

Executive Summary: Alternative Education

Administration was charged to return to the CIT Committee with more specifics regarding the idea of running a two-tiered alternative education program.

Information Provided:

Attached are several documents that provide additional information. There is a one page summary of the district program and a letter, service description and budget from Beacon Light. These documents should help to clarify many of the questions that were raised at the last committee meeting.

Criteria for Admission and Exit:

Students could be admitted to the WCSD program either through expulsion by the Board of Directors or based upon an internal process. The students who would be placed in the program will be students who for various reasons need a more structured environment. Reasons that this might occur would be truancy issues, 15 or more consistent behavioral issues, return from a placement at a psychiatric or juvenile facility, or by recommendation of the hearing officer along with Board expulsion for violations of the discipline code. Students would need to meet behavioral, academic and attendance goals to exit the program and could move through the program based upon their success in meeting those goals.

Students attending at the Beacon Light facility would be students who violate discipline code by committing serious drug offenses, weapons violations or by threatening or precipitating serious bodily harm to other students. In addition, students might be expelled to the Beacon Light facility if they are unsuccessful in the WCSD program. Students would typically exit this program once the time assigned by the School Board has been completed along with the achievement of the goals set by the program.

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Financial Implications:

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Since the first proposal, Beacon Light has modified their proposal to include 20 students. It is their suggestion that the district might choose to place students that come to the Residential Treatment Facility (RTF) in Youngsville in 10 of those slots rather than enrolling them in YEMS and YHS. The costs for those students would then be billed back to the sending districts thereby supporting approximately ½ of the proposed cost of the program. The district is currently operating the WAHS program at a cost of approximately \$167,000. The Beacon Light program would cost \$339,343 (including start-up costs). Based upon past history, the district could expect to recoup approximately \$166,608 leaving an estimated net cost of \$146,038 to the district to add the second tier of alternative education.

Administrative Recommendation:

The Beacon Light proposal allows us to add an option to our alternative education programs that will allow us to better meet the needs of all students. At Beacon Light, we can provide additional counseling and a more therapeutic atmosphere for students who have more significant emotional and behavioral needs. At the WCSD program, we can provide interventions and supports for students, often before they would get to the level of needing to be expelled from school. There is no way to measure the costs for the county and the school district that can arise when students are placed outside the district, but having an appropriate alternative education option here along with the RTF might very well save fees that we currently are paying for students to be placed outside the WCSD. Having this program available as an option for our students would be highly valued by the administrators in the district. All of the secondary principals spoke in favor of a tiered program.

Jim Miller of WAHS offers the following statement, “A two tier system would offer the ability to work with a part of the student population that is overlooked. The district has a group of students are the potential drop-outs that need a structured program to help them through issues or problems in their life’s that are more important to them than their schooling.”

Amy Beers, assistant principal of SAMHS and YHS offers this remark, “Each student’s situation is unique and a one size fits all approach to alternative education probably isn’t the way to go if there are funds and options.”

Other administrators offered similar sentiments.

It would be the recommendation of the administrators that the Board consider the addition of the Beacon Light proposal as a second tier for alternative education for students in the WCSD.

Recommended Motion:

That the Board of School Directors direct the administration to develop a contract with Beacon Light to provide a second tier of alternative education for students of the WCSD contingent upon Beacon Light’s successful application to the PA Department of Education to be approved as a provider.