

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION - ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS AND ARIZONA SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY COMPONENTS AND SYSTEM

Prepared by
Arizona Alternative Education Consortium



Vision: College and career (post-secondary education and workplace) ready school completion through accountable alternative education

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KEY POINTS

Appropriate assessment of the educational impact of alternative education at accommodation and alternative schools must reflect the mission of the school.

An appropriate method should include components that reflect the value that alternative schools bring to society:

- **Criterion-referenced targets, not a distribution scale.** The State Board of Education adopted as one of its Principles of Agreement, “All schools must have the opportunity to achieve “A” (or excellent) status.”
- Since Arizona intends to link performance to funding, the system must classify alternative schools as **“excellent” now**. Schooling this target population of students in Arizona must be high priority. Arizona reaps a 20 to 1 return on investment through its alternative schools.
- **Heavy weighting for Academic Persistence** – Arizona should reward a school’s ability to engage or re-engage in students who are at risk of not earning a high school diploma or equivalent
- **Full implementation of an Education and Career Action Plan (ECAP) or equivalent – Incentivize** schools who **prepare students to complete school** and **make plans for productive engagement** in the workforce, military, and/or continued education after school completion.
- **Credit earned needed for high school graduation** – Recognize credit recovery alternative high schools for helping students earn credit in a way that appropriately matches the **mission** of the school.
- **Graduation** of all students - regardless of age or cohort within state policy regarding when as student ages out of public education.
- Provide alternative schools the ability to **choose** among measures – metrics that match their school mission such as,
 - Providing additional data from instruments that are sensitive to the wide range of target students’ educational needs through:
 - Vendor assessments and/or LEA developed assessments for English Language Arts and Mathematics
 - Internships completed/student licenses/certifications
 - Social and emotional preparedness
 - Career and Technical Education (CTE) coursework and completion
- **AzMERIT is NOT currently an appropriate assessment** for alternative schools. “Excellence” in school quality is not a matter of the small percentage of students currently scoring “proficient.” Course assessment must be ‘on demand’ and administered close to the time of course completion.
- Show English Language Learner (ELL) progress by **improvement of a performance band on the state mandated ELL assessment.**
- Utilize **qualitative data**, which is also **empirical**, as well as quantitative data.



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INTRODUCTION

We, the Arizona Alternative Education Consortium, are submitting our input in response to the Arizona Department of Education’s Request for Information (RFI) on Arizona School Accountability Components & System.

We are the specialists in Arizona on alternative education and alternative schools. As you will read in our description of the Arizona Alternative Education Consortium, we are a grassroots, membership association of alternative education stakeholders and advocates. The National Alternative Education Association identifies us as THE state alternative education association in Arizona <http://www.the-naea.org/NAEA/state-doe-websites/state-alternative-education-associations/>.

Additionally, other states are revising their academic accountability for alternative education – alternative schools. We will share examples of systems from other states as soon as they are available. We are availing ourselves of this opportunity to provide RFI comment, yet we look forward to additional opportunities created by the State Board of Education to give further comment. Research and evidence-based practice on alternative education campuses (the term used nationally) accountability is constantly updated and states’ development of models and systems reflects on-going work in this vital area. We are eager to share the most current information, as it is available.

OUR RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS IN REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

We, the Arizona Alternative Education Consortium¹, are submitting our input in response to the Arizona Department of Education’s Request for Information (RFI) on Arizona School Accountability Components & System.

In addition to our discussion of alternative education and Arizona’s alternative schools, our comment addresses:

1. Demonstration of the Value of Alternative Education
2. Background
3. Overview of System
4. Measuring Student Growth

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OVERVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

MISSION OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Arizona statute and the State Board of Education have recognized that alternative education **serves a unique student population**. In 1986, A.R.S. § 15-796 established alternative education in Arizona and is the statute cited in national publications as the statutory base for alternative education.²

Nationally recognized characteristics of alternative education students include homelessness, students with disabilities, over-aged students, and/or students who have experienced traumatic life events³. **Even though alternative education serves youth who may share some similar characteristics, diversity exists among alternative schools, programs, and other non-traditional educational opportunities: ‘one size doesn’t fit all’.** Most alternative high schools offer credit recovery. Some alternative schools recruit and successfully retain younger high school students by working with families to offer culturally appropriate support for first time high school graduation. Other alternative high schools serve over-aged students and/or re-engage former dropouts.

Accountability for alternative schools began around 2002 with modifications to 15-241.⁴ Currently, an alternative school must have **a mission/charter that clearly identifies its purpose is to serve a specific student population** who will benefit from a nontraditional school environment. An alternative school in Arizona must annually certify with the Arizona Department of Education that 70% or more of its students are eligible. The categories for eligibility are students with/who are:

- Adjudicated.
- Documented history of disruptive behavior issues.
- Dropout status.
- Poor academic standing as demonstrated by being at least one year behind on grade level performance or academic credits.
- Primary caregivers or are financially responsible for dependents and, therefore, may require a flexible school schedule.
- Wards of the state and are in need of an alternative school setting.

² Porowski, A., O’Conner, R., & Luo, J. L. (2014). How do states define alternative education? (REL 2014–038). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED546775.pdf>

³ Schlessman, A, & Hurtado, K. (2012). A comparison of state alternative education accountability policies and frameworks. Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED534083>

⁴ Schlessman, A. (2010). *Student achievement and success at alternative education high schools*. Annual meeting of National Charter Schools Conference. Chicago, IL.



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IMPACT TO ARIZONA SOCIETY

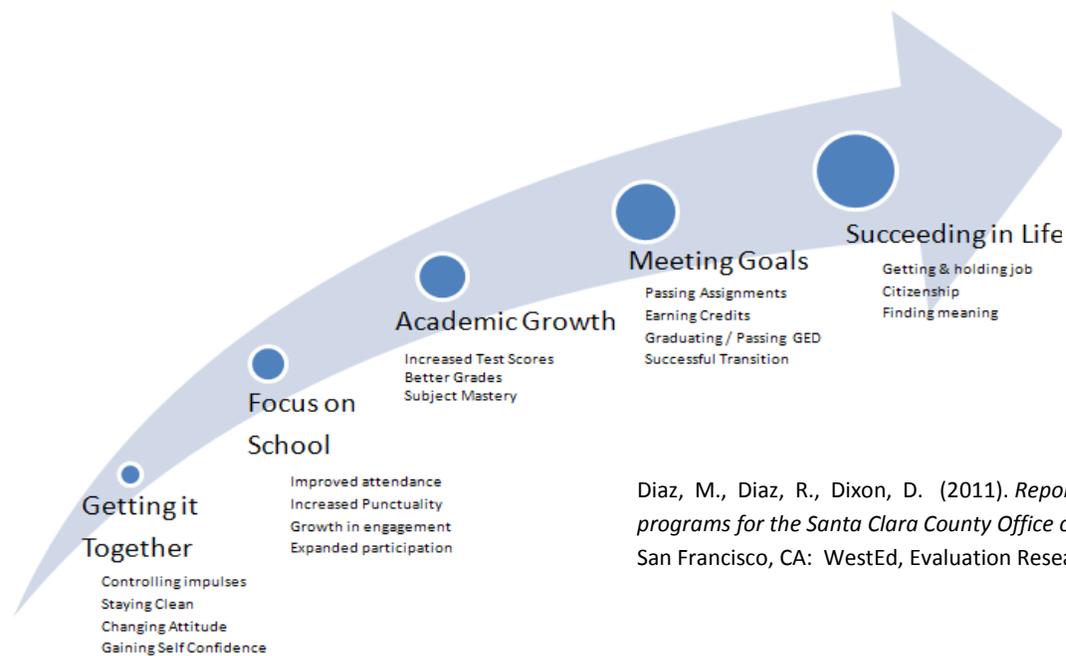
Alternative education in Arizona provides a **significant contribution to society** by providing educational opportunities. We have calculated a Return on Investment (ROI) for educating these high-risk Arizona citizens⁵.

Arizona's ROI for alternative education is **20 to 1**.

Every dollar invested in Arizona alternative education returns twenty dollars!

A CONTINUUM OF DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH SERVED BY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

This well researched developmental model shows a continuum of student learning readiness as well as academic growth and success for alternative education youth.



Diaz, M., Diaz, R., Dixon, D. (2011). *Report on the alternative education programs for the Santa Clara County Office of Education*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd, Evaluation Research Program.

⁵ Return on investment is calculated using numbers reported in WestEd. (2014.) *How Arizona's dropout crisis affects communities, Creates economic losses for the State of Arizona*, retrieved from : https://www.wested.org/wp-content/files_mf/1403888261AZMRT_FullReport.pdf



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A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

Alternative Education offers hope to students at risk of not completing school by continuing to engage students at-risk of dropping out of school or re-engaging disenfranchised youth through nontraditional educational environments including some or all of the following:

- access to wrap-around services,
- flexible scheduling including make-up times/days and tutoring,
- modification of delivery of instruction, often through blended-learning,
- credit-recovery programs,
- student-engagement activities,
- realistic career and post-secondary planning including dual enrollment with community colleges, work study programs, and/or career education programs.

At-risk students benefit from Alternative Education because each school or program provides a unique approach to providing interventions through learning expectations and experiences that maximize student potential for success.

THE ARIZONA ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium is a grass-roots member association of personnel and leaders from alternative schools and alternative education programs at accommodation schools, districts, charters, county education service agencies, non-profits, community organizations, dropout recovery programs, and other dedicated stakeholders who support alternative education in Arizona. Our membership represents 100 schools and other organizations. The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium is the Arizona affiliate of the National Alternative Education Association.

Our membership elects Consortium officers and Board Members in an annual, democratic, transparent process.
<http://www.azaec.org/bylaw/>



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SYSTEM

A system is composed of multiple unique populations that interact. Our analogy is an ecosystem. An ecosystem is made up of interactions among the populations in a community and the community's physical surroundings. A community is a collection of interacting populations.⁶

The student population at Arizona's alternative schools is a distinct population. Life cycles for various populations in an ecosystem are distinct. Similarly, the needs of alternative education students and the ways to hold the schools that serve them accountable are distinct from students who attend traditional schools and accountability of traditional schools.

The Florida Department of Education's Division of Accountability, Research, and Measurement clarified to us that the Florida A+ system is comprised of two sets of labels, a letter grade OR a rating for alternative schools. In Florida, a school identified as an alternative school has the opportunity to choose for its annual accountability rating either a letter grade or a distinct rating for alternative schools.

Arizona's system for school accountability would be less confusing to the public if the system includes unique labels for alternative schools. An -ALT designation does communicate a distinction; however, a unique labeling system would be clearer to the public and allow for achievement profiles that appropriately assess the educational impact of accommodation and alternative schools, as well as be more appropriate to the data available for a relatively small number of schools. There are 140 schools on the Arizona Department of Education's alternative schools list for 2015-2016.

The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium recommends unique labels for alternative schools, similar to those used for Alternative Education Accountability in other states, yet a distinct Arizona innovation:

Academically Performing – correlation to A-F (A, B, C) (in FY 14, A through C-Alt, 117 schools)

Academic Improvement Required – correlation to A-F (D, F) (in FY 14 D-Alt, 12 schools)

Unique Achievement Profiles updated May 2016

As stated in the whitepaper, *Rebuilding Arizona's School & District Accountability System*, presented to the State Board of Education in 2015,

Many states, including Arizona, recognize the unintended consequences of assigning A-F labels to schools where a letter grade may be less appropriate than more nuanced identification. In these instances, the state may utilize other mechanisms to differentiate and support schools which serve divergent populations such as Arizona's more than 100 alternative schools. Even with different methodology and designations such as alternative (-ALT) and Arizona Online Instruction (-DL) models, the easily recognized A-F labels imply some level of comparability among very different schools.

⁶ *Biology: The Interaction of Life*, pp. 42 & 43



“EXCELLENT” ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Considering the high Return on Investment, **20 to 1**, that Arizona reaps from alternative schools and alternative education, an “excellent” alternative school is an Academically Performing alternative school.

Arizona society benefits from youth who are

- Socially and emotionally prepared to become contributing members of society
- Stay engaged in education or are re-engaged in school,
- Have a school prepare them to compete school and make plans productive engagement in the workforce, military, and/or continued education after school completion
- Earn the credit they need for high school graduation,
- Graduate from high school

Alternative schools are eager to provide a variety of educational niches to serve a unique targeted student population. Alternative schools have very specific missions to serve “at risk” students in a variety of ways. Alternative high schools addressing a host of challenges, e.g., documented history of disruptive behavior, poor academic standing, several grades behind cohort, adjudicated, homeless, dropped out of school and returning, ward of the state, primary caregiver or financially responsible for dependents) for students who will otherwise likely drop-out of school. No single alternative school addresses each group of students or all of the specific needs. That is why there is variation even among alternative schools. Alternative high schools help “at risk” students to make academic, social and career progress. At-risk students benefit from excellent alternative school that provide interventions, learning expectations, and experiences for students to maximize their potential for success. Such schools focus upon the realities of the needs and interests of at-risk students by offering learning experiences for improved self-concept, motivation, reduction of truancy, reduction of disruptive behavior, and improved academic learning.



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“FAILING” ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

A pattern of Academic Improvement Required for several years in more than one measure flags a “failing” alternative school. An alternative school fails when it does not fulfill its mission thus contribute to society by educating youth at-risk. It is not equitable to evaluate the success of an alternative school based on student progress on a state-mandated assessment.

Depending on the mission of alternative school, failure might be:

- Inability to engage/re-engage students in school as evidenced by regular school attendance and Academic Persistence. A school might have a dropout recovery program to address the needs of students who have circumstances beyond their control that prevent regular seat time.
- Minimal levels of earning, or making progress on, course credit through a curriculum aligned to Arizona standards.
- Absence of an ECAP program or preparation for students to complete high school course work and make workforce and post-secondary education plans through an ECAP or equivalent.
- No graduates or minimal growth to graduation.
- Absence of student development of social and emotional skills in the school system.
- No corrective action plan or improvement plan exists.

We emphasize again “one size does not fit all” among alternative education and even alternative schools. **No one system can capture all exceptions.**

Alternative schools exist that are doing a fantastic job of serving specific niches, e.g. juvenile sex offenders, expelled students that no other school will take, etc. for whom successes are outside a ‘one best system’. The Arizona Department of Education should create a way, beyond the process of substantive appeal of a label, for “Failing” schools to present their own data documenting successes. This would enable a school to tell its own story and demonstrate its successes – even if those successes are in emotional intelligence / metacognitive learning skills / executive functioning. There is empirical data, sometimes qualitative, for such cases.



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ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

MULTIPLE MEASURES OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND ACADEMICALLY RELEVANT INDICATORS OF SCHOOL QUALITY

Multiple measures include both quantitative and qualitative, and are appropriate for alternative schools. Momentum Strategy and Research rates Arizona second only to Colorado on its alternative school accountability system. Arizona is missing the essential element of Flexibility in Selection of Measures in its Alternative Accountability System⁷.

Arizona's system for alternative school accountability would be strengthened by the inclusion of selection of measures, measures that align to the mission of the school.

ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE (REQUIRED)

Academic Persistence appropriately belongs here as a measure of School Quality. If a weighting system is used, the system should weight Persistence heavily for alternative schools.

Academic Persistence is an innovative Arizona measure. It measures one of the most important outcomes of alternative education/schools – the ability of a school to engage or re-engage a youth in education. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) first used Academic Persistence as additional points in its 2012 alternative school model. In 2014, ADE moved Persistence into the College and Career Ready Index.

It is important to keep the definition of Academic Persistence as enrollment in any Arizona school. We have discussed the high mobility of the student population at alternative schools.

EDUCATION AND CAREER ACTION PLAN (ECAP) OR EQUIVALENT (REQUIRED)

School prepares students to complete school and make plans productive engagement in the workforce, military, and/or continued education after school completion.

⁷ Slide 6 of [Arizona Alternative Education Consortium Update on Arizona's National Ranking and ESSA Graduation Rate Expectation](#)



SELECTION OF OPTIONAL MEASURES

School selects options to match mission of the school:

Assessment results from Vendor⁸ or LEA Developed Assessments Aligned to Arizona Standards. This list is illustrative, not comprehensive.

- Galileo
- Star
- Pearson
- ASVAB
- NWEA

Internships completed/Student Licenses/ Certifications

Completion of vocational certificates

Social & Emotional Preparedness

- Gallup surveys
- Aptitude Inventories
- Data from behavior intervention programs

Colorado's framework shows the flexibility in selecting measures for alternative education campuses in its [Selection of Accountability Measures for Alternative Education Campuses](#)

⁸ The caveat to use of vendor assessments is research shows vendor assessment targets are not normed for alternative education campuses and need to be adjusted for appropriate assessment of alternative education students.

Ernst, J. & Turnbull, J. Alternative growth goals for Alternative Education students using NWEA's MAP assessment. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjX-Ory_u7NAhVHwGMKHRFOBSIQFggeMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcharterschoolquality.org%2Fmedia%2F1176%2FAlternativeGrowthGoals_NWEAsMap.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHrPoOu-YAXlyzrvtcKn82F2KdN5A&cad=rja

Beckler, A., Ernst, J., & Turnbull, J. (2015). Implications for policy and practice from alternative norming studies. Retrieved from <http://www.alternativeaccountabilityforum.org/uploads/2/1/9/4/21949220/student-school-norming-for-aecs.pptx>



ACADEMIC PROGRESS ON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS

State mandated assessments are the least appropriate measure of alternative high school student success. Alternative high schools cannot undo years of unsuccessful school experiences. Instead, alternative schools work, with the students who come to them and move the students forward. Youth served at alternative high schools are highly mobile and tend to rotate among several schools, staying for short periods at each school. The brief periods spent at each school may or may not be sufficient to gain academic progress as measured in a nine-month period. Measures such as Academic Persistence, credits earned, and internships (as mentioned above) appropriately assess academically relevant alternative school quality.

It is imperative for alternative high schools that the statewide assessments of English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics be available on demand. Alternative high schools use a variety of alternative calendars and block schedules. A timely assessment immediately following completion of a course reflects student progress. When assessment administration is months after a student has completed a course, it is an unrealistic expectation that the student's exam score reflects mastery of the standards. Many local school boards for alternative schools would be interested to include the exam score in students' final grades for courses, similar to the way that final grades for college courses include a percentage for the final exam score. This is not possible considering the current testing calendar.

Our review of SB 1430 does not indicate that "proficiency" is a requirement. SB 1430 mandates "**academic progress**" (our emphasis).

PROFICIENCY

If policy-makers decide to include "Proficiency" on the statewide assessments of English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics in Arizona's School Accountability System, appropriate assessment would:

1. Report AZ Merit data but not be used to hold alternative high schools accountable until results on the statewide assessment reach the level of proficiency as seen on the former state-mandated AIMS assessment, OR
2. Be included but not heavily weighted, 5%, for alternative high schools, OR
3. Be an option for alternative high schools (as referenced in another state's alternative education rubric⁹ which is still being vetted with stakeholders and will be shared as soon as it is publicly available) while other options could include performance on vendor assessments OR scores on end of course assessments in nationally recognized curricula that are aligned to Arizona standards.

"PROGRESS" VS GROWTH

Our understanding is that ADE Accountability is in the process of soliciting national review of the use of Student Growth Percentile (SGP). "ADE is in the process of procuring an external validation and technical report on measuring student growth percentiles (SGP) based on AzMERIT." **"Does this mean growth will be measured by SGP in the new accountability system?** ADE will share the results of the technical report with stakeholders and policy makers; ADE will provide rationale and research to support any recommendation to use SGP data and/or valid indicators of student academic progress as it develops the new federal and/or state accountability system.

⁹ We have shown a draft copy to ADE Accountability leaders. We will provide the final document as soon as it is available. Please inform us of the desired process



ADE will consider alternative approaches to implementing SGP or other growth indicators in the new accountability system based on technical research and other feedback” (p. 1)¹⁰

The use of SGP for alternative high schools is problematic for several reasons:

1. Few alternative school students take courses in a traditional sequence. Students take courses as needed for high school graduation; therefore, students take courses simultaneously, out of sequence, in shorter blocks of time within alternative calendars in contrast to a traditional semester.
2. The timing of the state mandated assessment is not appropriate for alternative high schools. (See discussion above in this section.)
3. SGP would only be available for a relatively small number of students. ADE has addressed this challenge in the past by “pooling” students with SGP to have an N size large enough to justify calculations. We would rather see impact data about the use of SGP for alternative high schools first, before we endorse it as being appropriate.

ACADEMIC PROGRESS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER ASSESSMENTS

Accountability for English Language Learners at alternative schools should be calculated as improvement in performance band on the AZELLA. The criterion of a minimum N size of 10 should remain, as well as this being additional points in the model.

PROGRESS TOWARD COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

GRADUATION (REQUIRED)

Graduation from alternative, credit-recovery high schools should be based on calculations for **all students regardless of age or cohort**. As a required measure, the revised system should weight an **appropriate** graduation calculation strongly for credit-recovery alternative high schools. A calculation based on 4 year cohort graduation is **NOT appropriate**. It is vitally important that the graduation metric calculation for alternative high schools include all graduates until their 22 birthday, as specified in Arizona statute, A.R.S. § 15-821. The mission of Arizona’s credit recovery alternative high schools is to educate over-aged and under-credited youth. These schools are NOT dropout factories but rather a solution to Arizona’s dropout problem. Credit recovery alternative high schools must not be penalized for serving Arizona society. See [ESSA Graduation Rate Expectation and Credit Recovery – Alternative Education](#) The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium spearheaded this national advocacy effort in May of this year. The Consortium is preparing a position letter specifically about Arizona’s credit recovery alternative high schools that will be submitted to the Arizona Department of Education, Arizona’s Governor’s Office, the Arizona State Board of Education, as well as the United States Department of Education.

¹⁰ [Accountability Newsletter THE GRADER – June 2016](#)



COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS OPTIONAL MEASURES

School selects to match mission:

CTE coursework enrollment & completion

Credit Earned needed for HS graduation

AN APPROPRIATE MODEL

Our suggested Model within parameters of SB1430

1430 requirement	Measure
<p>Multiple Measures of Academic Performance or other Academically Relevant Indicator of School Quality</p>	<p>Academic Persistence</p> <p>ECAP or Equivalent</p> <p>School selects to match mission:</p> <p>Results from Vendor Assessments or LEA developed assessments</p> <p>Galileo Star Pearson ASVAB NWEA</p> <p>Internships completed/Student Licenses/ Certifications</p> <p>Social & Emotional Preparedness</p>
<p>Academic Progress on statewide assessments in ELA and Math</p>	<p>Report yet not “appropriate assessment” for alternative schools</p>
<p>Academic Progress on the English Language Learner Assessments</p>	<p>Moving a performance band</p>
<p>College and Career Readiness</p>	<p>Graduation up to legislated age limit</p> <p>School selects to match mission:</p> <p>CTE coursework enrollment & completion</p> <p>Credit Earned needed for HS graduation</p>

Key: **Required Data** and/or Options



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APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT IN PREVIOUS MODEL

The elements in the 2014 alternative school model that were appropriate are:

- Compare Alternative Schools with other Alternative Schools
- Academic Persistence¹¹
- Graduation Rates beyond 4 year cohort – 5th, 6th, and 7th year cohort
- ELL progress on AZELLA as additional points

CONTINUED COLLABORATION

We look forward to additional opportunities to provide our expert, yet often “out-of-the-box”, suggestions to the Arizona State Board of Education and the Arizona Department of Education as the school accountability system is refined and developed to meet the requirements outlined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), ARS §15-241, SB1430, the State Board of Education’s Principles of Agreement, Superintendent Diane Douglas’ *AZ Kids Can’t Afford to Wait* Plan.

¹¹ Schlessman, A. (2014). Innovations in Arizona’s accountability policies and frameworks for alternative schools. Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Retrieved from files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED545470.pdf

