Pennsylvania provides grants for alternative programs that are designed as proactive responses to the individual needs of potentially at-risk students. The programs involve the public schools, government agencies serving children, private community-based social service agencies, the business community, and parents in a collaborative approach to addressing the increasing challenges presented by disruptive students.

The National Dropout Prevention Center has identified features of exemplary alternative programs (1997). The features are listed in Table 1 on the next page.

While it is difficult to identify with precision the factors that make for an effective alternative school for disruptive students, Chalker (1996) identifies four commonly accepted settings for alternative educational programs:

- The separate alternative school,
- The school-within-a-school,
- The continuation school, and
- Alternative classroom settings.

He contends that the isolated nature, self-contained structure, and use of innovative strategies make the separate alternative school the format of choice among many school systems.

Smink (1997) has identified the following characteristics as those commonly found in the more effective schools:

- A maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10
- A small student base, not exceeding 250 students
- A clearly stated mission and discipline code
- A caring faculty that receives continual staff development
- A school staff that has high expectations for student achievement
- A learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style
- A flexible school schedule with community involvement and support
- A total commitment to each student's success

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE ENCOURAGES THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION AS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF PROGRAMS FOR ACCESSING BEHAVIORAL ISSUES.

Table 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS	
Administrative Structures and Policies	• clear mission and objectives • clear discipline code • small classes • enrollment choice by students • shared decision making • flexible schedules • collaboration with business/community
Curriculum and Instructional Techniques	• integrated curriculum • individual learning plans • active learning • accelerated Learning • community and service learning • use of outside resources and speakers
Personal Support Programs	• diagnostic services • family groups • parental involvement and home visits • individual and group counseling • childcare and parenting training • community support services
Career-Oriented Programs	• career days • career shadowing and internships • business partnerships • employability training • work experience programs
Staff Development and Staff Relationships	• caring staff • personalized student environment • specialized staff training • student incentive programs

Source: The National Dropout Prevention Center, 1997

The Center for the Study of Prevention and Violence (1994) encourages therapeutic intervention as an important component of programs for addressing student behavioral issues. These approaches include:

- **Behavior Modification** focusing on changing maladaptive behavior through such techniques as direct reinforcement, contingency contracting, and modeling.

- **Cognitive Behavior Intervention** including cognitive self-control, anger management, social perspective taking, moral reasoning, social problem solving, and attitude change.

- **Social Skills Training** involving the use of discussion, modeling, rehearsal and feedback for teaching behaviors believed to contribute to pro-social engagement and for teaching general interpersonal skills.

- **Psychotherapy** directed at enhancing the emotional functioning of the adolescent through traditional group and individual psychotherapeutic techniques. (pp. 14-22)

Collaboration is a critical element in the implementation of alternative programs. All stakeholders in a child's successful growth and development must be willing to assume ownership and to join forces. The more interagency collaboration, the greater the benefit to children and families. The Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals (Houck, p. 91) emphasizes collaboration in its proposals for handling chronically troubled youth:

- Juvenile punishment must have consequences. Presently, students do not fear nor have a bottom line for their negative and destructive actions and behavior;

- Where collaboration with agencies exists, reports are positive that students are facing the consequences of their actions and learning new skills to deal with future frustrations and conflicts;

COLLABORATION IS A CRITICAL ELEMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS....THE MORE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION, THE GREATER THE BENEFIT TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

- There is a need for a liaison between the school and other agencies dealing with troubled youth.

- Parents should be held accountable for their children.

- Parent training for both parents and students should be part of any alternative program. There is a need for court ordered counseling for the entire family of a disruptive student.

- More counseling and social workers are needed to assist schools in dealing with disruptive students and the training of staff.

- Probation officers and other social services agencies should be housed in schools to offer easy, quick access for students, parents and staff.

- The entire community from local citizens and organizations to county agencies must join schools in addressing the issue of troubled and disruptive youth.

- Consistent, firm enforcement of rules must occur, such as amending the Tobacco Control Act to make sure penalties for violating the no smoking on school property ban are just and severe enough to send a clear message.

- Link truancy and school conduct with obtaining and maintaining a driver's license for those 18 and younger.

- The state needs to become an active partner via public policy, legislation and financial resources to address the issue of the disruptive student.

James Comer (1996) makes the case for the importance of collaboration in his statement that "Schools or parents alone, or *together alone*, cannot provide all sustenance, services and support that children need to thrive and develop well in this increasingly complex society. The entire community of significant others and services must work together to strengthen and prepare our children well for their present and future lives" (p. 52).

The U. S. Department of Education (1997) conducted a study of programs providing alternatives to students who have been expelled. Nine exemplary models were identified. Unique among each of these programs was students' attendance for more than one semester and some form of follow-up or tracking information on students after they leave the program. Similarly, an evaluation of alternative programs conducted by the North Carolina Public School System (1998) found that continuous data-based decision making must guide program improvement, especially through tracking and evaluating student progress. The evaluation revealed:

- Relevant data should be collected, assessed and provided to the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) staff in a feedback loop to encourage continuous progress. Systems should be in place to track student progress. Longitudinal tracking of even simple outcomes, such as grades, achievement scores, attendance, promotion rates, graduation rates and disciplinary actions would be informative.

- Length of enrollment may help. During a two-year study, students enrolled for three or more grading periods had more positive outcomes than those who were enrolled for only one grading period.

- Barriers to ALP effectiveness included lack of comprehensive student support services (e.g., counselors, social workers, psychologists, health services), insufficient space, lack of adequate staff and staff expertise, inadequate

facilities, and a lack of parent involvement.

- Factors contributing to ALP effectiveness included caring and competent teachers and staff, small classes, safe and orderly environment, local education agency support, supportive and committed parents, administrative support and leadership, and high expectations for students.

In *Alternatives to Expulsion: Findings From Nine Model Alternative Programs*, the U. S. Department of Education (1997) found that the most effective programs –

- help students develop the capability to succeed in school and meet high expectations.

- provide extended contact with a caring adult.

- develop coping skills.

- structure activities, time and relationships in beneficial ways.

- provide opportunities for consequences for students' actions emphasizing success but also negative consequences when appropriate.

- create an atmosphere of belonging and bonding or a community within a program.

- provide access to, and foster the development of, a support group of peers focused on a positive lifestyle.

- prepare youth for the future by making the school experience relevant in their terms and providing some exposure to and preparation for the world of work.

- make resources and services available to address individual and family problems.

"WE CHALLENGE EDUCATORS AND PARENTS TO CONSIDER WHAT SCHOOLS WOULD BE LIKE IF EVERYONE ACCEPTED LOVING KINDNESS AS A PRINCIPLE AND MADE IT THE FOUNDATION OF EVERY PROGRAM AND EVERY DECISION MADE FOR CHILDREN.

– James Comer, et al., *Rallying the Whole Village*

The U.S. Department of Education identified the Catonsville Center for Alternative Studies in Baltimore County as one of the national model programs. The other programs are:

- Atlantic County Alternative High School, Mays Landing, New Jersey

- The Borough Academies, New York City, New York

- Central Bucks School District Alternative Program, Doylestown, Pennsylvania

- City-As-School, Buffalo, New York

- Community Academy, Boston, Massachusetts

- Chesterfield Community in Schools/Burger King Academy, Chesterfield, Virginia

A recent survey of alternative school students in Baltimore County (1999) provided indicators of the most effective components. A review of responses indicated that small classes and individual attention were important to student success in alternative schools. The result was that students often wished to remain in the alternative schools longer than allowed rather than return to the home school "where the problem began."

James Comer and the other authors of *Rallying the Whole Village* provide an end note to this consideration of essential elements of exemplary programs. "We challenge educators and parents," they wrote (p. 168), "to consider what schools would be like if everyone accepted loving kindness as a principle and made it the foundation of every program and every decision made for children."

IV. Maryland's Best Practices

Existing programs offer building blocks for model alternative structures

The ideal alternative educational program should be an alternative method of educating a specific population in an environment that promotes success regardless of any factors that may have placed the student at risk. This is the guiding belief of the Task Force. Clearly, these alternative programs should not merely duplicate in a different setting the education practices of traditional schools. The curriculum and methods of teaching should be designed to address the needs of the student with emphasis on the mastery of basic skills and on improving the student's reading ability. Exemplary alternative programs and schools designed to provide viable educational options for diverse populations are in place across the state. Yet there is little consistency as to what constitutes best practices. Many of the programs can be used as building blocks in designing effective structures for disruptive students.

Exemplary Maryland practices and programs are highlighted below.

Alternative Learning Center #488, Baltimore City: An instruction and treatment model providing a cognitive behavioral treatment program for students who have committed crimes in school.

Baltimore County Public Schools, Department of Student Services and Alternative Programs: An exemplary continuum of services providing a seamless safety net for at-risk students (See Table 2.)

Catonsville Center for Alternative Studies, Baltimore County: An exemplary alternative center focusing on rigorous academic preparation, with a career development program for dropouts or those at-risk of dropping out, ages 16-21.

Community Based Classroom, Prince George's County: A dropout recovery school providing opportunities for earning a high school diploma.

Heather Ridge School and Heather Ridge Twilight, Frederick County: A full service extended-day academic program for students from grades 6-12, with social services support.

North End Academy, Prince George's County: A program for expelled students providing an academic focus supplemented by an Internet access curriculum and including appropriate counseling and social skills emphasis. A seamless transition feature is offered.

The Other Way, Montgomery County: Rigorous academics in a therapeutic environment, in conjunction with interagency collaboration with the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

IDEAL ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS SHOULD NOT MERELY DUPLICATE IN A DIFFERENT SETTING THE EDUCATION PRACTICES OF TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS.

	Table 2		
A System of Alternative Education			
[Note: Entries in *italics* are existing alternative programs.]			
Home School	**Home**	**Home School with Some Alternative Program Intervention**	**Alternative Program**
* Prevention–100% of students		Early Intervention –15% of students	**Intervention – 5% of students
Ongoing student assessment; outside supports within schools		Even Start Family Literacy Program	Elementary Learning Centers (Proposed)
		Instructional Support Team (Elementary Support/ Programming Alternative Instruction)	*Alternative School*
Family Involvement/ Support		Alternatives within classes	*Evening High Schools*
		Schools within Schools	*Home Teaching*
Adequate/Appropriate Staffing		Classes within Schools	*Afternoon Group Learning Center*
		Universal Transitional Support	Long Term Alternative Program (Proposed)
Staff Selection/Training in alternative instructional strategies, and differentiation of instruction and behavior management		*Maryland's Tomorrow*	
		Choice Middle School Program	
		After–school Tutoring and Counseling Program	
		Summer School	
Source: Baltimore County Public Schools, 1999.			

Annapolis Road Middle School, Prince George's County: A regional alternative program for middle school students with rigorous academics and therapeutic support emphasizing parent involvement. Students from Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Howard, Prince George's and Montgomery counties are eligible to attend.

The Spotlight on Prevention, A Resource Guide To Successful Crime Prevention Programs across Maryland, (1998) compiled by Attorney General J. Joseph Curran, Jr., highlights successful programs in which collaborative efforts address the needs of at-risk students. Below is a descriptive list of initiatives related to alternative programs, including those for elementary-aged students.

The Choice Program: Intensive, family-centered, community-based youth services program of the UMBC Shriver Center that uses college student volunteer mentors to provide supervision and advocacy services to youth in high-need neighborhoods across Maryland. Services target youth who have been identified by the Department of Juvenile Justice or other State youth service agencies.

Maryland's Tomorrow: A statewide dropout prevention effort that provides multi-year, comprehensive, year-round instruction and support to help underachieving youth meet academic expectations, attain a high school diploma, and enter employment or further schooling.

Community Agency School Services (CASS) Frederick County: A multi-site, community-based, comprehensive, integrated family-services program with coordinated case management. Prevention and early intervention are emphasized in an effort to break the cycle that leads to crime and violence, academic failure, chronic health problems, homelessness, and unemployment. Interagency collaboration and cooperation among schools, private and public agencies, communities, and families are integral to this initiative.

The PRIDE Program (Frederick County): The Program to Reduce Incidents of Disruption in Elementary Schools (PRIDE) provides tutoring and counseling services for elementary school students who have been put on extended suspension for violent behavior or have exhibited continual insubordinate, defiant behaviors. Each child receives two hours of tutoring and one hour of counseling three times a week, with the family included in the counseling. The student is returned to the regular school after the troubling behavior is addressed.

Second Step-Violence Prevention Curriculum (Anne Arundel, Calvert, Cecil, Charles, Frederick, Garrett, Prince George's, Montgomery, St. Mary's, Somerset, and Washington counties): An in-school violence-prevention, pro-social skills development program designed to reduce disruptive behaviors through use of a direct, proactive curriculum, with specific focus on empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Parent workshops are part of the program's behavior modification component.

Alternative Learning Center (ALC), Baltimore City: Students in grades K-12 who require small group instruction and are unable to work in a regular school setting due to behavior or academic problems are referred to the ALC at Tench Tilghman. The length of stay is from one day to a few weeks. The school's Crisis Manager determines when behavior has improved and recommends that the student return to the regular classroom. A follow-up plan is provided by ALC staff and is monitored by the regular classroom teacher.

V. Funding and Related Issues

Underfunding remains a problem despite clear benefits of alternative programs

Programs for seriously disruptive youth have historically suffered from chronic under-funding. Policy makers who believe funding alternative programs rewards disruption have resisted funding these programs. A failure to provide adequate support for alternative programs has sometimes contributed to increases in the dropout and school crime rates. Without effective intervention and the continuation of academic services provided by alternative programs, students may continue to exhibit disruptive and criminal behavior in and around schools and in their communities. After a loss of substantial credits as a result of suspension and expulsion, students are likely to give up on school and drop out. The result is often a life of unemployment, under-employment, or involvement with drugs and various criminal activities.

AN INVESTMENT IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS...YIELDS LONG-TERM SAVINGS TO THE STATE IN TERMS OF COSTS FOR WELFARE, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND JUVENILE AND ADULT INCARCERATION.

There is broad agreement that significant savings could be realized in the long run if the U. S. Department of Justice and other agencies funded preventive alternative programs for potential offenders before they reach juvenile justice. While there has been discussion regarding the creation of a "federal level" section on "Alternative Schools in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention," the reality is that limited funds have led to limited programs.

It is important to note that the average cost per student for an institutional placement through the Department of Juvenile Justice is $52,000 and up. Alternative programs offer comprehensive treatment services to students for an average of $10,000 per student–less than 25 percent of the cost of incarceration. Cost effectiveness is important in considering the funding of alternative programs and schools as a primary intervention for disruptive students. Nonetheless, program effectiveness in changing behavior is of even greater value. The high recidivism rate of students who have not experienced rehabilitation while incarcerated reflects a failure of juvenile facilities and speaks to the need to intervene early, while there is still time.

Foundations supporting children's services are often available to local school systems that apply and submit grants for consideration, but competition is stiff and these grants do not begin to reach the level of need. In addition, foundations frequently offer funding for one to three years with a "step down" reduction in funding support. Not only do we see a dearth of alternative programs, but we find that they don't last long enough to make the difference in the lives of the students most in need.

Some local school systems have formed interagency partnerships to enlist outside funding and human resources support for alternative programs. Smaller jurisdictions are often ineligible for consideration or lack direct access to outside agencies and foundations. In times of local spending "crunches," alternative educational programming is often not a budgetary priority.

A study by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (Gregg, 1998) found that there is a common perception that programs that target individuals divert resources from everyone else. This view fails to take into account the benefits all students receive in terms of learning opportunities when chronically disruptive students are not allowed to continued to disrupt the classroom.

Others who question the value of alternative programs argue that "a focus on problem students may threaten system equity by segregating poor disabled or minority students in alternative programs." The best way to ensure against the segregation of certain populations in alternative programs is through the fair and equitable implementation of school discipline codes and alternative program intake assessments. Appropriate monitoring will detect discrimination based on race, class, or disability when the data indicates the potential or presence of bias.

> **THE TASK FORCE STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THE STATE'S LONG-TERM COMMITMENT OF SUPPORT TO FUND ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS AND**

Numerous studies have found that an investment in alternative programs, including early interventions, yields long-term savings to the state in terms of costs for welfare, unemployment, and juvenile and adult incarceration. In effect, because of their preventive nature, eventually these programs more than pay for themselves. In the long run, millions of dollars could be saved by putting in place alternative programs and strategies for students who are potentially disruptive.

It is with this understanding and from this perspective that the Governor's Task Force on Alternative Educational Programs for Disruptive Youth strongly recommends the State's long-term commitment of support to fund alternative programs and preventive services in Maryland's schools.

VI. Findings
Findings highlight effective programs, data on student exclusion

The Task Force developed its recommendations based on findings related to the characteristics of effective programs and data on student exclusion from school. These findings are presented below.

Alternative programs that are best for students include:

- Rigorous academic standards

- High expectations for behavior

- An individualized development plan for each student

- Small student/staff ratios

- A counseling component which focuses on social skills development, cognitive behavioral treatment and mentoring

- Active parent participation

- Community integration

- Multidisciplinary team collaboration

- Provision of the services of a social work professional

A well defined transition program is essential for long-term gains. Transition planning should begin prior to the student's return to a traditional placement.

The length of stay in an alternative learning placement should be dependent on student readiness and not be predetermined.

The data on student exclusion from school indicates that:

- Male students tend to have more difficulty in behavioral adjustment to the high school environment and, as a result, tend to be suspended and expelled in greater numbers.

- More African American students are placed on long-term suspension.

- Students who are suspended and/or expelled in greater numbers are more likely to become dropouts.

- There are discrepancies among jurisdictions regarding the provision of services for disruptive students, especially for expelled students.

- There is a perceptual difference in the interpretation of "expulsion." Is it appropriate to treat an expulsion as a permanent exclusion, a conditional exclusion, or a more temporary long-term suspension?

- The student dropout rate is directly affected by the increase in the exclusion of students, many of whom never manage to catch up once removed from the school setting.

- Disruption among elementary school-aged students is on the rise.

- Alternative educational programs are sometimes (inappropriately) used as dumping grounds or warehouses for disruptive students as well as for teachers held in low regard.

- Teachers working in an alternative education setting should desire to be there and not be pressed into service.

- The leadership of an alternative education program should be highly experienced and skilled.

- The need for staff development and recruitment for alternative settings is essential to the success of the program.

- A comprehensive health education resource curriculum will assist in meeting nutritional needs that affect the student's ability to function effectively in school.

- Programs developed around an interagency collaboration model tend to provide a more holistic approach to student growth and development.

- Interagency funding should be solicited for the support and development of alternative programs.

- When alternative education and special education work collaboratively to develop integrated alternative programs, the individualized needs of all students, including those with Individualized Educational Programs, can be addressed.

- All students must, by law, be held accountable for acts of violence and disruption committed in school.

- Dropout prevention, intervention and recovery should be included and emphasized in the continuum of services for at-risk students.

- Parents should be actively and meaningfully engaged and their opinions invited in every aspect of program operations. Resources should be available to programs to afford regular visits to the homes of students.

- Alternative school support staff should include the school social worker, school psychologist, and pupil services worker, with clearly defined roles.

- Community support should be actively encouraged and sustained.

VII. Recommendations

The Governor's Task Force To Study Alternative Educational Programs For Chronically Disruptive Students recognizes that all students have the right to a safe educational environment for learning and that, equally, all students must be provided the opportunity to learn, even when their behavior disrupts this safe environment. Continued incidents of classroom disruption across the state require strategies to provide alternative learning structures for this population. It is from this perspective that the following preliminary recommendations are presented:

1. Using best practices, develop standards for model alternative programs that address appropriate staffing, certification, curriculum, scheduling, and support services.

   Recommended best practices include a rigorous academic curriculum, including appropriate reading skills development, and comprehensive health therapeutic services. Essential elements include counseling services, social skills development with a focus on career development and life skills, as well as a structured transition component.

2. Policies and procedures that facilitate the early identification and intervention of students potentially at-risk of needing alternative programs should be implemented.

   Early identification and intervention must be addressed to begin to turn around the disruptive behaviors of elementary school-aged students.

3. Local school systems should refine their continuum of alternative programs for at-risk students to provide all necessary strategies.

   The responsibility to provide an education for all students in an environment that is safe for all students creates a need for the implementation of alternative programs.

4. Interagency collaboration and community involvement are necessary for the successful implementation of programs and activities for at-risk youth.

   A cooperative relationship between the State, schools, communities, juvenile justice and social services agencies will provide the basis for the expansion of effective programs as well as the replication of such programs at the local level.

5. Alternative programs should be available for students who have been excluded from the regular school setting.

All students are entitled to an appropriate educational program, even when inappropriate behaviors or other factors prevent success in the traditional school setting.

6. Benchmarks should be developed for the measurement of expected outcomes for alternative programs.

   An alternative education advisory council or other appropriate advisory board should be charged with the responsibility of reviewing and completing an annual assessment report based on specific evaluative criteria and developing long-range plans for program implementation.

7. Parent and community involvement in alternative programs should be enhanced.

   A liaison for interagency collaboration should be appointed and charged with developing parent and community involvement initiatives that will strengthen relationships in alternative school programs.

8. The State should provide financial support for local school systems to support the development and implementation of Alternative Educational Programs for students who have been identified as chronically disruptive.

   $84 million, at a formula of $100 for each student in Maryland Public Schools, would be an adequate appropriation.

9. A specific percentage of funding should be targeted for early identification/intervention programs at the elementary school level.

   As the data suggests, since one-third of the reported suspensions are the result of inappropriate behaviors of elementary school-aged students, a designation of one third of the total funding for alternative programs would be appropriate.

10. Additional resources should be provided to support the replication of two supplementary regional alternative schools.

    $3.2 million is required to provide services comparable to Annapolis Road Middle School, the current regional school for disruptive students.

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Appendix A

House Bill 864
Establishing Task Force

HOUSE BILL 864

F1

(9lr0435)

ENROLLED BILL

— Ways and Means/Economic and Environmental Affairs —

Introduced by **Delegates Pitkin, Vallario, and A. Jones**

Read and Examined by Proofreaders:

_____

Proofreader.

_____

Proofreader.

Sealed with the Great Seal and presented to the Governor, for his approval this

_____ day of _____ at _____ o'clock, _____ M.

_____

Speaker.

CHAPTER _____0465_____   MAY 13 '99

1   AN ACT concerning   **APPROVED** *BY THE GOVERNOR*

2   **Task Force to Study Alternative Educational Programs for Chronically**
3   **Disruptive Students**

4   FOR the purpose of establishing a Task Force to Study Alternative Educational
5   Programs for Chronically Disruptive Students; providing for the membership,
6   duties, and staffing of the Task Force; requiring the Task Force to issue a report
7   by a certain date; providing for the effective date and the termination of this Act;
8   and generally relating to the establishment of a Task Force to Study Alternative
9   Educational Programs for Chronically Disruptive Students.

10   BY adding to
11   Article 41 – Governor – Executive and Administrative Departments
12   Section 18–317
13   Annotated Code of Maryland
14   (1997 Replacement Volume and 1998 Supplement)

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.
     [Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.
     Underlining indicates amendments to bill.
     Strike out indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law
     by amendment.
     Italics indicate opposite chamber/conference committee amendments.