

## QPAS PROGRAM REVIEW – FALL 2004

**Program Title:** Interagency Alternative Schools      **Program Manager:** Joan Ledebur  
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**Date of Report:** September 20, 2004      **Period Covered:** FY 2003 – FY 2004

### Program Intent

#### Program Purpose, Goals, and Objectives

##### Program Purpose:

The purpose of the Interagency Alternative Schools is to provide quality instruction to at-risk youth who are placed in 29 school programs at 38 different sites that are co-located in community agency programs (Juvenile Court, Alcohol and Drug Services, Mental Health).

The Interagency Alternative Schools (IAS), in partnership with the community agencies in which they are located, provide a rigorous academic program designed to assist each student in the development of his or her potential. Dedicated and skilled teachers meet the diverse needs of a high-risk student population through the following goals and objectives.

##### Program Goals:

**Goal I:** Ensure high levels of instruction in all Interagency Alternative School (IAS) programs.

**Objective IA:** During the 2002-2004 period, all new IAS teachers will be mentored by an experienced IAS teacher.

**Objective IB:** During the 2002-2004 period, all staff will receive staff development opportunities to enhance instruction.

**Goal II:** Ensure high levels of student achievement within Interagency Alternative Schools.

**Objective IIA:** During the 2002-2004 school years, there will be at least a 5 percent annual increase in the number of students across grade levels that pass the SOL tests during the year in which they enrolled in an IAS program.

**Objective IIB:** During the 2002-2004 school years, 90% of all IAS students who are seniors will graduate from high school.

**Objective IIC:** During the 2002-2004 school years, a survey will be conducted to determine the post-GED success of GRANTS program participants.

**Goal III:** Ensure a comprehensive variety of Interagency Alternative School Programs.

**Objective IIIA:** By the end of the 2003-2004 school year, projections will be submitted and reviewed by key stakeholders for funding of the IAS programs.

**Objective IIIB:** During the 2003-2004 school year, key stakeholders will assess the need for additional programs to meet specific geographic demands.

The purpose, goals, and objectives have not changed throughout this review period.

Changes anticipated for the future are related to the need for additional programs as determined by an increase in student numbers and FCPS needs.

#### **Nature of the Program/Intervention(s)**

The programs are actually small schools, some of them “one-room-schools,” that offer education to the seriously at-risk student population with the same instructional expectations of general education schools. All instruction is based on the Virginia Standards of Learning and the FCPS Program of Studies. The staff of the Interagency Alternative Schools is a dedicated, well-trained faculty with many years of experience in providing instruction for students with significant academic and behavioral issues. Attention is given to maximizing instructional time at each site. This is made possible because of the low pupil-teacher ratio, which on average is 6:1. As each school program is designed to coordinate with the agency treatment components, schedules vary among the 38 sites. Agency staff support enables teaching staff to concentrate on instruction with few behavior problems that might typically disrupt class time in other programs for at-risk youth. Teachers are assigned to each site based on their instructional strengths and endorsements. In the larger programs, teachers are responsible for one curriculum area. In the smaller sites, one teacher provides instruction in English and social studies and a second teacher is responsible for math and science. The IAS guidance counselor works closely with each site to ensure that appropriate courses are offered for each student and that all transcripts are updated on a regular basis.

#### **Number and Location of Sites**

The Interagency Alternative Schools consist of 29 school programs in 38 sites that are located primarily in agency-based programs. Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court operates 11 programs that include school components. Less Secure Shelter, Boys Probation House and Girls Probation House are residential treatment programs for youth placed by Juvenile Court judges. There are 5 school programs in probation counselor offices. The Independent Study program is available for probationers who are not able to work in groups. Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board has school programs in six of their substance abuse treatment sites and in four of their programs for students who have mental health concerns. One shelter home serves students

in foster care and a Recovery School is in a school administration office. A second such program closed during this period because of budgetary reasons. In fall of 2003, a partnership with Fairfax County Community and Recreation Services provided space for a new program for students who have been expelled and placed by the Office of Hearings. The students meet in the facility's computer clubhouse and are taught through online courses. A similar program will open in fall, 2004.

State funds support seven of the Interagency Alternative school programs. The Juvenile Detention Center, Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute, and the Northern Virginia Sickle Cell Center receive grants from the State Operated Programs Department of Education (DOE) office for all staff and instructional materials. An additional program began in spring of 2004 called Care Connection for Children. The Adult Detention Special Education teachers are also funded by state monies. The Transition Support Resource Center (TSRC) is partially state funded as a Regional Alternative School Program with the bulk of the teacher's salaries covered by Title I, Part D for Neglected and Delinquent. An additional site for TSRC will open in fall, 2004. The GRANTS program is funded through the new state legislation as an Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program for supporting students to receive their GED at an earlier age if they complete job skills training and other preparation for becoming a productive citizen. During the reporting period, GRANTS programs have increased from two to six sites. All of these programs are supervised at the local level by the coordinator of the Interagency Alternative Schools in order to maximize the services for the large at-risk population in Fairfax County.

It is possible that additional programs may close in the coming years because of budget problems. Two teaching positions have been assigned to the Crisis Care Center scheduled to open at some point in the future.

The following chart provides an overview of the types of programs.

**INTERAGENCY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS BY SPONSORING AGENCY**  
**2004-2005**

**JUVENILE AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS COURT**

<u>Residential</u>		<u>Day</u>
<u>Long-Term</u>	<u>Short-Term</u>	
Boys Probation House	Juvenile Detention Center (State)	Sager
Girls Probation House	Less Secure Shelter Home	Falls Bridge
	Adult Detention Center	Hillwood
		Gunston
		Elizabeth Blackwell Middle School
	_____	_____
	Independent Study Program (3 sites)	Enterprise

**FAIRFAX-FALLS CHURCH COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD**

**ALCOHOL AND DRUG SERVICES**

<u>Residential</u>	<u>Day</u>
Crossroads Residential	Horizons Day
Sunrise House	Vista Day
Sunrise II	Compass Day

**MENTAL HEALTH**

<u>Residential</u>	<u>Day</u>
<u>Long-Term</u>	<u>Short-Term</u>
Sojourn House	Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute (State)
*My Friend's Place	Northwest Center

**RESIDENTIAL YOUTH SERVICES**

Short-Term Diagnostic Shelter Home

Hickory Grove

**FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Devonshire Center Alternative School (Recovery School)  
 Transition Support Resource Center (Bryant and Falls Church)  
 Computer Enhanced Instruction Program (CEI) (Reston and South County)  
 GRANTS PROGRAM (GED Readiness and New Technology Skills Program) (State) (6 sites)  
 Northern Virginia Sickle Cell Center (State)  
 Care Connection for Children (State)

\* Elementary Program

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## **Groups Targeted for Impact**

The population at the Interagency Alternative Schools is considered to be at-risk, but many of them are beyond at-risk and are in crisis. Eleven of the programs are in Court facilities including Juvenile Detention Center, Adult Detention Center, and Boys Probation House, thus serving a delinquent population. Six of the sites are treatment programs for substance abusers; five are in mental health facilities; one is a shelter care home, and the rest of the programs serve students who are recovering addicts, GED candidates, and students who have been expelled. The mission of the facilities that house the school programs usually defines the population, e.g., delinquent, substance abusing, mentally ill, or coping with family dysfunction. An average of 20 percent of the students in IAS have been expelled or excluded from their base schools and approximately 13 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. A look at the 2003-2004 demographics of the IAS (excluding Juvenile Detention Center students) provides information on characteristics of the students. Typically, more males are served with 60 percent males in the IAS schools and 40 percent females. Ethnicity breakdowns for IAS are: Caucasian—47 percent; African-American—21 percent; Hispanic—21 percent; Asian—9 percent; and Other—3 percent. Students classified as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) make up 8 percent of IAS. Students who are eligible for special education services are 29 percent of the IAS students. Because the Interagency Alternative Schools are specifically designed to work with this population, they are well suited to meet the unique educational needs of such children and youth.

In a snapshot of one day, there are 442 students in the Interagency Alternative Schools, including those at Juvenile Detention Center who are not in the FCPS SASI database. During the course of a year, there is an average of 1,600 students enrolled in IAS. Some of the IAS programs are at sites where the students are there for a short period of time. The population now includes more students working on their GED (General Education Development). Four years ago, the State began funding the program Individualized Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program to allow students 16 and older to take the GED if they complete a program involving computer and vocational training. This program, GRANTS, has grown and serves over 250 students each year.

There may be a growth in the number of GED candidates now that the graduation requirements include passing a designated number of SOL end-of-course tests. The new Crisis Care Center will serve youth ages 6-18 that are in various stages of distress and will be opening this year.

## **Program Organization**

### **Program Staff**

The Interagency Alternative Schools staff is supervised by a coordinator who serves as the “principal” and evaluates staff. The Juvenile Detention Center has a state-funded principal. Support staff includes a guidance counselor, a curriculum resource teacher, a special education liaison, a technology SBTS, and technology resource teacher (who also serves the Dunn Loring and Eleven Oaks Alternative Learning Centers), a six-tenths reading teacher (funded by Title I), 5 ESOL resource teachers (funded by Instructional Services Department), a SASI operator, and a half-time administrative assistant. This staff is based at the Devonshire Administrative Center. The teaching staff includes 83.5 teachers (22.5 funded by grants) and 2 instructional assistants.

They are divided among the 38 sites throughout Fairfax County. The teachers must be certified in one or more content areas and/or Special Education. The instructional assistants must have at least two years of college. Special qualifications include excellent content teaching skills and the ability to relate positively with at-risk youth. They must also be independent and creative in order to function in the autonomous manner needed for their roles.

There was an increase in staffing during 2003-2004 with growth in the GRANTS program and the addition of the Computer Enhanced Instruction program. For FY 2004, three new programs are planned including a second Computer Enhanced Instruction program in Alexandria, a second Transition Support Resource Program in Falls Church, and a resource position at Care Connection for Children. One program, Oakton Arbor, was closed during this period with the loss of one position. Because of the rigor of SOL demands, certified teachers have replaced several instructional assistant positions.

At this point, all IAS teachers who are not new to the FCPS are considered to be highly qualified in accordance with the No Child Left Behind legislation. New staff are only hired if they are able to become highly qualified during their first year.

### **Organizational Structure**

The coordinator of Interagency Alternative Schools is supervised by the director of Alternative School Programs, who, in turn, is supervised by the assistant superintendent of the Department of Special Services. The coordinator is responsible for staff evaluations. There is no school administrative staff at the sites. Each program has a head teacher who is the main contact with school and agency staff. Faculty meetings are held each month for all teachers and support staff in order to manage administrative issues and share instructional information and strategies. Each site has access to the Internet, thus email is widely used. There is an Interagency Alternative School Conference accessible through the Internet and announcements and messages are posted for all staff. The Conference also posts handbooks, instructional strategies, and technology information that is pertinent to staff. There is an IAS web site with public access. In addition, the coordinator and resource staff visit the sites on a regular basis.

Information that requires sharing in the form of hard copy is sent by FAX or through the FCPS courier system. Staff members contact the coordinator's office via phone to problem solve and receive advice regarding guidance issues, sensitive student problems, registration and withdrawal matters, and budget concerns. Two-way communication is open and constant.

Each staff member is provided with a handbook that is updated yearly and outlines expected procedures and regulations. Additionally, an annual photo staff directory that includes home and work information is published and distributed.

There has been no change in the organizational structure over the course of the two-year period.

No changes are anticipated in the organizational structure over the coming year.

### **Training/Staff Development**

The Interagency Alternative Schools have a strong staff development program. Decisions are made about content based on a needs assessment completed by staff. Each month at the faculty meeting, there is a presentation involving some element of the instruction program or clarifying new guidelines that impact the teaching staff. In the hour prior to each of those meetings, the staff has two choices for instructional enrichment.

During the 2003-2004 school year a variety of instructional sessions were offered. The science chairperson developed a yearlong workshop to explore Biology content and strategies that are appropriate for alternative school students. The ESOL teachers also presented monthly workshops on strategies to work with language minority students. Every year the teachers participate in a Sharefair where they exchange teacher-tested lessons with other faculty members. Throughout the year, technology sessions are taught after school hours to instruct the staff on the use of new software programs and computer applications. Each session is evaluated by survey to facilitate future planning. On countywide in-service days, all staff attends content area sessions designed by the Instructional Services Department.

There have been more sessions based on the various Instructional Services initiatives such as the Middle School Benchmarks and the required classes for conditionally promoted students. SOL strategies are frequently presented topics as well.

In addition, the coordinator and support staff provides informational meetings for FCPS guidance counselors, social worker, psychologists, special education cluster staff, and other groups throughout the year. Two times a year the coordinator has a meeting with agency directors of all programs where all emerging issues are discussed and program changes are outlined. FCPS regulations and guidelines that impact on the clients they serve are explained. In addition, the agency directors share information about their programs.

There may be a need to clarify the No Child Left Behind legislation. There will be focus on implementing the Blackboard system into our programs and significant training will be required in that area.

### **Program Implementation**

To implement each program, each Interagency Alternative School provides instruction in accordance with the Virginia Standards of Learning and the FCPS Program of Studies. Each Interagency Alternative School is supplied with the most recent FCPS adopted texts and ancillary materials for all academic subjects. In addition, supplemental materials that are appropriate for an at-risk population are available. Computers and printers purchased with Title I funds are typically available in a 3:1 ratio of students to computers. Each site has at least one teacher presentation system that consists of a combination of a high-end computer connected to a television, a VCR, and a laserdisc player. A variety of county-approved software programs are available with periodic training sessions on their use. In addition, staff has access to national databases for research including Grolier's, SIRS Knowledge Source, ProQuest and Marco Polo, which are typically available in school libraries. Internet access is available at each site. A

technology resource teacher works with each teacher to help incorporate technology into daily lessons—both in classrooms and through training sessions.

Instructional strategies that are universally used in IAS are based on the understanding of differing learning styles (Albert Canfield, Bernice McCarthy); Multiple Intelligences (Howard Gardner), and Bloom’s Taxonomy. Recent workshops on differentiation have reinforced the scientifically based strategies used with the multi-level classrooms. Teachers recognize the importance of using “hands-on” activities such as math manipulatives, interactive experiments, and project-oriented assignments. A major goal is the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Most of the Interagency Alternative Schools use the resources of volunteer tutors and mentors to supplement their instructional programs. At the Juvenile Detention Center, educational mentors and screened volunteers from the Fairfax County community are assigned to appropriate students. Student and mentor are carefully matched for compatibility and needs to ensure a successful relationship. The mentor and student meet several times at the detention center before the student is released. The mentor continues to meet with the student back at the base school or follow-up placement to help aid transition back into the regular academic setting. Parental approval is obtained before the mentoring partnership is arranged. This has been a very successful triad partnership of family, school, and community.

The Springfield Rotary Club has been a partner to the IAS program for the last five years. This group sponsors the Creative Arts Contest each spring by participating in the judging of entries and by funding bookstore gift certificates as awards. Several of the IAS sites have formal business partnerships. The Enterprise School has business partnerships with community service agencies and corporations that provide support designed to encourage both youth involvement in the community and the community’s support of its youth. Partnerships have been built with Fairfax County business and volunteer sectors that include bi-weekly internships, daily apprenticeships, on-site mentorships, and technology training. The school’s Community Service Project gives first year students the opportunity to foster interpersonal skills, build responsibility and self-confidence, and develop a sense of giving. Students are placed in traditional non-profit community agencies and local schools 2 days per month to provide direct service to agency participants. Each student serves a minimum of 150 hours annually. Written evaluations are conducted after each session based on criteria established by site supervisors. The GRANTS GED Program has contacts with several businesses and with Northern Virginia Community College to allow students to shadow and have some training in preparation for future jobs. All programs are encouraged to involve students in community service projects, which will benefit the community and build students’ self-esteem.

It will be necessary to purchase new adopted texts in social studies and science for each site when the adoption process is completed during 2004. It is a policy for IAS school programs to have the most current texts so that students who enter from base schools will be able to continue with their work with less disruption. It is also important to have the new texts because they are more closely aligned with the Virginia SOL objectives.

### **Program Impact**

The IAS program met the majority of the objectives set for the 2002-2004 review period. All new staff is assigned an IAS alternative school mentor who is trained by FCPS Office of Staff Development and teaches in the same content area as the mentee. (Goal I, Objective IA) Monthly meetings are held with all new staff and their mentors. Weekly meetings are held between mentor and mentee.

Staff development offerings for 2002-2004 were selected to help teachers better prepare students for taking the SOL tests. (See Training/Staff Development section.) Student success on SOL tests attest to the quality of the training. (Goal I, Objective 2A.)

It must be noted that many of the IAS sites are short-term placements where students have little chance to benefit from the instructional program before SOL tests are given. The scores of students at the few long-term sites have always been higher. In addition, the student population is small. The impact of a few very low scores skews the percentages dramatically. Success of IAS students, however, has been rewarding to all teachers and staff. Overall, there was a 17.6 percent increase in the number of IAS students who passed the end of course SOL tests between spring 2002 and spring 2004. Success rates exceeded the goal of a 5 percent increase in the pass rate in 8 of the 10 subject areas. However, the dramatic success in both English literature and U.S./VA history is responsible for the overall high percentage. (Goal II, Objective IIA)

#### **Four Year Comparison of Interagency Alternative Schools SOL Test Scores**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Eng Lit</b>	75.6	72.5	69	88.8	96.2
<b>Alg 1</b>	48	54	32.5	52.2	57.4
<b>WS 1</b>	61.2	75.8	75.5	80	74.1
<b>WS 2</b>	45	48.7	60.6	65.4	70.6
<b>Geom</b>	70.3	40.5	69.3	62	80
<b>USVA</b>	19.3	33.3	46.8	56.5	91.1
<b>Chem</b>	34.6	35	38.6	48	62.8
<b>Bio</b>	56.5	77	69.6	60.3	60.8
<b>Alg 2</b>	30	60.8	34.7	34.3	64.2
<b>Earth Sc</b>		100		50	100
<b>Writing</b>	52	76.5	70.5	84.8	85.1

Of the 44 IAS students who were seniors during June 2003, only one student did not graduate. In spring 2004, there were 41 seniors. All graduated either with regular or modified diplomas except for one student who did not continue in the program for summer school. These two years were the first years that verified credits earned by passing SOL end of course tests were required. (Goal II, Objective IIB)

The GRANTS GED program has been a success and has grown during the past four years. In the 2003-2004 school year, there were a total of 389 students who were referred to the program. Of that number, 251 students were enrolled. Of that number, 153 took the GED test and some students returned to complete the program in fall 2004. Of the 153 students who took the GED, 145 passed with a total pass rate of 95 percent. A six-month follow-up telephone interview of

125 GRANTS students who had completed the program revealed that 66.4 percent were either employed or attending post secondary training programs or colleges. (Goal II, Objective IIC)

Projections were submitted and reviewed by key stakeholders of both agency representatives and FCPS for funding of the IAS program. (Goal III, Objective IIIA)

A program for expelled students was planned to respond to the needs of students who were not able to enter FCPS school buildings. In fall 2003, the Computer Enhanced Instruction (CEI) program was opened at the Reston Teen Center of the YMCA. Students are assigned by the Hearings Office and, with the support of two teachers, work on their subjects in the Nova.Net online system. In 2004, an additional CEI program is scheduled to open in the Alexandria area as well as a second Transition Support Resource Center in Falls Church. Staffing is in place for a school program at the Crisis Care Center when it opens in 2005 and the need for additional CEI programs has been suggested. (Goal III, Objective IIIB)

The program has been impacted by the increased concern about facilitating the passage of SOL tests for our at-risk population. Some of the programs have the students for only a few weeks before the testing and teachers feel frustrated that they are not able to make more of a difference in their performance. As mentioned previously, additional expectations such as benchmark monitoring and providing instruction for conditionally promoted students has stretched the resources of the teachers of the “one-room-schools.”

The Impact changes to the program for the upcoming year are unclear.

## Program Budget and Expenditures

### Interagency Alternative Schools Program

	FY 2003 Approved		FY 2004 Approved	
	School-Based	Nonschool-Based	School-Based	Nonschool-Based
FT Salaries	\$3,524,843	\$141,271	\$3,978,257	\$211,983
PT Salaries and OT	72,884	0	102,030	0
Employee Benefits	888,653	35,393	1,044,290	55,229
Operating Expenses	82,744	0	86,234	0
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$4,569,124</b>	<b>\$176,664</b>	<b>\$5,210,811</b>	<b>\$267,212</b>
<b>Positions</b>	<b>69.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>67.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Program Total</b>		<b>\$4,745,788</b>		<b>\$5,478,024</b>
<b>Offsetting Revenue</b>		<b>\$0</b>		<b>\$0</b>
<b>Net Cost</b>		<b>\$4,745,788</b>		<b>\$5,478,024</b>
<b>Grant and other funding</b>		<b>\$1,131,790</b>		<b>\$1,781,535</b>
<b>Total Positions</b>		<b>71.5</b>		<b>70.0</b>
Number of Schools/Sites		31		31
Number of Services		379		357

Costs for the IAS programs have increased by approximately \$730,000 from FY 2003 to FY 2004. School-based costs rose due to cost-of-living and employee benefit increases, which more than offset the decrease in the number of school-based staff.

### Conclusions/Recommendations

The Interagency Alternative Schools are an essential part of the continuum of services for at-risk youth. IAS students have needs beyond those of students in traditional school settings. The IAS programs serve Fairfax County's most at-risk students in programs where the costs for facilities, utilities, and support staff are borne by other agencies. The model of co-location in an agency site provides a structure that allows the teachers to concentrate on academics while the agency staff addresses the issues that brought the students to the program. A journal article from the April 1995 issue of *Crime and Delinquency*, "A Meta-Analytic Assessment of Delinquency-Related Outcomes of Alternative Education Programs," suggests that alternative programs that are designed for a specific population have a better chance of reducing the frequency of involvement in delinquent behavior of the students than more general programs. The Interagency Alternative Schools are specifically designed to meet the needs of the small groups of students who are in treatment or in a similar setting for a similar reason.

The IAS programs provide school options for up to 1,600 students a year. Many of these students would not be in school or would be impacting the general education programs in a negative way.

The Interagency Alternative Schools will continue to look for creative ways to help at-risk students meet their instructional needs. We serve a population of students who have failed in almost all of their previous school settings. With this in mind, a different approach to relating to the students is needed. The staff supports the philosophy outlined in the book Expelled to a Friendlier Place by Martin Gold and David Mann. This book was a study of the effectiveness of several alternative school programs. One of the conclusions the authors reached was that there are two essential ingredients of alternative education that would determine its success in reducing disruptive and delinquent behavior and improving academic skills:

- a positive relationship with one or more adults and
- genuine success experiences that are possible because of individualized and personalized instruction.

We will continue to look for just the right method to teach students who have rarely been successful in school. This will be done through continued staff development, analysis of student performance scores on SOL tests, and studies of student success after leaving the IAS schools.

A study of alternative schools in Virginia was done by the University of Virginia in 1998 called “A School of Their Own: A Status Check of Virginia Alternative High Schools for At-Risk Students. In the summary of this research, there were nine recommendations that were deemed to be essential for a successful alternative school. One recommendation speaks to the need for a variety of alternative school options:

- Every school division should provide a continuum of alternative schools and programs, rather than trying to accommodate all students in a single alternative school.

The Interagency Alternative Schools will continue to assess the need for additional program options that meet the needs of students at risk for dropping out of school and work closely with Fairfax County agency partners to provide sites to meet those needs.

Appropriate transitions of alternative schools students between placement settings are an important key to future success. The above policy perspectives paper also made the following recommendation based on the findings of the research team: Every alternative school that returns students to a regular high school should employ an individual to serve as a transition specialist. This recommendation can also apply to any transitions between schools. In many cases, students who have been successful at a structured, small placement with considerable individual attention have difficulties maintaining their academic and behavioral accomplishments in a new, larger setting. Employment of a transition specialist will be an objective to be explored during the next few years.