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COLORADO DEPARTMENT *of* EDUCATION

Alternative Education: Summary of Technical Assistance and Training Needs

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Introduction

Alternative Education Programs and Alternative Education Campuses (AECs) serve large percentages of students that have special needs or meet the definition of a "high-risk" student. The structures and systems in these programs and schools frequently vary from traditional schools, as the student needs differ. The state definition for AECs is included in the Appendix. In 2012-13 there were 78 AECs and in 2013-14, there are 82 AECs authorized by the State Board of Education. Historically these schools have reported graduation rates lower than the state average and dropout rates higher than the state average. The following graduation and dropout information was obtained from the Accountability Office at the Colorado Department of Education.

TABLE 1: Graduation Rates for Colorado AECs and All Schools

		Graduation Rates		
		4 year (on time)	5 year	6 year
AECs	Class of 2013	26.5		
	Class of 2012	23.6	35.5	
	Class of 2011	21.2	33	37.4
All schools	Class of 2013	76.9		
	Class of 2012	75.4	80.1	
	Class of 2011	73.9	78.7	80.1

CHART 1: Graduation Rates for Colorado AECs and All Schools
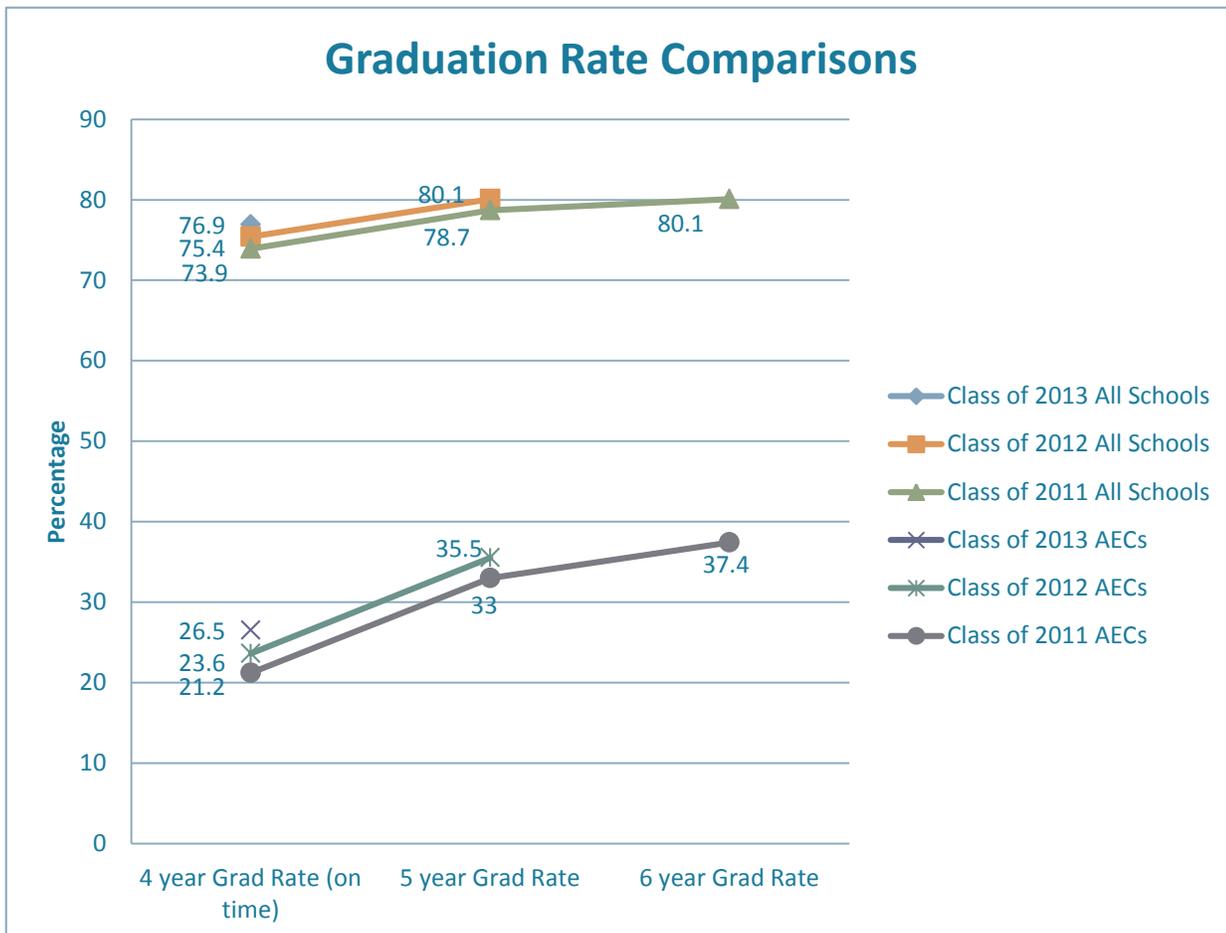
TABLE 2: Dropout Rates for Colorado AECs and All Schools

		Dropout Rates
AECs	2012-13	19.1
	2011-12	18.2
	2010-11	16.2
All schools	2012-13	2.5
	2011-12	2.9
	2010-11	3.0

CHART 2: Dropout Rates for Colorado AECs and All Schools

CHART 2: Dropout Rate Comparisons
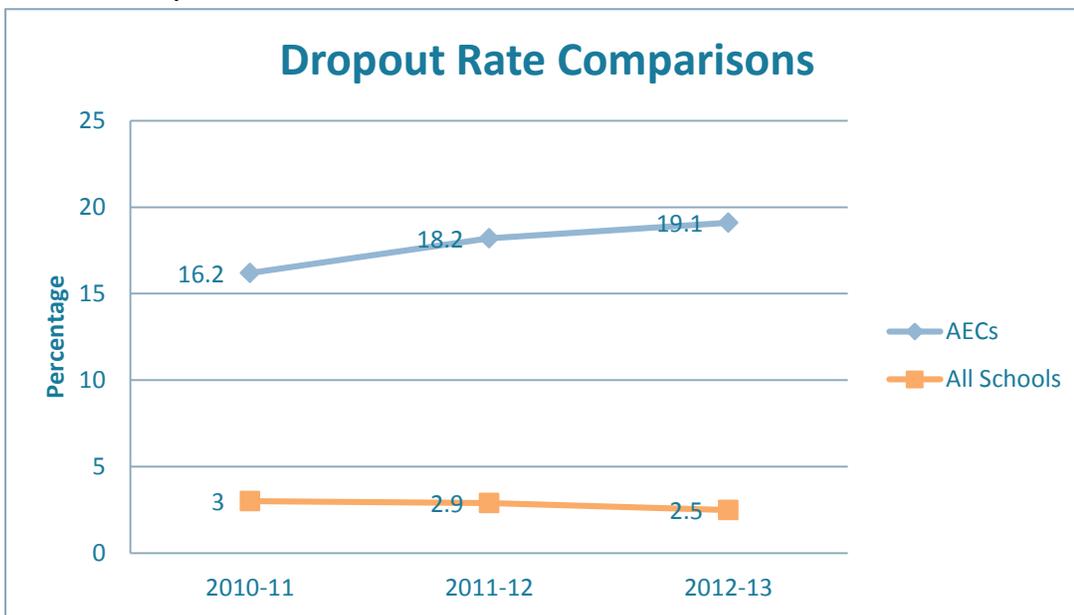
The low performance of students in alternative education settings and schools led to a discussion regarding how the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) can better support the schools that serve high-risk students and bolster achievement and postsecondary and workforce readiness. In order to better meet the needs of these schools and districts, the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement at CDE conducted an environmental scan, which included four data sources:

- Analysis of AEC's SPFs
- Technical Assistance Needs Assessment
- Focus Group Conversation at 2013 Dropout Prevention Summit
- Expelled and At Risk Student Services (EARSS) grant recipient survey

Environmental Scan SOURCES

- 2013 SPF Analysis
- Technical Assistance Needs Assessment
- March 2013 Focus Group
- EARSS Grant Recipient Survey

This document summarizes key findings from each source, as well as a summary of findings.

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Environmental Scan Analysis

School Performance Frameworks

The School Performance Framework serves to:

> 1. Hold schools accountable for performance on the same, single set of indicators and measures; and

> 2. Inform a differentiated approach to state support based on performance and need, by specifically identifying the lowest performing schools.

These aims are a central part of the Colorado Department of Education's Statewide System of Accountability and Support and the goals outlined in the Education Accountability Act of 2009 (SB 09-163) . They are critical to enabling the state to better support district evaluation, planning, decision-making, and implementation in improving schools. To support the various state, district and school uses of the performance frameworks, both district and school performance frameworks will be provided to districts annually at the start of the school year.

The law authorizes the Department to conduct a distinct performance review for those schools that meet the definition of an Alternative Education Campus (AEC). The state's performance framework for AECs takes into account the unique purposes of the campuses and the unique circumstances of the challenges posed by the students enrolled in the campuses.   Information was gathered during the 2010-11 school year from various AEC stakeholder groups to develop the AEC SPF criteria and components. More information about accountability for AECs can be found here: http://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/stateaccountabilityaecs

All of Colorado's Alternative Education Campuses (AECs) are accountable for the following performance indicators: Academic Achievement, Academic Growth, Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (high schools only) and Student Engagement. Performance on these indicators will serve as the basis for an AEC's school plan type assignment by districts and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). For schools, the overall evaluation leads to the type of plan schools will implement.

> *The Education Accountability Act of 2009 requires each Colorado district and school to create an annual improvement plan. (CDE) has developed a unified improvement planning template and processes to support schools and districts in their performance management efforts.*
> *~ CDE's Unified Improvement Planning website*

The School Performance Framework assigns to each school one of four plan types:

> 1. Performance Plan: The school meets or exceeds statewide attainment on the performance indicators and is required to adopt and implement a Performance Plan.

> 2. Improvement Plan: The school is required to adopt and implement an Improvement Plan.

> 3. Priority Improvement Plan: The school is required to adopt and implement a Priority Improvement Plan.

> 4. Turnaround Plan: The school is required to adopt and implement a Turnaround Plan.

Table 3 describes the 2013 School Performance Frameworks for Alternative Education Campuses. Information was obtained from the Accountability Office at the Colorado Department of Education. Needs were determined by more than 50% of the schools falling into the 'Approaching' or 'Does Not Meet' categories, or by schools not submitting data in this category. Needs are highlighted in yellow.

TABLE 3: 2013 SPF Results for AECs

	Grade Levels	Middle	Elementary-Middle-High	Middle-High	High
	Total # of Schools	1	4	17	53
Achievement	Exceeds or Meets (# of schools)	0	0	6	16
	Approaching or Does Not Meet (# of schools)	1	4	10	27
	Blank: School did not submit data (# of schools)	0	0	1	10
Growth	Exceeds or Meets (# of schools)	1	1	4	17
	Approaching or Does Not Meet (# of schools)	0	2	12	22
	Blank: School did not submit data (# of schools)	0	1	1	14
Student Engagement	Exceeds or Meets (# of schools)	1	4	6	24
	Approaching or Does Not Meet (# of schools)	0	0	11	27
	Blank: School did not submit data (# of schools)	0	0	0	2
Postsecondary Readiness	Exceeds or Meets (# of schools)	N/A	4	10	21
	Approaching or Does Not Meet (# of schools)	N/A	0	7	32
	Blank: School did not submit data (# of schools)	N/A	0	0	0
Overall Performance Ratings	Performance (# of schools)	1	2	6	22
	Improvement (# of schools)	0	2	6	18
	Priority Improvement (# of schools)	0	0	3	9
	Turnaround (# of schools)	0	0	2	4

Technical Assistance Needs Assessment Survey

In November, 2013, the Dropout Prevention and Engagement Office at the Colorado Department of Education asked for one representative from each Alternative Education program or campus to fill out the Alt Ed Needs Assessment. Information from this survey is being used by the Office of Dropout Prevention to develop and implement a technical assistance plan that will meet the needs of both Alternative Education programs and schools in Colorado. The technical assistance plan could include both in-person and web-based professional development opportunities involving training, networking and resource sharing.
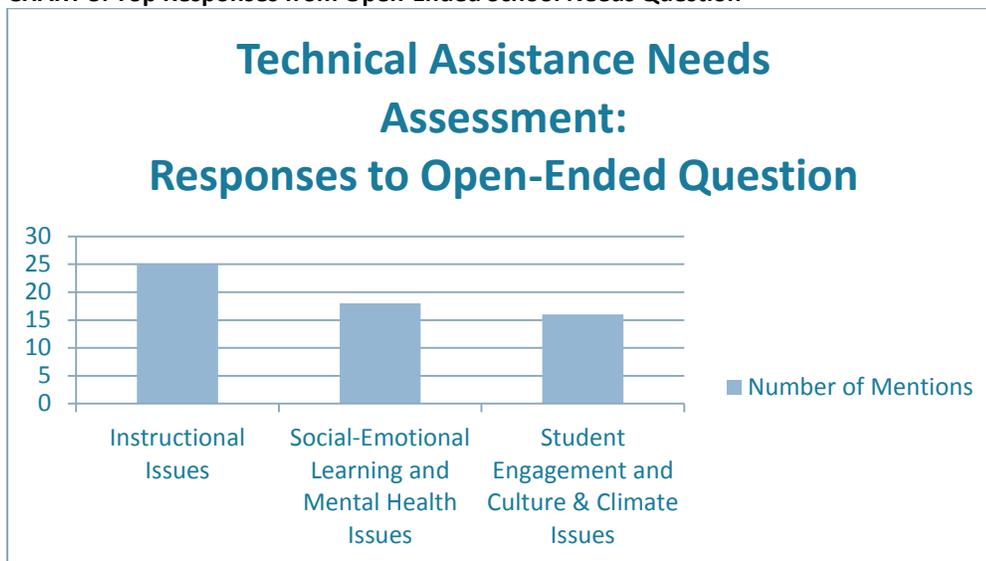
Representatives were asked to identify the top two or three professional development or support needs for their schools and programs. This question was an open-ended question. A qualitative analysis was done in which responses were categorized according to topic or category.

Top responses from this open-ended question fell into the following three categories, as indicated in table 4.

TABLE 4: Top Responses from Open-Ended School Needs Question

Category	Number of mentions	Specifically mentioned
Instructional issues	25	Differentiation, 21st Century Learning, Backwards Design, PBL, blended learning, etc.
Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health issues	18	Understanding and supporting traumatized and at-risk youth, behavior management, counseling strategies, SEL, etc.
Student Engagement and Culture & Climate issues	16	Attendance, increasing student motivation, etc.

CHART 3: Top Responses from Open-Ended School Needs Question

Technical Assistance Needs Assessment:
Responses to Open-Ended Question

School and program representatives were asked to indicate the level of interest of a staff or faculty member participating in a variety of professional development topics. Choices included high interest, moderate interest and low interest. Priorities were determined based on the number of 'high interest' responses as the first sort, and 'moderate interest' responses as the second sort.

Top technical assistance priorities from the Needs Assessment were determined as follows:

1. Improving academic skills
2. Strategies to support students with their mental health
3. Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, including strategies to support students' PWR (test prep, career technical education, concurrent enrollment, internship/externship experiences, etc)
4. Increasing the relevancy of students' educational experiences
5. Strategies to support students who are overage and undercredited
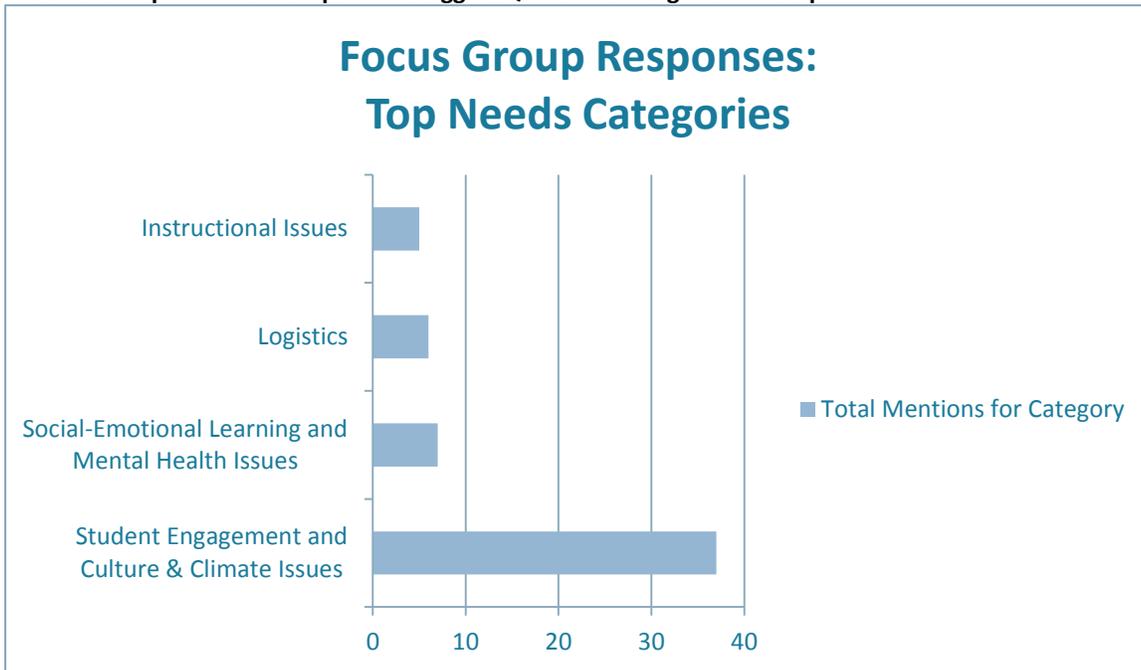6. Strategies to support students struggling with substance abuse

Focus Group Results

The Dropout Prevention Summit held in March, 2013 was hosted by the Colorado Graduation Pathways program in the Dropout Prevention and Engagement Office at the Colorado Department of Education.   During the Summit, approximately 30 professionals who work with opportunity youth and at-risk youth in educational programs or schools participated in a break-out session specifically for AECs. During this session, representatives were asked to discuss their top two needs or struggles. The following table summarizes the topics generated from this focus group, as well as how often a particular topic was mentioned.

TABLE 5: Responses from Top Two Struggles Question during Focus Group

Category	Specifically Mentioned	Number of Mentions
Student Engagement and Culture & Climate Issues	Truancy	13
	Parent Engagement	10
	Relevancy	5
	Student Engagement	3
	Lack of Hope for Postsecondary	2
	Dropping Out	1
	History of Failure	1
	Students Want to Leave	1
	Systems	1
Total Mentions for Category		**37**
Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health Issues	Mental Health	3
	Bullying	1
	Peer Pressure	1
	Substance Abuse	1
	Support for Social/Emotional	1
Total Mentions for Category		**7**
Logistics	Transportation	3
	Day Care	1
	Homelessness	1
	Mobility	1
Total Mentions for Category		**6**
Instructional Issues	Overage & Undercredit	3
	ELL's	1
	Poor Academic Skills	1
Total Mentions for Category		**5**

CHART 4: Responses from Top Two Struggles Question during Focus Group

Focus Group Responses: Top Needs Categories

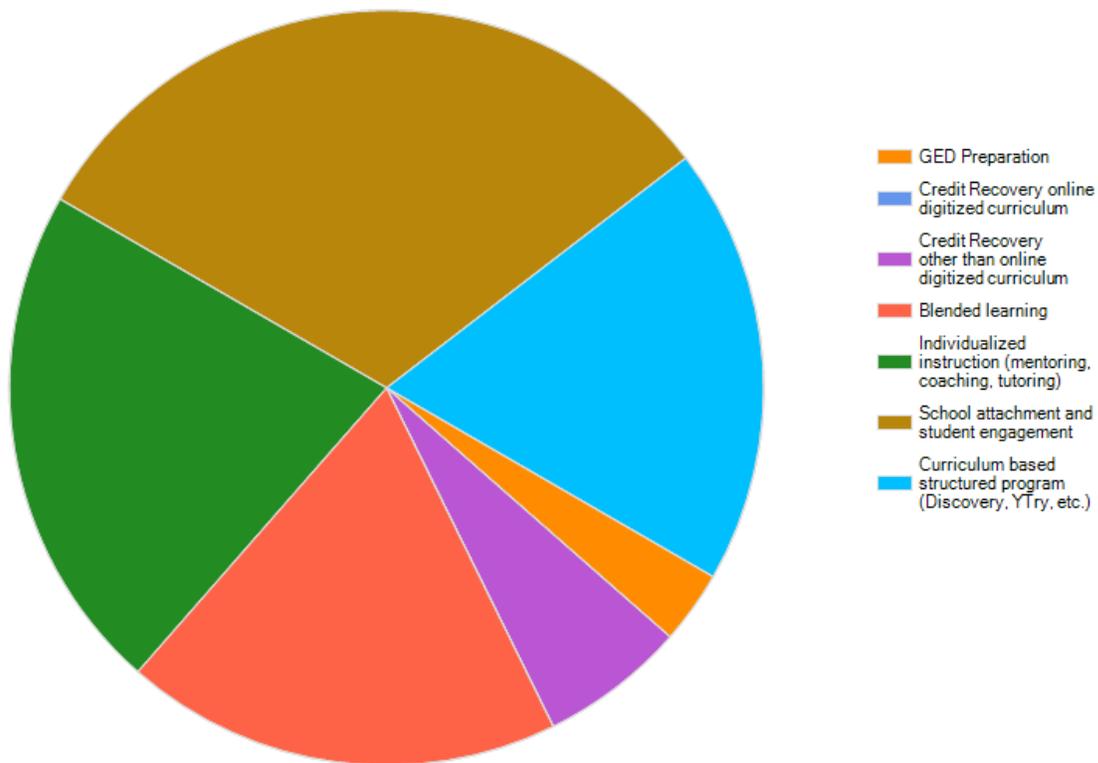| Category	Total Mentions for Category
Instructional Issues	~5
Logistics	~6
Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health Issues	~7
Student Engagement and Culture & Climate Issues	~37

■ Total Mentions for Category

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EARSS Grant Recipient Survey Results

The Expelled and At Risk Student Services (EARSS) grant recipients were asked in August, 2013 to identify their top needs in a survey. Thirty-two responses were collected, indicating alternative educational issues were a high priority for grantees. Additional information was then collected from those respondents to clarify which particular alternative educational issues were of high need. The following diagram represents the results from the EARSS grant recipient survey, illustrating the top alternative education issues for EARSS grantees.

CHART 5: EARSS Grantees Top Educational Issues

Of the following programs or strategies most typically offered in Alternative Education settings, identify the one which you are most interested.


Legend:
- GED Preparation
- Credit Recovery online digitized curriculum
- Credit Recovery other than online digitized curriculum
- Blended learning
- Individualized instruction (mentoring, coaching, tutoring)
- School attachment and student engagement
- Curriculum based structured program (Discovery, YTry, etc.)

Summary

Common Themes

Aggregating the results of the four sources, two issues emerge as priorities for Alternative Education Campuses and programs. The first priority is academic needs, including instructional approaches, curricula, delivery methods and individualized student support and advising. The second priority surrounds student engagement. Specific topics include attendance and truancy, mental health, social-emotional issues and effective counseling strategies.

These two priorities directly impact each other. Higher levels of student engagement will support higher levels of academic attainment. In turn, higher levels of academic success will promote higher levels of student engagement.

These findings are being used to inform a technical assistance plan that is currently under development to support Alternative Education programs and schools.

Academic Needs
- Instructional Approaches
- Curricula
- Delivery Methods
- Student Support

Student Engagement Needs
- Attendance and truancy
- Mental Health
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Counseling
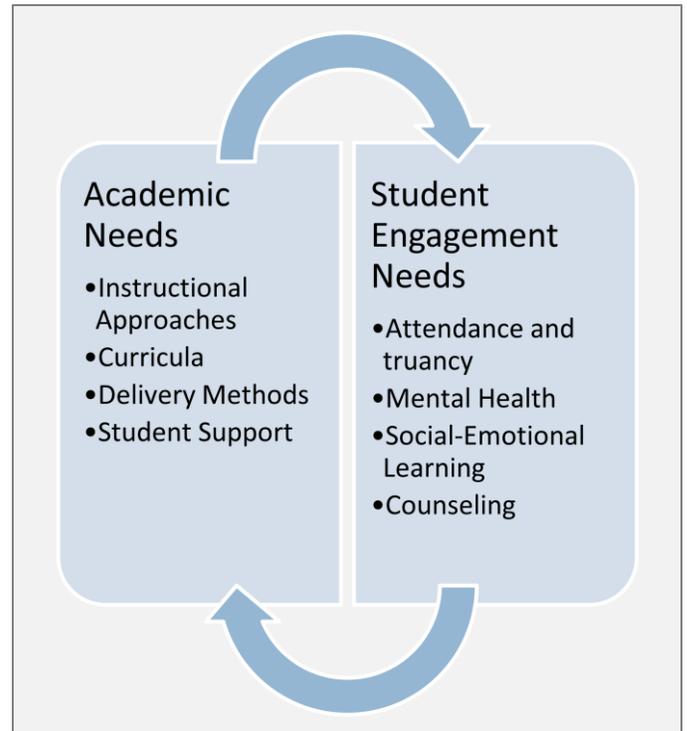
Prioritized Needs of Alternative Education Campuses and Programs

Appendix A: Definition of Alternative Education Campuses

Each school wishing to be designated as Alternative Education Centers by the Colorado State Board of Education must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Has a specialized mission to serve special needs or at-risk populations
- Is an autonomous public school, meaning that the school provides a complete instructional program that allows students to proceed to the next grade level or to graduate
- Has an administrator who is not under the supervision of an administrator at another school
- Has a budget separate from any other public school
- Has nontraditional methods of instructional delivery
- Has a public process to ensure accountability
- Serves one of the following student populations (at the time of the state testing window):
    - All students have severe limitations that preclude appropriate administration of the assessments administered pursuant to section § 22-7-409, C.R.S.;
    - All students attend only on a part-time basis and come from other public schools where the part-time students are counted in the enrollment of the other public school; or
    - More than 95% of students either have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) pursuant to § 22-20-108, C.R.S. and/or meet the definition of a "high-risk" student.

For purposes of Alternative Education Campus designation, "high-risk" students include the following students:

- With Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Who have been committed to the Department of Human Services following adjudication as juvenile delinquents or who are in detention awaiting disposition of charges that may result in commitment to the Department of Human Services
- Who have dropped out of school or who have not been continuously enrolled and regularly attending any school for at least one semester prior to enrolling
- Who have been expelled from school or who have engaged in behavior that would justify expulsion
- Who have documented histories of personal drug or alcohol use or who have parents or guardians with documented dependencies on drugs or alcohol
- Who have documented histories of personal street gang involvement or who have immediate family members with documented histories of street gang involvement
- Who have documented histories of child abuse or neglect
- Who have parents or guardians in prison or on parole or probation
- Who have documented histories of domestic violence in the immediate family
- Who have documented histories of repeated school suspensions
- Who are under the age of twenty years who are parents or pregnant women
- Who are migrant, as defined in Section 22-23-103 (2), CRS
- Who are homeless, as defined in Section 22-23-102.5 (2), CRS
- Who have a documented history of a serious psychiatric or behavioral disorder, including but not limited to an eating disorder, suicidal behaviors, or deliberate, self-inflicted injury
- Who are over traditional school age for their grade level and lack adequate credit hours for their grade level

More information regarding AEC designations, as well as resources and materials regarding accountability for AECs, can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/Accountability/StateAccountabilityAECs.asp