

Iowa Success Stories of Alternative Schools and Students



Iowa Association of Alternative
Education

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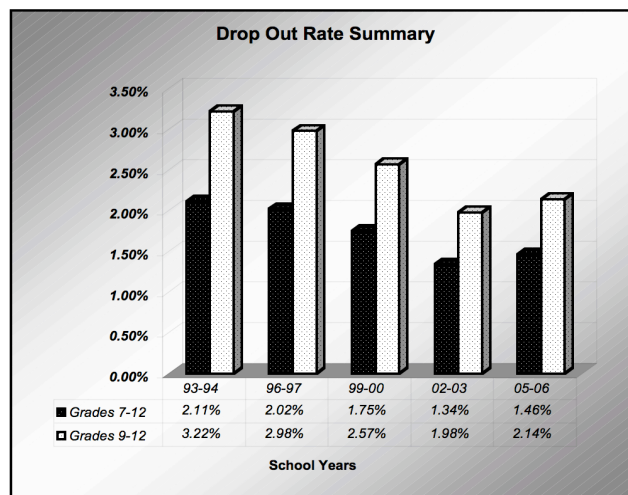
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Positive and significant changes are evident in those of Iowa's youths who have dropped out of high school or transferred to alternative learning environments apart from the traditional high school. Alternative schools have proven the ability to change students in a vast array of positive ways to complement other public school environments that failed to meet their specific needs. Over the past 30 years, the United States has successfully provided alternative education through multiple means: Schools within-schools, Magnet schools, Charter schools, Continuation schools, Multiple Intelligence schools, etc. The development and continuation of these alternatives nationally and in Iowa represents one of the most effective strategies for maximizing learning for all students. National efforts are underway to develop a comprehensive agenda of research to completely understand and utilize the positive aspects of the many initiatives that have emerged (Aron, L. & Zweig J., 2003). Students who had once given up find their way to colleges and universities. They become our leaders in business and enter into professional fields because of alternative schools and programs.

Alternative Education is about meeting students' needs. A direct correlation exists between school size and dropout rate. The smaller the school size the lower the dropout rate (Iowa Department of Education, 2003) (Barr, R. & Parrett, W., 2001). It is important to support alternatives in education to provide a means for establishing smaller size schools. Alternative schools, by design, need to be small in size and have teachers available to work with students on a personalized basis. Being free to teach to a certain individual while accommodating their specific needs can and has made the difference.

The potential cost of the student dropping out and not being productive in the future well outweighs the funding up front for alternatives in education. In an Iowa study published in 2007, it was found that on the average, \$386,055 in a lifetime of personal income is lost due to dropping out of school. Costs for incarceration are estimated at over five times the cost for education figured annually. The cost of dropping out to Iowa taxpayers is enormous. The reduced revenues per year alone were estimated to be \$607,000 for dropouts in 2004-2005. The unemployment rate among dropouts nationally was estimated to be about twice that of graduates of alternative schools and the increased risk of incarceration for dropouts in Iowa was estimated at ten times that of graduates of all high schools (Veale, 2007).

Iowa Dropouts as a Percent of Public School Students in Grades 7-12 and 9-12 1993-2006



Between 1982-2007, Iowa has experienced continued decline in high school dropouts (approximately 5,100 to 3,400 annually). The number of alternative schools and programs have continually increased during the same period (Dept. of Education, Basic Education Data Survey, 1982-2006) (Iowa Association of Alternative Education Historical Accounts, 1978-2004).

Why are alternative schools successful? They provide the attention that individuals need. The learning criterion is geared toward the speed and style of the student's learning. The teachers do more listening than lecturing. Responsibility for education is placed directly on the student. They must decide to attend, participate, complete assignments and plan for their future. The class sizes are small enough to provide the teacher-to-student attention necessary. The personal relationships made in the environment positively increases the student's attitude, work ethic, motivation and self-esteem.

To create awareness and understanding about alternatives in education, some testimonials follow with some facts about alternative schools and programs. Readers are encouraged to visit the Iowa Association of Alternative Education's website (<http://www.iaae.net>) for in-depth information regarding many aspects of learning alternatives including national agendas for continuing research and exploration of this successful initiative within all of education.

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The Need for Alternatives

Every day I woke up not wanting to go to school. I would get physically sick because I was so scared to see what my day would be like. Almost every day I was tortured by the other kids in the school: pushing me in the hall, pushing me down the stairs, putting me down, and treating me like crap. I put up with it for 17 years and

I am not going to put up with it anymore.

My son was on his way not to graduate. I remember him struggling since Kindergarten. In fourth grade, students were constantly picking on him. His self esteem was so low. I realized that my son had special needs. He was failing all of his classes, but now he is getting a passing grade in each class. I enrolled him in an alternative school where he has been attending for a few months. My son is finally getting the personalized attention and the respect he deserves. I truly believe the alternative school has saved my son's future.

My days prior to alternative school were very misguided. I used to skip school all of the time. When I did go to school, I was always behind on my work and didn't get along with the teachers. After speaking to my counselor, he mentioned CCILC as an alternative. After attending there for a few days, I felt comfortable in the environment and with the students. While attending CCILC, I felt I could succeed. Teachers continually gave me the confidence I needed. I finally felt like I was somebody. I know that if it weren't for the alternative school, I would have quit. I am a 16-year-old sophomore attending an alternative school with future goals.

Why Go to an Alternative School

Why go to an alternative school? Actually, I should first ask, why shouldn't you go to an alternative school? You shouldn't go to an alternative school if you think it will be easy, or you think you can slack off, or you have built up the idea that you don't have to do anything but goof off and get away with it. Please, if this is your idea, I ask you to invest your time in something else, because we here at Future are a group of intellects with many tales, dreams, and positive goals. We are a group of students not a group of dropouts, as some people who don't have a clue what we do here, may call us. We have all come here for different reasons but we are all still here for the same reason, to graduate high school and become a valuable addition to our community and society.

I've now been coming here for over a year and I love it. My mother feels terrible whenever she remembers how she judged this school

and others like it without looking into it first. I do better here because I can work at my own pace. I feel I learn more than I did at the high school because here you can't 'fall through the cracks'. You have to earn a 'B' on each assignment. A 'B' means that you understand things better than if you only earned a 'D'.

After witnessing years of continual negative reports from teachers about my son, it was time for a change. Experiencing a divorce has troubled him and since then he has been very independent. I received a letter from CCILC (Cass County Independent Learning Center) that prompted me to get him enrolled. I felt that my son could have turned into a 'bad kid'. The major factors in preventing this were the support, teamwork, and mutual respect practiced at CCILC. The remarkable change in his attitude toward his education amazed me. I had feared that he would drop out of high school as soon as he turned 18 years old. Now he is earning a diploma and mentions that he can see the light at the end of the tunnel. He now believes he will attend college. CCILC, you have my respect and admiration for the work you do. Thanks for being involved in my son's life.

I was a sixth grader and did well in school up to that point. During the school year I started slacking off and getting into trouble all of the time. This continued until the 10th grade. I started attending an alternative school and learned to deal with authority and to stay out of trouble. I am still able to work while I attend school because of the flexibility of the alternative school schedule. All together, I think it has been an advantage attending an alternative school.

I was attending a public high school and was very unhappy. I had thoughts of suicide daily. My grades were horrible and I often skipped class. I was given the opportunity to attend an alternative school and now I love it! I feel like I can succeed here. The teachers are very kind, understanding, and willing to work out any problem with me. I learn more in one day here than I did in a month in public schools. I have learned that the world doesn't revolve around me and that I am not the only one with problems. Our classroom is a very open classroom and that helps a lot.

I feel like I get the individual attention that I need to succeed here. When I attended public school I just shutdown. I fell so far behind in my work that I knew I would never catch up. I got into arguments with my teachers because it seemed they didn't want to help me. I stopped participating in groups because I thought that the teachers didn't want to listen to what I had to say. I was convinced that I would never graduate.

These are the reasons I enrolled in alternative school. The work

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seemed easier there because I could work at my own pace. There were group activities and hands-on projects that I enjoyed. I also built up the confidence to participate in class discussions that ended up being fun.

Attending an alternative school made me feel better about myself and have the desire to be heard.

I stopped attending public schools because I became pregnant and had a baby. I knew that I wanted to finish school but had scheduling problems. I ended up going to an alternative school because I was told that they would work with my schedule. I have attended for two years and have learned how to tolerate peers that I didn't get along with. I have respect for this school and also for myself. I have learned to help others by volunteering and have learned to appreciate the environment. I have learned that I like school. After graduation in 2004, I would like to continue my education.

I was a junior attending public schools. My parents were having trouble and fighting all of the time. That is all I could concentrate on when I was at school. I started coming to an alternative school because I wouldn't have enough credits to graduate in two years. I find it easier to learn in this environment because of the group activities and discussions. Here the students do most of the talking and are willing to help each other.

The Personal Rewards and Future Brought By Alternative Schooling

I have been a student at Walnut Creek for three and a half years. This is my senior year and I am leaning more towards my college goals with my classes.

When I was registering this year I was referred by the guidance counselor to a new class called bio and health sciences. I was really interested in taking this class. I was even more excited when I got my hands on the syllabus, which read that everything was going to be hands-on, including touring hospitals and doing dissections. This class opened the door for the opportunity to start an education towards a career as a Certified Nurse's Aide through the Mercy College of Health Sciences. The class, held at night for one month, prepared us to be CNAs. After completing the nursing class, the college would help you find a job. The nurse's class was mostly hands-on. We had to go to a nursing home where we received experience dealing with real problems and how to handle them in tight situations. In the bio and health class, we learned about microbiology, genetics, and human anatomy.

The rest of the year is going to be great and I'm looking forward to

the learning the rest of the year to help me when I attend Mercy College next year. I eventually plan to end up somewhere in the pediatrics unit at Iowa Methodist Hospital.

Last year started out really bad. I had a bad attitude and had some fall-outs with the school authorities. I decided to go to Tuesday Night Service Learning because my friend went there. The teachers were so nice to me. They made sure that I knew I could talk to them about anything anytime. So when I started going I started actually listening. I discovered that I didn't want to be a loser anymore. I went through a period of time where I had no friends, but I had good relationships with my teachers. Going to Service Learning every Tuesday made me feel good about myself. I started the STAR program and soon started to establish a good reputation. I started making the right decisions. By the end of the year I was making the honor roll and I gave up my habit of smoking cigarettes. I now have the desire to go to college and major in Education and minor in Speech.

Jeannie was struggling at high school. Traditional high school wasn't meeting her needs. She enrolled in an alternative school where she became comfortable, could work at her own pace, and had a listening ear. She ended up earning her diploma. The following fall, Jeannie enrolled in a local community college where she earned her CNA and LPN nursing degrees. She is now a cardiac nurse and aspires to be a member of the helicopter trauma flight team.

From Dropout to Success Story

There are great people in our country who started adult life as dropouts and succeeded because of continued support through a variety of options in public education. Included below are some examples of the great work that students, drop outs, can do with the right kind of educational support.

Walter Anderson:

Chairman and CEO of Parade Publications and past editor of Parade Magazine with distribution in 343 newspapers and circulation of over 37 million.

Vickie:

Going back to high school was not an option. After all, "no one cares about me there. They just see me as a freak." Vickie completed high school classes via the alternative school and also completed six semesters of college credit. Her confidence in

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becoming successful was demonstrated by her not wanting to accept anything less than “B” work and striving for “A” work on a continuous basis. From a green haired, sullen girl having trouble even getting to school to a young lady who wants to earn A’s in her college course.... a remarkable change in one year’s time.

Michael:

As Earnest Hemingway said in Across The River and Into The Trees, “Happiness is a moveable feast.” This to me is what Greenview is and will be. The people, the experiences, and insights of the real world are something Greenview gave me to become what I am today and helped determine what I will be in the future. I am a student at Hamilton College who is learning something new every day. I plan to go to a university next year to major in English with an emphasis in creative writing and literature. Greenview is an alternative school, which worked to change this once, drug using, smoking teenager into someone cleaned up and with a positive outlook on life. The school is flexible. The work that is required is within a time framework that allows one to be successful. Greenview is not merely another school. It is so much more. I’m thankful to have had a second chance in life.

Jeffrey:

Jeffrey arrived at Expo Alternative High School with a history of attendance problems. He more or less “got lost” in the large classes and enormity of the size of the traditional high school. His mother was an alcoholic who was rarely home and was unaware of the choices Jeffrey was making in her absence. Jeffrey became a father while attending EXPO. He realized he needed to graduate to earn a good living for his son. Jeffrey graduated and was accepted into the auto mechanics program at Hawkeye Community College. He thrived there. His grades were outstanding. He was offered a job at Pinicon Ford Motors in Independence, Iowa. He remains a highly trained technician at Pinicon and a productive member of his community.

Andy:

Andy graduated from Expo Alternative high School and enrolled in Brown College. He graduated with honors from Brown College in September of 2006. He began an internship in Marshalltown, Iowa at KDAQ 99.5 FM Soft Rock Station. After one week he was on the air. He now does the news, weather and sports at 6AM.

Nina:

Nina arrived at Expo Alternative High School after dropping out of the traditional high school. She was working full time. She graduated with a 3.75 grade point average. She enrolled at Hawkeye Community College and graduated as Valedictorian of her

class: 4.0 grade point. She earned her AA degree in general studies.

Nina applied at the University of Northern Iowa and was awarded numerous scholarships due to her outstanding performance at Hawkeye Community College. She earned a BA degree in psychology. (She also maintained working a 35-40 hour week and was a single mother).

Nina applied at the Drake University Law School and is presently on the waiting list. She will relocate upon getting notice of becoming a law student.

Nina has overcome obstacle after obstacle but persisted in overcoming barriers. Her fortitude and high intelligence enable her to persevere. The option to attend the alternative school provided a pathway to success.

Linda:

She enrolled in the Alternative School during the fall of 1975 after spending about a year out of school. She graduated with her class from the Mason City Alternative School in the spring of 1976.

Education:

1976-78: She attended North Iowa Area Community College and worked part-time as a bartender.

1978-84: Lived in Minneapolis, MN and worked in the hotel/restaurant industry. Became a shop steward for restaurant/ hotel employees’ union.

1985: Returned to school at the University of Minnesota. Double major in political Science History.

1988: Graduated from the University of Minnesota with honors.

1989-94: Worked in the Minneapolis area as a Crime Prevention Coordinator for Neighborhoods Inc., and a Crime Prevention Specialist, Minneapolis Police Dept .

1992: Started graduate program through Mankato State University.

May 1998: Graduated M.A., Public Administration.

2005: Earned PhD, University of Minnesota, Evaluation Studies

Employment:

Bosma Consulting LLC

Evaluation and training services focused on public health, substance abuse prevention programs, community organizing, evaluation and training, evaluation capacity building.

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Current clients include:

- University of Minnesota Extension Services
- Solano County, California
- School of Nursing, U of M
- New Paradigm, Partneo, Wisconsin
- Youth Leadership Institute, San Rofnel, California
- Copper County Mental Health Services Institute, Ontonagon County, MI
- Minnesota Institute of Public Health

Teaching Experience:

Instructor: U of M

Department of Educational Policy & Administration.

-Ed/PA 5501 Principles and Methods of Program Evaluation

Publications:

She has published 9 different articles and has done presentations nationally and internationally (Canada, Finland, and Sweden).

Abby:

Abby enrolled at Mason City Alternative School on the 22nd of November, 1999.

She had dropped out of Clear Lake High School early in the first quarter of the 99/00 school year. She had been living with her father in Clear Lake, but moved in with her mother in Mason City. Her cumulative GPA at Clear Lake High School was 3.875, but she had issues in her life which caused her to drop out of school.

She attended the Mason City Alternative School:

99/00: Earned 12.0 credits.

00/01: Earned 7.0 credits. Total: 47.0 credits

5/2001: Graduated. \$1,000 scholarship awarded to her from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows

2001: Attended North Iowa Area Community College

2002: Transferred to the University of Iowa.

2006: Graduated University of Iowa, Bachelors of Science Degree in Nursing.

2006: Employed in Iowa City.

Research-based Facts: Iowa and National Alternative Schools and Programs

- Between nine to ten thousand students are served annually in all recorded alternative schools and programs in Iowa. This number does not include students completing a high school education through GED or Adult High School Diploma Programs offered through community colleges. GED completions totaled 3592 and Adult High School Diploma completions totaled 242 in 2006. (IAAE, 2003) (Iowa Department of Education, March, 2007).
- The graduation rate in Iowa (90.7%) as well as demand for GED and Adult High School diploma programs have continually increased between 1996-2007 (Iowa Department of Education, 2007). In part, graduation rates in local districts have increased due to alternative schools and programs (Conclusion based on Condition of Education Report, 2006, IAAE Survey of Alternative Education, 2002-2003 and demand for GED and Adult High School Diploma programs (Iowa Dept. of Education, 2007).
- In the past decade, the U.S. high school graduates percentage remained stable. Upon removing high school graduates with alternative credentials, the U.S. graduation rate showed a decline (NCES, 2000).
- The success of alternative programs has been measured in terms of improved grades, school attendance and graduation rates; decreases in disruptive and or violent behaviors and suspensions; and improved sense of direction and self among participating students (National Association of School Boards (1996).
- Graduates of alternative schools in Iowa go on to post-secondary education. Some schools report over 50% of graduates moving on to post-secondary training in four year and two year institutions. As high as 78% have been reported to have plans for post-secondary education. (Veale, 1990) (Bobek, 2000) (Local reports by alternative schools, 2007). Graduates have achieved doctorate, masters and bachelors degrees in post-secondary training after graduation from alternative schools.
- Students in Iowa alternative schools and programs participate in standardized testing. Many score better than their counterparts in traditional high schools despite the challenges they face (Alternative schools accounts of local testing 2002-2007).
- Graduates enter jobs in our communities in all occupation career cluster areas (Personal testimonials and case studies, 2007).
- Graduates establish businesses in our communities and progress to CEO and head administration positions in

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established businesses (Personal testimonials and case studies, 2007).

- Graduates participate in our political process at levels exceeding other high school graduates (Veale, 1990).
- Students escape dependencies on social welfare (Veale, 1990).
- Students increase personal self-value and motivation to learn and succeed (McNabb, 2000 Personal stories 2007 reported to Department of Education).
- Alternative students volunteer in our communities to provide needed services by: helping the homeless and the elderly, rebuilding parks and recreation areas, improving our roads and highways, assisting children to learn, and advising school administrators to improve schools (McNabb, (1997-2000), (Personal testimonials and case studies 2007).

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