Administrative Procedure 220

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

Background

Foothills School Division (FSD) is committed to high quality instruction and excellence in learning. Learner engagement, support and success are priorities for all programs offered by Foothills School Division. A variety of programs improves opportunities and learning experiences for students. Foothills School Division promotes innovative thinking and practices in support of optimizing student learning, achievement and success through regular and alternative programs. Alternative programs, as programs of choice, are established to meet the specific educational interests and/or needs of students and their parents. Some examples of 'Alternative Programs' in FSD would include: French Immersion, International Baccalaureate (IB) and Montessori.

As referenced from Section 19 of the *Education Act*, 'Alternative Program' means an education program that:

1. Emphasizes a particular language, culture, religion or subject matter, or
2. Uses a particular teaching philosophy, but that is not a religious education program offered by a separate school board of that religious denomination, a Francophone education program or specialized supports and services.

There is a distinction between 'Alternative Programs' as outlined in Section 19 of the Education Act and other ways school divisions can provide variety and choice in programs. Alternative programs are not a specific course involving a single classroom or specific area of interest. Some examples of these programs not considered 'Alternative Programs' in FSD would include: Cameron Crossing, Foothills Digital School, Global Hockey Program.

The uniqueness of 'Alternative Programs' lies in the existence of the following defined set of elements:

1. A defined and consistent set of unique features intended to be long-term and sustainable. The program usually involves the entire elementary, junior high or senior high grades or a combination of these grades.
2. An educational approach that affects the entire schooling experience of a child, such as, bilingual programs or religion-based alternatives.
3. A school culture or environment that reflects the uniqueness of the program.

Procedures

Alternative programs are programs of parental or student choice in that, once a board has decided to offer a program, the choice to enroll is that of the parent or student. Alternative programs are about doing things differently and they involve working collaboratively within the vision and mission of a particular program. The Education Act does not explicitly require an alternative program to be established through a board motion. Boards and schools wishing to introduce alternative programs must be prepared to help facilitate and support these programs.

1. Framework for Alternative Programs
   1.1   Meet the interest and expressed needs of students and parents
   1.2   There is parent and student choice to enroll in alternative programs
   1.3   Programs are established on the basis of concepts explored, researched and proposed by parents, students, community and/or division staff
   1.4   Process for alternative program proposals to be considered by the board for approval
   1.5   Alternative program implementation plan
   1.6   The board has sufficient resources and facilities to offer the alternative program
   1.7   Alternative programs meet students educational needs
   1.8   Alternative programs are consistent with the requirements of the Education Act and the regulations to those students not enrolled in the alternative program
   1.9   The board may charge fees related to the alternative program for the purpose of defraying non-instructional costs that may be incurred in offering the alternative program
   1.10 Alternative programs are reviewed and effectiveness assessed on a regular basis

2. Proposals for Alternative Programs

   Alternative program proposals should identify the rationale for the establishment of the program and include a description of the intended outcomes achieved through the implementation of the program. Proposals should include the following information:
   2.1   Background research
   2.2   Philosophy, objectives and mission statement
   2.3   Distinguishing features of the alternative program
   2.4   Operational budget
   2.5   Staffing profiles desirable to meet the alternative program objectives
   2.6   Evaluation of alternative program methodology and objectives
   2.7   Projected student population (sufficient to ensure a likelihood of success) and geographical location/ages

2.8   Transportation of students to and from the alternative program

2.9   Curriculum and instructional resources/materials in addition to Alberta Education Curriculum

2.10   School, School Council and community implications

2.11   Outline of program meeting all requirements of Alberta Education as set out in provincial legislation and regulations

2.12   Program complies with all Board policies and administrative procedures

2.13   Alternative program operates as part of an existing Division school, usually housed in or based at an operating school building

2.14   Staffing for the alternative program is consistent with Division staffing procedures

2.15   Alternative program meets the annual education planning and reporting procedural requirements established by the Division

3. A draft alternative program proposal outlining how the alternative program will achieve its intended outcomes, while meeting all provincial and Division requirements, shall be provided to the Board by the Superintendent (or designate), along with the Superintendent's (or designate) recommendation at least six (6) months in advance of a new school year. Alternative Program Proposals will be considered and reviewed by the Superintendent on a two-year rotation. Alternative Program Proposals can be submitted for consideration by the Superintendent two years following the implementation date of a previously approved Alternative Program. In addition, the Alternative Program Proposal timeline from proposal to implementation including reports, meetings with the Superintendent, stakeholder engagement and presentations to the Board of Trustees is approximately an 18-month journey.

4. If a proposal for the establishment of an alternative program is approved by the Board, the Superintendent will:

    4.1   Communicate the decision, in writing, to the proponent along with any special terms or conditions determined by the Board.

    4.2   Describe the conditions upon which the alternative program may either gain continuing status or have its operation terminated by the Board.

    4.3   Indicate to the applicant the role of the program advisory committee, if it is to be formed, including its relationship to the School Council and to the Principal of the school administering the program.

    4.4   Allocate Division resources for purposes of programming support in a manner consistent with the Division's distributed decision-making and budgeting procedures. Resources, facilities and staffing for programs should be equitable.

5. If a proposal for the establishment of an alternative program is not approved by the Board, the Superintendent:

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5.1 Will, within sixty (60) days, communicate the decision in writing to the proponent giving the reason(s) for the Board decision and any recourse the applicant may have to address the concerns of the Board.
5.2 Will advise the proponent about his/her right to pursue an application for Charter School status with the Minister.

6. Implementation Plan for Alternative Programs

Whether or not a program is feasible and desirable depends on the nature of the program, the board's philosophical stance, the financial viability of the program and the board's alternative program framework. If the administration is satisfied that the program is feasible and desirable, the board will create and follow an implementation plan based on information gathered during the evaluation of the alternative program proposal. The implementation plan will take the following elements into consideration:

6.1 Program location

6.2 Funding and Fees

6.3 Development of Public Awareness and Cultivating Interest

6.4 Student Profile

6.5 Roles and Responsibilities

6.6 Communication Plan

6.7 Accountability Plan

7. Principals responsible for an alternative program may establish a "program advisory committee" for the purpose of gathering and communicating information about the alternative program.

Reference: Relevant Legislation and Regulations

Alternative Program Assurance Plan

The method used to report progress and success of an alternative program is aligned with Education Plans and Annual Results reporting. Alternative Programs are accountable for their performance in meeting responsibilities and ensuring student growth and achievement. An Alternative Program Assurance Plan sets out what needs to be done, including determining priorities, outcomes, measures and strategies that will be implemented. Performance measures gives a consistent means of measuring progress, helps identify strengths, areas for improvement and determines next steps.

Alternative programs must demonstrate accountability and provide assurance for continuous improvement. Assurance occurs through building relationships, engaging with the school community, sustaining a culture of improvement and collective responsibility. Principals responsible for an alternative program must establish a **Program Advisory Committee**. Program Advisory Committees should consist of students, parents, community members, teachers and administrators. The role of the Program Advisory Committee is key in identifying new alternatives and working with school administration to support the program. This committee can ensure the integrity of the program, provide advice and input on matters related to the program as a whole and assist in the recruitment of students and promotion of the program. The role of the Principal who administers an alternative program is key to its successful implementation and ongoing operation. Principals should understand and support the program philosophy; have a clear vision of the intended results of the alternative program; and be able to communication this vision to others and to turn the vision into action plans.

There is an expectation, on an ongoing and **yearly basis**, that students, parents, staff and community will be engaged in the progress, results and impact of alternative programs. Program specific surveys should be developed to collect data and gather feedback to ensure programs continue to be responsive to local needs. Stakeholder engagement opportunities increases understanding of programs, improves decision-making and enhances ownership for decisions.

Alternative programs will be formally reviewed and effectiveness assessed every four years to monitor progress and adjust programs as required. Review of an alternative program will be completed by the Principal every four years with a report being presented to the Superintendent and Board of Trustees. This report will include information on:

- progress toward and achievement of outcomes
- targets that indicate a desired level of performance
- strategies that are implemented and adjusted as necessary to improve

results over time

- evaluation of results achieved, including whether improvement has taken place
- annual results report of provincial, local, school-based, program-based performance measures
- stakeholder engagement feedback

A program review will determine if the alternative program is achieving the intended results. This enables a school and division to effectively communicate the results achieved and the direction for the future. Reporting on program goals and results achieved as well as student achievement, student need and student, teacher and parent satisfaction strengthens the commitment of the community and ensures continued support for the alternative program.

If a review indicates that the program is not successful in achieving the intended results, the school and division can develop plans to address areas for improvement. If difficulties persist, it may become necessary to consider closure of the program.

FSD Alternative Program 4-Year Review, Report and Presentation Schedule

School	Alternative Program	Year of Review and Presentation to Board of Trustees
Millarville Community School	IB Program	2025-2026
Big Rock	Montessori Program	2026-2027
École Percy Pegler	Nature-based Program	2027-2028
Foothills School Division	French Immersion Program	2028-2029
French Immersion School-Based Programs • École Foothills Composite High School • École Highwood High • École Senator Riley • École Okotoks Junior High • École Percy Pegler • École Joe Clark	French Immersion (School-based Program Reviews)	2028--2029

Reviewed: May 2025