

## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION MOVEMENTS INTERNATIONALLY AND DOMESTICALLY

As we approach the summer of 2006, this generation faces entirely new challenges. We are watching civil wars erupting in Iraq, our Congress and President are at odds over security measures and management of our International Seaports, and in Philadelphia, we are facing a crisis regarding our murder rate. Our suburban communities are facing ever increasing issues regarding “at-risk” youth.

Never before has education become so critical. Education is the means to make each member of our society recognize the importance of the role they play within our community. Education leads to personal growth. Personal growth leads to self responsibility, social order, economic growth and advances our community as a whole.

Our Founding Fathers (the authors of our National and State Constitutions) recognized the importance of education, and as a result, our Constitution mandates that each and every citizen be able to fully participate in a public education system. Had they been experiencing the issues facing our communities today, the erosion of the family unit, the issues facing “at-risk” youth, I am confident they would have supported the Commonwealth’s alternative education system as set forth in Act 48, Act 88 and otherwise – referral to “approved” private providers who specialize in the provision of services to “at-risk” youth.

As the founder of the Pennsylvania Alternative Education Advisory Committee, I conduct research regarding alternative education around the globe. Here are just a few of the most significant headlines since the last publication of Progressions in October, 2005.

### ***KENNEBUNK, MAINE:***

WELLS — Wells High School Principal Dr. Milt Teguis has a plan for an alternative program to put into place next year to stem his school’s growing dropout rate. Although the dropout rate declined from 7 percent to 2 percent from 1999 to 2005, the rate for 2006 has more than doubled to 4.6 percent. ***One of the reasons appears to be the absence in 2006 of an alternative education program.***

“We’re mainstreaming those kids right now,” he said. “We did have an alternative education program for several years. With the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the need to get everybody up to snuff in verbal and math skills, and having eight students in the program, I said we’re going to try to put in a math and verbal support class. In essence, they would get English and math twice a day.”

What was absent from the alternative program was a hands-on component. “In an alternative education program you’ve got to have something that is tactile, such as making jewelry,” Teguis said. Last year the alternative education students created, among other things, a boardwalk for a marshland and benches for the school lobby. “Teacher Andy Lopez was in charge of English classes for the students and support in science,” said Teguis. “Teacher Linda Cluff did the math and social studies with the kids. Lopez did the hands-on, or tactile.”

The state requires a school to have a dropout prevention plan, including a dropout committee, consisting of school committee member Carrie Charpentier, administrators M. Teguis and J.R. Reinke, A. Lopez, school counselor Stephen Newton, parent Jean Raymond, high school student Matt Leon, school attendance officer Bruce Savoy, community resident B.J. McLeod, Adult Education Director Cheryl D. Mills, and social worker Tim Ericson. ***The school must have an action plan consisting of responsibilities such as studying the problem of dropouts, and the need for alternative programs in kindergarten through grade 12, and submitting a plan of action to the school committee. "Because of [NCLB], everybody has got to meet a standard, and everybody has got to be ready," Teguis said. "We take those state exams, and we've got to meet our annual yearly progress, just like everybody else in the country. In order to do that, we had to make sure they were meeting the standards."***

***A school district may establish a program alternative to the regular course of study to meet the needs of the students "at risk," according to the state. Alternative programs shall support student social and behavioral development in addition to performance on the content standards of Maine's Learning Results.***

"Some kids do not learn in the same way in the same time," he said. "Some of our kids start way ahead of other kids. What I was trying to tell the committee was that the fundamental reason for dropouts comes from literacy and number deficiencies. They can't read and do numbers. When you can't do that, you're working very hard to play catch-up." Teguis said the problem is that remediation can't start in the senior year of high school. "We need to do our remediation all the way up through the grades. It's almost too late in the high school," he said. "I've been told that the average third-grade teacher can spot the potential dropouts. I don't want to sound fatalistic and say you can't overcome, but I want to say that the struggles begin then."

***Students who are not doing well begin to act out in class to get attention because they see that the only ones getting attention are the ones doing well.***

Teguis said NCLB is giving schools a focus on accountability by setting standards, even though some students can't meet those standards despite trying.

"We say every child can learn, and they can," he said. "But do they learn at the same level as the standards?"

Alternative education is a concept has been around for quite a while. What's new is the idea of having supports, such as science and social studies instruction, to go with the focus on literacy and math. ***Teguis said it is also important to differentiate instruction to alternative education students.***

"The Maine superintendents say we need vocational education and alternative education, in that order," he said. ***But I would argue that you need the alternative education first.*** Sanford Vocational, which Wells students attend for vocational education, wants students who are passing their classes before they get there because of the need for maturity around certain equipment.

"But if your kids are failing in the mainstream," said Teguis, "how do you get them into the vocational program?"

Aware of the need to stick to a budget, Teguis said he has worked out the alternative education proposal to be "budget neutral" by shifting a few programs.

"These kids still learn academic subjects," he said. "All this will happen provided the school committee gives us the green light."

### ***PEORIA, ILLINOIS:***

Candidates for the District 150 Board debated Saturday about how to keep the public schools safe after three incidents last month in which students brought weapons, including loaded guns, onto school property.

The six candidates in the March 21 election, two seeking the District 2 seat and four seeking the District 3 position, spoke at a forum at the Radisson Hotel sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Greater Peoria.

Debbie Wolfmeyer, challenging 10-year School Board veteran Garrie Allen for the District 2 seat, said she opposes a proposal by Superintendent Ken Hinton to spend \$40,000 to \$100,000 on a security consultant.

"We don't need to wait three or four or five months for a consultant," she said, adding that talking to individual teachers and staff to target security risks was a better use of the district's resources. A retiree from a 27-year career as a district secretary, Wolfmeyer is a former president of its clerical union.

Allen remained open to hiring a consultant, saying the district should "at least try anything that we can." And although he was willing to consider installing metal detectors, he said that the cost of \$180,000 per school in four schools gave him pause. "I'm not sure that's how we want to spend our money."

Metal detectors are worth the expense if they "could save one life," said Gloria Cassel-Fitzgerald, an Illinois Department of Children and Family Services retiree vying for the District 3 seat. "I will in no way vote to take a risk on your children," she said.

The other District 3 candidates were willing to consider metal detectors, though none gave them a ringing endorsement. Jim Stowell, senior vice president of investments at Robert W. Baird Inc., said that while metal detectors may provide a "visible deterrent," they are not likely to stop someone determined to bring a gun to school. Cleveland Thomas Sr., Reverend of New Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church, said the real problems in schools come from "older people not relating properly."

Cassel-Fitzgerald, Stowell and Thomas are challenging Stephen Morris, who was appointed to the Board in August. "I don't know that metal detectors are the right answer," Morris said. He suggested an "alternative detection system" for weapons, although he wasn't sure what that would be yet.

The candidates also addressed voters' questions about early childhood education programs, declining test scores, ***alternative education for disruptive students and vocational training. All candidates favored partnering with businesses and vocational schools in the area***, and Morris added that he would like to develop a method for identifying students who wanted to pursue vocational training instead of college.

### ***SAN JOSE and LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA:***

Traditional school didn't work for Ben Aldridge. "I was bored and lazy. And I never had a good work ethic," said Ben, 18, of San Jose, explaining how he fell far behind in class credits. Yet today Ben, a senior in one of the San Jose Unified School District's alternative education programs, is back on track to receive his diploma — on time. Although he attends a continuation school, he plays varsity basketball at Pioneer High, the traditional school he used to attend, and will participate in graduation ceremonies there.

For students in trouble, continuation schools, which tend to be much smaller and to offer more individualized attention, can be a lifeline. And San Jose has created what many view as the model of alternative education.

Each student gets an individualized learning plan, grade reports every three weeks and lots of counseling and help with career planning. Students in the program are not required to complete a college prep curriculum, but officials say the program is nonetheless rigorous. "We don't save everyone," Ferdig Riley said, "but we sure give it a good shot."

The official four-year dropout rate for the urban district, in which 70% of the students are minorities, was 6.2% in 2003-04, according to the state Department of Education. The rate for Los Angeles Unified for that year was 33.1% and the average across the state was 13.1%

Because they offer smaller classes, continuation schools are more expensive. San Jose Superintendent Don Iglesias said the district, with direction from a cohesive school board, has had to cut costs in other areas, including administrative salaries, to protect its alternative programs during lean times. The district also uses federal desegregation funds to help pay for the alternative programs.

Los Angeles Unified has 45 continuation schools, which many students say have saved them from dropping out. But demand for the schools far exceeds supply, preventing the kind of active outreach and recruitment that educators say is crucial. Valarie Rosales, 18, said she needed the kind of attention she gets at Pioneer High's continuation school, Pioneer Plus.

## ***SUMMIT, COLORADO:***

When Bill Baker first came to the Summit School District three years ago, he was alarmed by the dropout rate. Too many of the students in his middle school classroom, he thought, might not graduate. So Baker kept his room open at night, working with kids who had given up on school and needed help to get the necessary credits to graduate. To date, seven kids have graduated through what is now called the Twilight program.

Baker made it a point to work out of his classroom at the middle school because he saw the psychology of the "system" as a hurdle for many of the kids. ***"We knew there were a lot of students who didn't want to have anything to do with the high school," Baker said. "They didn't want to be there, and the school felt the same way about them. Every school has a culture, and when you walk in the building you can pick up on it. That culture was not working for these guys."***

Baker continued working with the students through the summer, and approached the administration in the fall, proposing to start an independent alternative education program. The administration was supportive, and Twilight set up shop last year at the Summit Education Center, the old elementary school in Silverthorne.

Suddenly, he said, kids who once had a slim chance of finishing high school now have a good chance of attending college.

### ***HURST, TEXAS:***

The walls of Trish Turner's cozy room at Bellaire Elementary School are plastered with posters, not about reading, math or history, but about behavior and feelings. "How to Treat Others" instructs children to be nice to one another, use kind words, cooperate, listen and be helpful. One display, titled "Be In Control," includes cartoon drawings of children ignoring unkind words, controlling anger, walking away from a fight and apologizing.

Turner, 31, is a licensed social worker from Communities in Schools of Greater Tarrant County, a nonprofit organization that helps "at-risk" students and their families get the academic and social services they need. The long-term goal is to prevent students from dropping out of school. Hurst-Euless-Bedford school district trustees voted in March to pay \$50,000 -- about half the cost -- to bring CIS to Bellaire and the KEYS Learning Center, an alternative campus that lets students work toward graduation at their own pace. The rest of the cost will be covered by grants and state money.

### ***UNITED KINGDOM, SCOTLAND:***

Pupils booted out of schools for bad behavior are being left to walk the streets. Shock figures released by the Executive show 92 per cent of excluded pupils were sent away with nowhere else to go. It means that on 35,644 different occasions, pupils could not find a place at an alternative school. ***Every local authority in Scotland is legally bound to find an alternative education for excluded pupils.***

Judith Gillespie, development manager of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, said: "The parents are often at work and their children are being left home alone or are out on the streets. They've been in trouble at school but now they are getting no education at all. That is not going to solve anything." Commissioner for Children and Young People Kathleen Marshall warned: ***"The cumulative effect of deprivation of education on these pupils could be significant."***

### ***PHILLIPINES:***

HOPE found new meaning to some 91 out-of-school youth (OSYs) in Basilan, as they completed the one-year Integrated Technical Training Program of the Nagdilaab Foundation, Inc. (NFI), in a simple graduation ceremony, held last Friday in Maluso, Basilan.

Excitement was reflected on the faces of these young people, who along with the jubilant parents and relatives, made a commitment to pursue the challenges of applying the skills learned from the one-year training that started in November 2004. Realizing that education is a never ending process, the young learners were grateful for those who put their resources together and help the OSYs in Basilan develop their minds and skills.

"This (program) has left a legacy in our hearts," said one learner, representing the graduates as she gives her impression during the program. "Because of this, many would like to continue (and) further their studies," she said.

It is worth the time spent; instead of dwelling on idleness and unproductive activities," said another learner who was challenged to use and apply the skills anytime in his life.

As demonstrated above, Southeastern Pennsylvania School Districts are not alone. Around the nation and the globe, communities are recognizing that failing to invest critical resources into alternative education programs for "at-risk" youth, only leads to more expensive problems, a decay in our societal structure, and an overall downward spiral within our communities.

Educating EVERY student – something REQUIRED by our State and National Constitutions – a concept that was relevant in 1776 and is still relevant in 2006.

However, the means in which we deliver the mandated public education *must* evolve with the needs of our society. Alternative education settings, schools where *every* aspect of the program was designed specifically to meet the needs of "at-risk" or "disruptive" youth, smaller class sizes, settings where self empowerment, responsibility, and academics are taught within a nurturing environment, where rigorous counseling and mentoring services are provided, settings where each INDIVIDUAL student's issues, academic, emotional and familial can be addressed, provide a critical resource for our communities, and help promote student success.

In the face of "No Child Left Behind", we are REQUIRED to show improved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). One of the best ways to improve "AYP" is to refer those "at-risk" or "disruptive" students to alternative education institutions designed to meet their needs. Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton has been working for over 36 years to deliver both educational and emotional services to "at-risk" students. Its original mission was the provision of those services. Through its work, tens of thousands of students in Northeast, Philadelphia, Lower Bucks County and Eastern Montgomery County have become successful members of our society, not "high school drop-outs".

BE SURE TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL  
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CONFERENCE AT THE  
WILLOW VALLEY CONFERENCE CENTER  
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA  
MARCH 29, 2006 - MARCH 31, 2006  
FOR MORE INFORMATION - GO TO [WWW.PDE.STATE.PA.US](http://WWW.PDE.STATE.PA.US)

**DELAWARE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL – BUSTLETON**  
**We ARE Alternative Education – Our 36<sup>th</sup> Year!!!**

**TECHNOLOGY AND STUDENT MANAGEMENT**  
**ENABLES OUR SCHOOL TO DO MORE FOR LESS!!!**

Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton (“DVHS”) is our region’s oldest and most widely recognized alternative education, licensed and accredited secondary school. DVHS offers class sizes with a student to teacher ration of approximately 15:1. DVHS offers intensive mentoring, counseling, and outreach social service programs and speakers for its students. DVHS offers post graduation success planning, free tutoring, state of the art computer laboratories where students are introduced to critical workplace tools such as Quickbooks, ACT!, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and other software programs enabling them to be competitive in today’s workplace. DVHS offers special education services, rigorous attendance monitoring, continuous communication with guardians, parole officers and parents, and provides a stratified academic program aligned with the Chapter 4 Standards of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Yet, DVHS costs far less than what the average school district in this region spends per-pupil internally – approximately \$6,700 per student per year – wherein students receive eight (8) credits toward the graduation requirements of 23.5 needed to graduate. DVHS offers day programs, night programs, and two (2) summer programs.

How does DVHS do so much for so little? Part of the answer is a proprietary system and organizational structure that is designed specifically toward the needs of “at-risk” youth. However, DVHS has embraced technology and utilizes it in ways foreign to most school and educational institutions, so that its operations are far more efficient, effective and streamlined than any other educational institution in this Commonwealth.

In 2003, David T. Shulick, President of DVHS, embarked on a mission to streamline the management of the DVHS “at-risk” students. At the time, he envisioned a student management system that would permit the DVHS Administrative Staff to spend more time with the students and for the students, and less time processing paperwork. That vision led to a partnership with a technology software design company, and after two (2) years of design, and one (1) year of implementation, DVHS now operates on a software platform that enables its staff to handle their responsibilities in a quicker, better and more enhanced manner.

DVHS’ student management software enables each student to be managed precisely, effectively and efficiently, by:

- a. Offering biometric attendance (fingerprint system) on a daily basis;
- b. By 10:00 a.m., absent students’ homes are called using the DVHS electronic calling system;

- c. Every behavioral incident and attendance issue automatically alerts the system to require “intervention sessions” with the students and family, and grades are tied to the “intervention session” requirement.
- d. Academic classes are stratified, meaning that students of similar abilities are grouped together;
- e. Student notes regarding academic, emotional or behavioral issues are maintained “real time” within the system, enabling each individual administrator to be fully informed regarding the prior dealings with the particular student, from utilization of one central, time stamped, database linked to each student’s electronic file. All pre-referral paperwork from the student’s home school is also scanned into each student file, and instantly accessible by every administrator with proper access codes. In essence, DVHS is “paperless.”
- f. Rostering is done automatically, as each “referred” or “matriculated” student’s transcript from their home school or district is entered into the DVHS system, which then automatically recognizes what core classes are needed for graduation, and rostering occurs automatically. Thereafter, electives can be added to the student roster by our Academic Support Coordinator to maintain the individualized student’s needs, such as Life Skills, Anger Management, Consumer Education, or other relevant courses;
- g. Parents and families are continually kept informed of the DVHS programs available to them through a Parent Council and active use of the DVHS electronic call system, which can permit the DVHS staff to make a personal call to every family or home in the evening by pre-programming a message and instructing the system when to call each home when DVHS is closed. Calls in the evening have proven far more effective and efficient. Parents can voice their issues directly with DVHS staff at Parent Council meetings;
- h. Students can participate in a Student Council, chaired by the DVHS Social Support Coordinator and the DVHS President, David T. Shulick, Esquire. By having direct interaction with the DVHS students, the DVHS Board is as informed as the DVHS staff;
- i. Digital video surveillance is utilized throughout the entire school site, serving not only as a powerful deterrent, but when behavior incidents occur, they can be quickly and efficiently reviewed, and action can be taken immediately with requisite proof for parents, students and due process hearings, if required;

With these tools, a caring, nurturing staff, is able to focus on the students, the parents, and the programs. Board oversight is precise and effective. The outcome is a stellar alternative education program, student success, student empowerment, and student achievement.

The result for our “partner districts” is improved A.Y.P., improved internal school climates by referral of the “at-risk” or “disruptive” student away from their peers or their

home schools (where they previously were disruptive), all coupled with a financial savings for the school districts, enabling them to focus their resources on the regular education programs. Everybody wins, the student, the district and our communities.

## **RESTORATIVE AND RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE “THE BALANCED APPROACH”**

In 1995, our Commonwealth enacted Act 33 commonly referred to as The Juvenile Act at Section 6301 (the “Act”). The Act has the following purpose statement “Consistent with the protection of the public interest, to provide children committing delinquent acts programs of supervision, care and rehabilitation which provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community”. These principals are also commonly referred to as the “Balanced Approach”, in essence, the clients of the juvenile justice system are the victim, the community and the offender and each should receive “balanced” attention.

To understand these concepts in less abstract terms, one needs to understand two distinct principals: restorative justice and retributive justice. Retributive justice responds to crime as an act against the government or institution, through proceedings in which the offender’s actions are evaluated and proven and punishment is assigned. Restorative justice gives priority to victims and communities and offender accountability is defined in terms of assuming responsibility and taking action to repair harm. As set forth in the Act, our Commonwealth is striving to take a “Balanced Approach” to justice – retributive justice AND restorative justice.

Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton (“DVHS”) also follows the Balanced Approach in addressing behavioral issues of students and violations of our Code of Conduct. Students are properly punished and punitive measures are taken, however, they are also held accountable for their actions against property or other peers, by understanding the impact their conduct has on their peers and the overall school community, required to repair any property damage, required to compensate any victims appropriately, and otherwise take suitable steps – on a case by case basis. DVHS also assesses, on a social and psychological level, utilizing its psychologist, Dr. Tobias Cabral, who works collaboratively with our Social Support Coordinator and our Operations Director, to ensure that underlying emotional issues that cause the negative behavior are addressed as well. The student and family are involved in this collaborative effort.

Find out why virtually every school district in Lower Bucks County, Eastern Montgomery County and Philadelphia County refer their “at-risk” and/or “disruptive” students to DVHS. Go to [www.dvhs.org](http://www.dvhs.org) or call 215-677-6107 for more information.