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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

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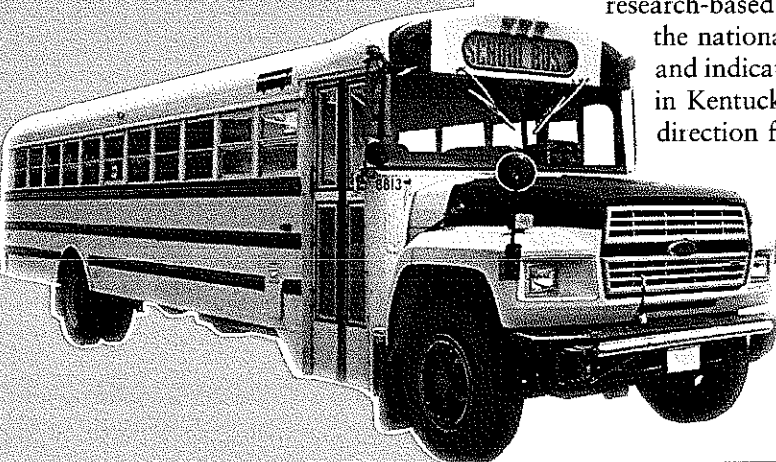
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## DATA AND TECHNOLOGY'S EFFECT ON ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

There are an estimated 15,000 alternative schools operating throughout the United States. Alternative schools are critical to address the students who just do not fit into mainstream classrooms for a myriad of reasons, from hairstyles and wardrobes to disruptive behavior

As a society we have finally recognized the need for alternative education and to productively address this "at-risk" student population. Pennsylvania and other states are struggling with how to comprehensively and objectively evaluate alternative schools.

As part of our work with the Commonwealth and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, this article will give you some insight into movements around the Nation as follows:

### Kentucky

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) developed the Alternative Education Program Evaluation Instrument. The Alternative Education Program Evaluation Instrument was developed based on a comprehensive review of national, state, and alternative education literature on standards and indicators. These standards and indicators are part of Kentucky's movement toward academic proficiency for all schools and students by 2014. In addition, indicators from the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) were used as a secondary resource for development of the instrument. After incorporating the information from the national and state level standards, it became clear that additional standards specific to alternative education programs (i.e., highly structured classrooms, mentoring, and behavior management plans) were needed to capture the complexity of these settings and address their goals (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). A review of alternative education literature was conducted to identify specific alternative education research-based systems and strategies. These strategies were then aligned with the national and KDE indicators to yield a comprehensive set of standards and indicators that could be used to evaluate alternative education programs in Kentucky. The intent was to gather information that can provide clear direction for staff and school/program changes that may influence student outcomes

### California

California's alternative accountability system was developed following the passage of the 1999 Public Schools Accountability

Act (PSAA), Senate Bill 1x (*Education Code* Section 52052 [h]), which required that by July 1, 2000, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, with the approval of the State Board of Education (SBE), "shall develop an alternative accountability system for schools under the jurisdiction of a county board of education or a county superintendent of schools, community day schools, and alternative schools, including continuation high schools and opportunity schools."

In July 2000 the SBE approved the framework for the alternative accountability system developed by the Superintendent's Advisory Committee for the PSAA. The conceptual model for the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) was based on that framework. The ASAM model emphasizes three central concepts:

- Student and school performance measures should be based upon multiple indicators that assess a school's ability to serve high-risk students. The indicators should measure change in learning readiness, engagement, and educational goal attainment as well as academic achievement and cognitive growth.
- Schools should be able to choose, from a variety of indicators, those most appropriate to their goals and student populations.
- A school's performance should be compared not with that of other schools but rather with its own performance over time.

## Texas

Under the state accountability system, alternative education campuses (AECs) have the option to be evaluated under alternative education accountability (AEA) procedures and receive accountability ratings based on different performance standards and indicators/measures than those used for regular campuses. Enacted by the Texas legislature in 1993, accountability legislation mandated the creation of an accountability system for all Texas schools. This accountability system integrated the statewide curriculum; the state criterion-referenced assessment system; district and campus accountability; district and campus recognition for high performance and significant increases in performance; sanctions for poor performance; and school, district, and state reports.

A set of alternative performance measures for campuses serving at-risk students was developed in late 1994 and implemented in the 1995-96 school year. In order for a campus to qualify as alternative, it was required to serve one or more of the following student populations: students at risk of dropping out; recovered dropouts; pregnant or parenting students; adjudicated students; students with severe discipline problems; or expelled students

## Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania has been a National leader in the collection and distribution of data regarding school-age children. Since 1999, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has struggled with the development of objective, uniform and basic methods to measure the effectiveness of alternative education programs within the Commonwealth. The P.D.E.'s Best Practices Guide for School Districts states, "To measure improvement or progress of a student, a pre and post assessment should be given. Evaluations should be ongoing and varied. Multiple measurements should be used. It is important to know where the student was academically, his/her feelings about school, and what behavioral weaknesses existed prior to time in the alternative education program in order to determine if the strategies used within the program were successful in helping the student. Hard data is needed to show the success of the program." This is done through a wide array of academic, behavioral, and social strategies.

Significantly, the Board Members of Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton ("DVHS") worked directly with the P.D.E. to develop the Best Practices Guide referenced above. DVHS's input was critical because DVHS has the unique perspective of being this Commonwealth's oldest private, licensed and accredited institution whose mission has always been "at-risk" youth services. DVHS was an "alternative" school long before that term was widely recognized on a National or Local level.

### Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton

At Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton ("DVHS") the Board of Directors understood that they needed to set a trend in the Commonwealth regarding Alternative Education Data Collection. Working with the P.D.E. gave the DVHS Board critical insight into future P.D.E. requirements for End of Year and Quarterly Reporting.

Accordingly, in 2002 the DVHS Board of Directors hired a software design company to develop a totally new student management software program for DVHS that would capture all of the objective data that would eventually have to be reported to the Commonwealth by our District partners.

From 2002-2005, DVHS served as the beta-site for the development of this software which was designed to streamline the management and reporting of each and every "at risk" student at DVHS who was matriculated by our partner Districts. At the same time, Research Studies were planned and commissioned allowing local Universities to study DVHS' operations, programs, academics, methodologies and accountability systems.

The results of this work now reside in one of the most comprehensive and sophisticated student management systems utilized

by any Alternative School in the Nation. Governor Janet Napolitano made a specific visit with DVHS Board President David T. Shulick to discuss DVHS and this management and reporting system. Holy Family University completed and released the Academic Study of DVHS. DVHS completed the final aspect of the software package – direct Teacher access for lesson plan and academic reporting in each and every classroom.

Today, every District that matriculates students to DVHS is assured that each student is independently tested at time of entrance and after each and every semester with a Terra Nova test product to assess, independently, reading and mathematics improvement – in addition to our internal grading system. Districts are able to access the data contained within the DVHS system about each student's academics, behavior, counseling and related notes directly by logging into the system reports with a unique password through the DVHS website. DVHS is able to assist the Districts with Quarterly and End of Year Reporting seamlessly because of the system.

More importantly, the staff at DVHS is able to do much more with their time. Because the DVHS system uses “real time” methodology and input – DVHS is a paperless school on an administrative level. All behavioral plans, incidents, academic rosters, student records, family records, social service data and information and related reporting are handled without any paper. Administrators at DVHS can see, in an instant, precisely what is happening with each and every student, including what students need counseling, what students need additional mental health services, what students are attending or not attending, and escalation and oversight is efficient, as is collaboration among staff about the students. The following are just some of the accountability measures at DVHS that are ongoing:

1. Student Assessment – Each student at DVHS is given a Terra Nova test upon matriculation to our school. This enables our staff to place the student in the correct classes and enables us to measure their growth by routinely re-administering the test to the entire student body. Students are also given the PSSA test in accordance with the state standards.
2. Aligned Curriculum – DVHS has a stratified educational curriculum aligned with Chapter Four Standards, which is broken down week by week, semester by semester, so that there is no excuse for any teacher at DVHS to not follow the curriculum. Lesson Plans are entered side by side to each course's mandated curriculum, and reviewed weekly by the DVHS Academic Support Coordinator and Director. Significantly, DVHS staff takes the most unusual step of generating these Lesson Plan Reports and auditing, without notice, each and every class at DVHS every single week to insure proper learning and guidance for the students on an academic level.
3. Academic Assessment – Students are given tests and proj-

ects to measure their academic progress based on what they already know and what they have learned from the curriculum. Grades are entered into the student management system, and a 4.0 scale is uniformly utilized. Significantly, grades are automatically lowered and warnings are automatically issued at time of mid-term report cards for students who have not completed their required Intervention Sessions resulting from prior behavioral incidents, further teaching students accountability for their conduct, but giving them an opportunity to address this conduct before it affects their grades.

4. Behavioral Assessment – DVHS has a structured behavioral model in place in order to modify the negative behavior of students and encourage positive behavior for a safe and nurturing learning environment that is directly integrated with the academic program as outlined above.
5. Attendance – Student attendance is monitor through a biometric attendance system with auto-calling, which allows for accurate and up to the minute attendance reporting, follow up, escalation of truancy issues, and efficient reporting regarding the same.
6. Social Programming – A state of the art student management system allows our staff to track the needs of our students and families to ensure that they are receiving the proper services both while they are in school and when they are in their communities, and group students by issue enabling efficient use of external resources. By way of example, DVHS can identify in an instant each and every student having “rage” issues, “insecurity” issues, and a host of other issues codified in our system.



## DVHS - PDE - DATA

**B**ecause of all of our work, as outlined above, DVHS is a leader in accurate, real-time, objective data collection regarding Alternative Education and related reporting to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. At DVHS we can handle all of the reporting requirements for your District seamlessly, efficiently give you whatever data you need, and support your District's reporting requirements to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In addition, DVHS is uniquely able to provide your District, your Parents, Guardians and other Stakeholders, with real-time data about the student's progress - academically, emotionally and behaviorally, all at a cost that is far less than what any District spends internally to educate its students.

## TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

As we all know technology is transforming our world. Finally – technology is transforming education. Teachers have access to more information, more ways to interact and collaborate, and more approaches to instruction than ever before. Technology can enable teachers to accommodate a variety of orientations to learning, track student progress, remediate struggling students, and challenge advanced learners. Traditional barriers no longer restrain educators from meeting the needs of every child.

Studies show computer-based instruction can individualize instruction and give instant feedback to students, even explaining the correct answer. The computer is infinitely patient and non-judgmental, thus motivating students to continue. Other benefits are documented as well. As schools have added computers, they've reported improvements in their attendance and dropout rates. They've also reported students are more challenged, more engaged, and more independent. Encouraged to experiment and explore the new frontiers of knowledge through the use of technology, students have assumed more responsibility for their assignments and produced higher-quality work.

Many studies published in recent years also document the benefits of technology. Without regard to potential biases, those studies include the following:

1. A "Report on the Effectiveness of Technology in Education, 1990-1997," conducted by the Software Publishers Association, cites the results of a Vanderbilt University research group's study of at-risk, inner-city kindergartners. The researchers found that students studying language arts in a multimedia environment gained more auditory, language, decoding-in-context, and story-composition skills than did students in a control group who did not use computers. (See "Open your Eyes: The Evidence is There," *Technology and Learning*, September 1997.)
2. Another group of Vanderbilt University researchers reported that students in the fifth grade and up who used a specific computer software product learned to solve multistep word problems more quickly than students in a control group did. (See a CNN report, *Computers Boost Kids' Test Scores*.)
3. A study conducted at Stephens Institute of Technology found that high-school students retained math skills longer after using commercially available mathematics software than did students in a control group receiving traditional classroom instruction (*Technology and Learning*, September 1997.)

4. A study of elementary-aged students learning math found that students who used multimedia computer software showed less math anxiety and more frequently perceived the subject as relevant to everyday life as students in a control group did. (*Technology and Learning*, September 1997.)
5. An Educational Testing Service study discovered that math teachers who used computers could significantly boost fourth and eighth graders' standardized math scores, and a study of 53 elementary, middle, and high schools found that providing cutting-edge technology improves teachers' morale. That ETS study also found that students' attitudes, motivation, and behaviors improved very quickly when they used computers in school (See a USA Today story, *Do Classroom PCs Help Kids Learn?*)
6. In a New York Times editorial, Ethan Bronner cited a study of college and high-school students that found that those who learned algebra with computers did better on a series of tests than those who learned it through more traditional methods. Bronner also quoted a study that found technology improves students' communication skills and the quality of their presentations and makes it easier for them to complete writing and editing assignments. (See "Rethinking Computers: More Than A Toy?," 11/30/97.)

To adequately prepare students for the future, educators say, they must be able to use 21st-century methods of teaching in the classrooms of the 21st century. If technology isn't available, students will have no chance of competing in the job market that they will enter -- a market in which a huge number of the jobs will require the use of technology.

Significantly, keeping "at risk" youth interested and motivated to become educated and earn a diploma requires technology. Students watch hours of television. Most students have access or use regularly computers, cell phones, the internet, and are "cultured" to receive their information through these means. Sadly, sitting idle in a classroom listening to a teacher lecture just bores many students, turning them "off" to education. However, when technology is introduced into the classroom and academic environment, students are suddenly in a familiar "culture" of high speed information and processing.

Governor Rendell and the Pennsylvania Department of Education have strived to encourage school districts to utilize technology to the fullest practicable extent. Project 720 and "Computers in the Classroom" have encouraged the use of technology at all levels.

DVHS is proud to announce that Microsoft Thin Clients have been installed in every classroom for every teacher in addition to our state of the art pre-existing computer labs. Further, a pilot program is currently ongoing at DVHS to introduce technology into the direct oral instruction of our students. This pilot program has resulted in a Plasma television being installed next to the traditional white-board, and connecting it to our internet

service and cable television service, allowing the teacher to integrate “on-demand” educational programming into the lessons, in addition to the generic text books and work-books. The system further allows our teacher to integrate material and information available over the internet for use during classroom instruction.

The results, we hope, will be a more interested and pro-active student body who will be receiving educational and academic information in a manner that peaks student interest and fits today’s student’s culture

*For more information visit our website at [www.dvhs.org](http://www.dvhs.org).*

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## NEWS ABOUT DELAWARE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL AND OUR REGION

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### THE HOLY FAMILY UNIVERSITY STUDY

### WHAT MAKES DELAWARE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL – BUSTLETON SUCCESSFUL?

**T**he Board of Directors of Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton commissioned Holy Family University to assemble a research team with experience in the Education field and study the school and alternative education in today’s public education system. They studied our organization, our students, and our technological infrastructure.

The research concluded that the reasons for the success of DVHS can be attributed to the following:

1. Students, teachers, and administrators all agree that student are treated as individuals and feel cared for by the teachers and staff
2. There are behavior expectations that are posted and students, teacher and administrators know what they are.
3. Class size is smaller than a traditional high school.
4. The program has a positive focus on the “whole student.
5. Services are available to students such as counseling and the school psychologist, and students do avail themselves of the services.
6. The program offers individualized goals for the students.

The study confirms our phenomenal success, addresses the underlying reasons for the success, and address how we save school districts across our region tens of thousands of dollars. We have included the Executive Summary of the Study for your review.

A full copy of the Holy Family University Study article is available on our website at [www.dvhs.org](http://www.dvhs.org). Log onto the website and click on the “News” feature.

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### DELAWARE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL – BUSTLETON AND BOARD PRESIDENT, DAVID T. SHULICK, ESQUIRE, FEATURED IN PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL FOR INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION!!!

**I**n the November 8, 2007 issue of the Philadelphia Business Journal, Delaware Valley High School – Bustleton and David T. Shulick, Esquire were featured for their “business thinking” bring accountability to the classroom. The article explained the myriad of details, work and technology that create the organized, comprehensive approach to alternative education that is delivered at Delaware Valley High School. We are proud of our work and this accomplishment.

A full copy of the Philadelphia Business Journal article is available on our website at [www.dvhs.org](http://www.dvhs.org). Log onto the website and click on the “News” feature.

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## DVHS – WE JUST KEEP GETTING BETTER – OUR 38TH YEAR!!!

As we enter our 38th year of serving students and their families we continue to offer exceptional programs and services for “at-risk” youth.

These programs include:

- Outside Speaker Program, which brings guest speakers to the school to talk to the students about relevant topics such as college planning, career planning, drug and alcohol prevention, and decision making, just to name a few. Local college and technical school recruiters will also be brought into DVHS to meet with interested students.
- Student Council, which is now in its third year of governing the school.
- Parent Council, which offers parents a chance to have their voices heard and gives them resources for raising their child.
- Truancy Prevention Program aimed at increasing the attendance rates of our students. The program will reward students who come to school on a consistent basis and it will also give needed resources to the parents of habitually truant children. School districts can also access student attendance on a real time basis by logging on to the DVHS website at [www.dvhs.org](http://www.dvhs.org). This tool allows the student’s home school district to follow up with their students while they are attending DVHS.
- Senior Career Explorations and Vocational Education Alliance Program, a partnership which allows DVHS students to explore careers in Court Reporting; Air Conditioning, Refrigeration & Heating; Building Maintenance; Carpentry; Plumbing & Heating; and Residential & Commercial Electricity at Orleans Technical Institute.

These programs combined with our comprehensive academic and behavioral programming allow us to provide students with the best possible learning environment. Our years of experience have shown that helping these young people mature into respectful young adults requires that we focus on more than their academic needs. We must also make them feel valuable, encourage them with a positive reward system, and address their social issues and problems.

Our goal is excellence in alternative education, efficiency in student management, and effectiveness. We look forward to another year of serving our students, families, and school districts. We ARE Alternative Education – our 38th year!!!

Progressions: ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA has been authored by David T. Shulick, Esquire  
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