

**Alternative Schools:
Questions for administrators and school board members
when considering closing a school.**

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Education Administrators Meeting, February 2012

- ❖ Is the school cost-effective? Does the community benefit by having students attend and return and graduate?
- ❖ Is the school just as focused on personal/social development, democratic dispositions, moral reasoning (cornerstones for community) as it is on academic development?
- ❖ Is the school student-centered (student-first/curriculum second) as apposed to being curriculum-centered (curriculum first-student second)?
- ❖ Are students staying in school, returning to school, feeling like they have accomplished something, planning a future of success, achieving personal goals, wanting to learn?
- ❖ Is academic learning seen as a means to an end, organized around problem solving, projects, and questions?
- ❖ Are students involved in designing the curriculum and other decisions of management of the learning environment and learning itself?
- ❖ Are students engaged in “what they are doing” as apposed to “how well they are doing?”
- ❖ Is cooperation emphasized as apposed to consistent competition?
- ❖ Is homework only assigned to deepen understanding or engagement with ideas?
- ❖ Are management questions guided by how it will affect student interest in learning? Is “rigor” kept in check to be sure that “rigor” is not dulling the curiosity, interest, and/or excitement of students?

If the answers to the questions above come out to be a majority of “yes” for any school, some serious thought needs to be given to keeping the school open. These factors, supported overwhelmingly by research in education, are considered the future of successful schools and successful communities. The factors have also been characteristic of successful alternative school planning nationally and in Iowa over the past 40 years.

Federal education laws and rules over the past two decades have contributed to current economic concerns across the United States. Curriculum-first schooling has lead to record dropouts, focus on learning facts as apposed to problem solving and over-concern about how well we are doing as apposed to what we are doing. Federal legislation in education based on strong influences/guidance from business and industry has led education to look much like business and industry—we have high unemployment, long-term unemployment, reduced levels of income for those with only a high school diploma, and lack of training opportunity for improving career skills. A decision to close a school based on current federal leadership and influences would be counter-productive for any community. Be wise and follow education research. Think about what you are doing VS being over concerned about how well you look under failed federal guidance.

Students want to learn and search for a pathway to the education goals of the community. Students are much like adults in the work world. They seek environments where they can succeed and avoid environments where they will fail. Be wise and realize the need for learning environments apart from traditional schooling to serve “all” students. Create alternatives and pathways to maximize student success and community well being. Alternative schools have proven to be beneficial & cost-effective for Iowa communities.