

# **Alternative Education Subcommittee**

Report to the Task Force

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## **Questions**

- A. What are the essential components of a quality alternative high school?
- B. What are the facility requirements for a quality alternative high school?
- C. “other thoughts and concerns.....”

## **Preface**

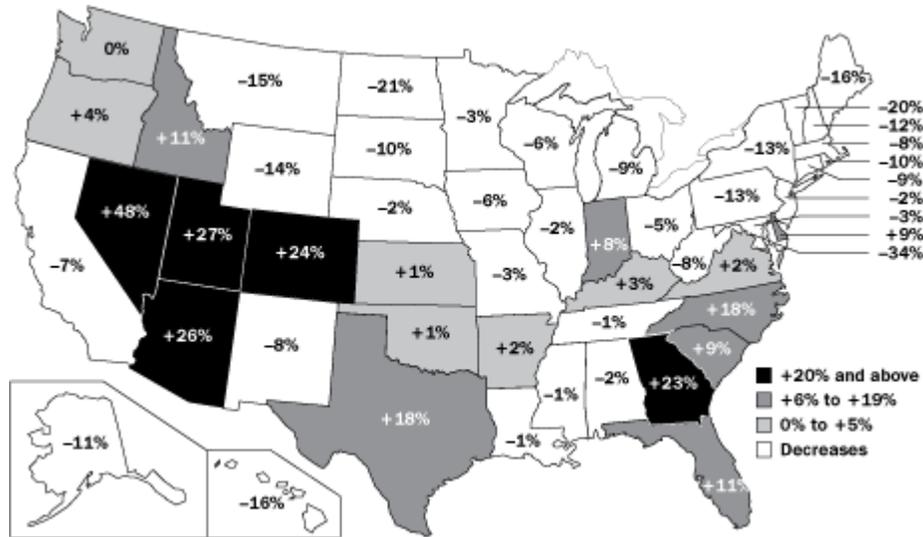
We must preface this report with the following statement. “We believe these questions are premature and can only be answered when the community has a clear vision of the importance of alternative education within Walla Walla Public Schools and can embrace a well-devised plan to provide it. This is more than a “community conversation” but, rather, an in-depth effort to educate, evaluate, and plan. It is certainly a community matter and cannot be addressed by the school district alone. We believe there will always be a need for alternative education and that alternative education is a positive and necessary option in our community. We believe there are many successful alternative education models in districts of similar size and demographics. We believe high school students will become more complex, not less so, and the clash of poverty, language, and family and cultural differences in this valley will always present students who are best served in an alternative learning program.”

## **Background information**

- Currently about 1850 students attend WW High School
- Currently about 452 high school age students attend one of the following schools: Lincoln [225]; Opportunity [90]; AEP/WWCC [107]; or The Juvenile Justice Center [30].
- In2005-06 about 74% of WWPS students [grade 12 cohort] graduated on time - 14% needed additional time to graduate and 12% didn't graduate [dropped out].

- Historically, a high percentage of Lincoln and Opportunity students are low income and/or have basic academic skill deficiencies.
- The number of Latino alternative education students is disproportionate to the general student population, sometimes exceeding 40%.
- The number of high school graduates in Washington State is not expected to change over the next ten years. The ratio of minority to Caucasian students is expected to continue to rise.

**Projected Change in the Number of High-School Graduates, 2007-8 to 2017-18**



SOURCE: Western Interstate Commission For Higher Education

- 2004-05 [Cohort] On Time Graduation, Extended Time [Continuation], Drop Out Rates

	On Time	Continuation	Drop Out
Walla Walla HS	[96 %]	[03 %]	[01 %]
Lincoln [Paine] ...	[49 %]	[10 %]	[41 %]
Opportunity .....	[29 %]	[11 %]	[60 %]
AEP/WWCC .....	[33 %]	[42 %]	[25 %]
<b>WW District Totals</b>	<b>[82 %]</b>	<b>[06 %]</b>	<b>[12 %]</b>

**Essential components of a quality alternative high school**

We discussed and researched this at length. We agree with the attached article (see link below\*). A “true educational alternative is based on the theory that all students can learn if provided with the right educational environment, these programs strive to meet students’ needs in order to help them succeed.” Exemplary programs of this type usually incorporate all of the following: choice in involvement; focus on the whole student; warm, caring relationships; expanded teacher roles; sense of community; and high student expectations. Successful organizational structure includes: small size; relative autonomy; comprehensive programs; counseling; safe environment; and separation from traditional school. Successful curriculum features

academic innovation and the school provides school-linked services to the community.

\*Article by Stacy Rosenkranz Aronson: > <http://www.sedl.org/policy/insights/n06/3.html>

### **Facility requirements**

This question cannot be adequately answered until a clear plan for alternative education is developed and approved. We do know, however, that Lincoln, in its current condition, is not an acceptable home for alternative education in this district. We also recognize different students require a different level of funding to be successfully served and many students who seek an alternative learning environment might cost more to complete high school than others who thrive in a traditional environment. Current resources, however, may not reflect this.

### **“.....other thoughts and concerns”**

- We spent a considerable amount of time discussing and researching the “plan” for students from birth to three, as appropriate, then pre-school and K12 education, with an eye to identifying special needs and providing early intervention. This broad look helped us better understand the challenges of students with special needs and of those students who do not thrive in a more “traditional” learning environment.
- We also discussed the place of vocational education in a traditional and in an alternative setting and felt this subject was best left to the vocational education subcommittee but definitely has a place in an alternative education strategy.
- We agree the entire community has an obligation to understand the challenges our children face and work together to address them. Education should be student centered and serve the individual needs of every student. Alternative education is not generally understood by community members and there will always be students who need it, including those who direct themselves to it and those who are not best served by a large learning environment but continue to languish there;
- We know students who ultimately seek alternative education begin to lose ground early on, sometimes before entering school. Intervention strategies should, of course, be based on assessments of individual students throughout their K12 academic career but alternative education especially addresses grades six through twelve. Alternative education options for students in middle school through high school must be taken seriously by the community and recognized as a viable part of the system, properly planned for and funded;
- The desire for an increasing number of students to study in an alternative setting speaks strongly about the size of the current, “traditional high school;”
- **We believe Lincoln has or will become, perhaps more by default than plan, the “second high school?” and**
- **If this is the case, shouldn't we actually plan for this and do it right?**