Literacy/Competency 5

Fine Arts/Foreign Language 10

Physical Education 20

Additional semester credits to total **230**

Classes and Programs:

Abraxas offers a variety of classes and programs to provide educational alternatives for the individual needs of our students. Each student is assessed to determine personal and academic needs and placed with a homeroom teacher who will individualize a program and prioritize students' goals, both academic and vocational. Our ultimate goal is to establish a sound foundation of personal and academic skills to build student self-confidence to assist them in becoming productive and contributing members of society.

Homeroom

Each student at Abraxas is assigned to a Homeroom. Students meet

with their homeroom advisors during first and fifth periods. Each teacher counsels his/her students about which subjects to take, calls home whenever the student is absent, talks to their students' parents on a regular basis, grades their students' independent contract work, and provides a family atmosphere for the students under his or her care. Besides this, s/he will teach three or more classes daily in a specialized subject area or areas.

Work Experience Program

The Career Center is a very busy place. It houses a homeroom, our Toastmasters Public Speaking class, Career English and the Work Experience program.

Work experience Education is a program designed for high school students with a full-time job of, minimally, 32 hours per week. The student must be approved for a work permit and our Work Experience Coordinator, or her Assistant, must verify the student's job status. They make on-the-job visits; keep records of progress and issue credit for work completed. Students must also attend a job skills class and participate in four hours of class a week at Abraxas. Students must prepare a schedule, approved by the coordinator, for their class time at Abraxas.

➤ **Chemical Dependency Support Group Program**

SAFIR (Supporting Adolescents and Families in Recovery) is a chemical dependency support group for adolescents and family members. Professional staff facilitators and trained peer group facilitators work together to develop alternatives to drug and alcohol abuse. Information about the disease is provided through group experience, sharing, support and guidance. We work in community activities by giving back through service. This group meets weekly and is ongoing for as long as the participants require the support and education.

➤ **Student Assistance Program**

CHARM School operates as one of the major components of the Abraxas Student Assistance Program. The Poway Unified School District Mission of "All Students Learning" drives this program. For learning to take place, the environment must be conducive to that goal. Students, who come to school and, for various reasons, disrupt the learning environment, not only interfere with their own learning but negatively affect the learning of others. We at Abraxas believe that school needs to be viewed by students as both a privilege and reward. Clear expectations for appropriate behavior need to be set and students who are unable or unwilling to comply will have the opportunity to attend CHARM School to gain these skills. Once students are able to

maintain appropriate behaviors, they will be placed back in their regular classes.

Any member of the Abraxas staff can refer students to CHARM School. Upon referral, parents are called and students are assigned individual assignments specially focused on their area of concern. No regular course work will be done while students are in CHARM School and all assigned tasks must be completed before returning to the regular program. Repeated referral to CHARM will result in further interventions such as In-School Suspension (ISS), parent meetings, schedule changes, and possible home suspension. Successful completion of assigned work and a positive behavior change will result in the student return to the regular academic program. The goals of this program are:

- To provide a short-term placement and intervention for students who are having difficulty following school and classroom rules, and thereby limiting their ability to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered.
- To help students refocus on academic achievement.
- To provide clear guidelines and education on socially acceptable and school-appropriate behavior.
- To return students to their regular classrooms with changed attitudes or to pursue further interventions as needed.

Promising Practice

Continuation/alternative high schools serve students who require additional emotional and academic support. Promising practices consist of the following:

- strong principal and supportive faculty that create a sense of family
- limited teacher turnover along with additional adult supervision and support
- clear curriculum with consistent instruction
- enhanced counseling, vocational, and employment training
- intense programming to meet student needs i.e., substance abuse training
- strong parallel educational program with local comprehensive high school so students can complete high school or obtain a GED
- social skill, social responsibility, and self esteem enhancement training
- flexible student centered scheduling
- special education services provided on site with a certified special educator and aide

- positive working relationship with parole and police and community based organizations