

Alternative Settings for Students

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Alternative Night School and Credit Recovery are new programs that have been added to Elmira City School District's already existing alternative day high school. Elmira City School District recognizes that students have varying learning styles. They also understand the difficulty that some students face when they become credit deficient. In response for the need to prevent increased drop out rates, and attempting to increase their graduation rates, the Elmira City School District added Alternative Night School and Credit Recovery programs.

It is the belief of the Elmira City School District (ECSD) that "Every Student Succeeds", when in reality we know not every student succeeds in a traditional school environment (classroom settings, or even in a traditional school day). As a result, the Elmira City School District has organized and developed two additional alternative settings for high school students in their Credit Recovery and Night School also referred to as "Twilight" school. The addition of Credit Recovery and Twilight School brings the total number of alternative schools in Elmira to three, including an alternative school setting during normal school hours. These alternative settings assist in meeting not only student's needs, but also the needs of the district to meet New York State graduation requirements and federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind.

Elmira's Credit Recovery Program began in October 2007. Initially the program was offered in a central location, but as it expanded it was moved from the Alternative High School and offered at both Elmira Free Academy and Southside High schools. Classes meet for two hour sessions with two sessions an evening offered. The first session runs from 3:30-5:30 and the second session runs from 5:30-7:30. All sessions are Monday thru Thursday. Students receive approximately 26 hours of instruction for each course, which is six hours more than the State Education Department requires for credit recovery. Elmira City School's alternative programs are funded through grants and a program entitled "Contract for Excellence". As of June 2008, 195 credits have been awarded, thus reducing potential summer school enrollment and class size in day school by not repeating courses. Course offerings include, but are not limited to: English 9-12, Global Studies I & II, U.S. History and Government, Participation and Government, Economics, Algebra A, Geometry, Health, Living Environment, Biology, and Physical Education.

Credit Recovery is a collaboration of administration, teachers, students, and parents. The district provides students who meet strict eligibility requirements the opportunity for two credit recovery classes each afternoon. The class focuses on core content in the subject areas. Students and their parents sign an agreement to abide by the guidelines, which include attending all classes and completion of all work until proficiency is met. Credit Recovery instructors determine when a student reaches proficiency in the course to provide a passing grade. Students who enter the Credit Recovery programs are assessed to determine areas of mastery and learning gaps. Their instruction will focus on individual areas of need. In some cases these courses may also provide opportunity for success on Regents exams. Research indicates that students who are unsuccessful at school are at a greater risk of dropping out. It is the belief and hope, that a Credit Recovery program will help those students identified as possible drop outs obtain academic success while having the potential to meet graduation requirements.

The following is a list of characteristics and best practices utilized by the ECSD as a foundation for Credit Recovery.

- An assessment of student's strengths, weaknesses and instructional needs.
- Personalized learning plan and student goal-setting initiatives, with parents involved if possible.
- Flexibility in scheduling to meet the needs of a broad range of students.
- Computer assisted instruction is augmented by top notch teachers.
- This technology is effective but is no substitute for teacher centered instruction.
- Students enrolled may remain at their home schools.
- Credit received is applied towards graduation requirements.
- Approximately 190 credits have been awarded this school year. Of these credits nearly 20-25 seniors from both Elmira Free Academy and Southside High school will graduate this June as a result of taking one or more Credit Recovery courses.

The second alternative school concept adopted by Elmira City School District is Night School or also referred to as "Twilight" school. This concept offers students supplement instruction allowing students to attend in a different setting and time. Many of the students attending night school are credit deficient, and utilizing Credit Recovery would not be an option. These students typically are several years behind. However, Night School is not limited to just these types of students. Some students have taken Night School classes to advance the number of credits needed to graduate, to either graduate early or free up time to take elective courses being offered at the traditional setting.

Night School is designed to supplement and/or replace academic classes available in day school. Eligibility for Night School requires students to be enrolled in one of the districts high schools, be credit deficient or academically ineligible to graduate with their cohort, and be referred by and administrator or school counselor.

Night School began in February 2008, upon approval from the Board of Education. Initially, approximately eighty students were recommended for the program. Each student receives an entrance interview by the superintendent, building administration, school counselor, and parent /guardian. Students receive 96 hours of instruction for 1 credit courses and 48 hours of instruction for .5 credit courses. Students attend from 3:30 to 7:30 Monday - Friday. Each student receives 3 hours of instructional times as well as 1 hour of physical education instruction. Courses meet for 32 instructional days for one credit course and 16 days for half credit courses. In addition each student who attends night school is eligible to receive a bagged lunch.

Half credit course offerings include, but are no limited to: Computer Applications, Careers, Art, Music Theory, and Health. A full credit course includes; English 9-12, Global I & II, U.S. History and Government, Participation in Government, Economics, Wildlife, Biology, Earth Science, Math A/ B and Geometry.

While meeting these goals Elmira City School District will provide quality schooling and education throughout the day and school year. These alternative settings will also help the district to successfully meet their vision that "Every Student Succeeds", while understanding not every student succeeds in the same way. I believe that while these programs are great opportunities for our students, they also should not be a crutch. As these programs fall under the microscope of the community, I urge the community to realize that today's students come to us with varying issues, and do not resemble

students of ten or twenty years ago. It is our job as educators and the community to provide the best and least restrictive environment to educate our youth.

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