

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

in North Carolina Newsletter

Build Community Here & Now

BY BETH RICE

Our goal is a **resilient** North Carolina Alternative Education Community. Resilience in educators includes intentionally building communities with deep trust and the capacity to stay in the present moment.

This month, we focus on **how alternative schools & programs are building community.**

- Check out two North Carolina highlights from:
 - Bartram Academy in Macon County Schools and
 - Halifax Empowerment Zone in Halifax County Schools.

Did you know? For the second year in a row, North Carolina Alternative Educators were well represented at the **National Association of Alternative Education (NAEA) Conference** in Tucson, Arizona!

Don't miss the special opportunities for the **PBIS High School Think Tank** (page 10) and the opportunity to participate in the **Inclusive Skill Building Learning Approach** or ISLA (page 11). New ASAM, Resources for Resilience Training, and Implementation Story resources are available on page 14.

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State Reminders

1

Center for Safer Schools

Effective July 1, 2024, Alternative Learning Programs and Schools (ALPS) transitioned to the [Center for Safer Schools](#).

2

State Board of Education Presentation

On June 5, 2024, the State Board of Education received an update on alternative learning programs and schools. The [recording](#) (5:53:20- 6:25:00) and presentation are available [here](#), and includes to move to the Center for Safer Schools.

3

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) in Alternative Education

Have you noticed these resources in the Newsletter?

- [PBIS Adaptations in Alternative Programs](#) (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; April 2023)
- [The Use of Level Systems in Alternative Settings: Fidelity, Design, and Alignment with PBIS](#) (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, January 2023)



Bartram Academy

Macon County Schools

Journey to Bartram Academy

Imagine walking through the front doors of Bartram Academy, an alternative school nestled in rural Western North Carolina. The first thing that catches your eye is a large, beautifully painted compass on the wall, inviting you to reflect on where you've been and where you're headed. This compass connects to how you might navigate the Bartram Trail, a historic path you likely passed on your drive in, symbolizing exploration and personal journey—much like the journey of the students here.

As students filter in, their chatter blends with warm, personal greetings from teachers and staff. Conversations about life outside of school mix with words of encouragement and thoughtful questions. It's clear: these students feel a strong sense of safety and belonging at this place.

The recent positive shifts are reflected in the 2023/2024 school year data. Student attendance has increased from 80 to 85%. The number of graduating students in 2024 was 63, almost doubling from previous years. Teacher attendance, an important and overlooked statistic, grew from 92 to 98%.

Rewind to Transformation

It wasn't always this way. A few years ago, Bartram Academy (known by a different name) had a reputation that was far from stellar. It was often seen as the last stop for students in the district. So, what sparked this remarkable transformation?



Bartram Academy (continued)

How They Did It

The change began with a coalition of willing teachers, those who were deeply committed to investing the time, energy, and relationships needed to create a truly learner-centered environment where students loved to be. These educators reconnected with their core reasons for entering the profession and co-created a collective vision for what was possible for the school and its students. They began an empathy-driven journey that started with listening to students through focus groups and surveys, using these insights to refine their school goals, along with feedback from other school stakeholders, including parents, district leadership, and members of the local community. Together, they used a gap analysis to identify a new mission and vision for their unique learning community, identifying a gap between what they were preparing students for and what the students and community actually needed.

The above process reinforced the school's North Star - their why. That process led them to re-define their “how” by learner-centered experiential teaching strategies like High-Quality Project-Based Learning (HQPBL), as well as culture and relationship-building strategies such as weekly continuous improvement meetings between students and staff. These methods, and others, help create a dramatic shift in student perceptions of the school. Rather than feeling disempowered or “othered,” students felt that they were now key stakeholders not only in their individual success, but in the success of the school as a whole. They are now deeply invested in their own respective educations, able to weave in elements of personal identity, community involvement, and a true sense of agency. Through collaborative protocols and [Liberatory Design](#), the Bartram Academy students and staff have crafted a learning environment that resonates more closely with what both students and teachers care about.

This remarkable change, as is always the case with school culture shifts, is admittedly a work in progress and the team is still learning and continuously innovating. Nevertheless, they are immensely proud of what they have accomplished and would love to share it with others. If you’d like to learn more about this transformation in action and how it might provide an image of possibility for your own school or district, then please join Bartram Academy’s Principal, Brian Moffitt, and Wes Davis, who has supported the work through the nonprofit, Open Way Learning, in the following upcoming conversation.



Bartram Academy (continued)

Connect with Open Way Learning & Bartram Academy

Join us for “**Co-Designing a Better Alternative,**” a 45-minute facilitated conversation that delves into the transformation of Bartram Academy, an alternative school in rural Western North Carolina. Discover how a coalition of dedicated educators, guided by student voices and community insights, is working to turn a once-struggling school into a thriving learner-centered environment. Hear from Bartram Academy Educators as they share their journey of co-designing a school culture where both students and teachers are empowered and engaged. During the session, you'll also have the opportunity to connect Bartram's journey to your own school's context, leveraging these insights to inform your next steps toward creating a more inclusive and vibrant educational community. Don't miss this chance to be part of a transformative discussion.

Virtual Event: Co-Designing a Better Alternative

Date: October 23, 2024 (Wednesday)

Time: 6:00 PM - 6:45 PM EST

[Sign Up Here](#)

<https://www.openwaylearning.org/event-details/co-designing-a-better-alternative>





Halifax Empowerment Zone

Growing A Culture of Authentic Innovation: “The Food Truck Approach”

In August 2022, Halifax County Schools’s (HCS) educators met for school-wide professional development. The teachers and principal of the Empowerment Zone (EZ), the district’s alternative learning program, exemplified an open and curious mindset in exploring innovative ways to engage their students. Over a two-day design sprint, they took one great learner-centered idea out of many and created a movement!

We began the session with an intensive [empathy mapping activity](#), where we reviewed what students “say, do, think, and feel” about their current school experiences. While the school had already heard much of this firsthand, we uncovered compelling evidence that students also felt disoriented, especially when faced by academic challenges, and needed greater support and engagement.

During the design sprint, EZ teachers spoke with care about the real issues and needs affecting their students’ lives. With their district colleagues, we defined the challenges students faced, then set clear goals as the basis for brainstorming project topics and ideas. The resulting project ideas would explicitly drive deeper learning and engagement because they dealt with real issues affecting the lives of their students. We also made lists together of commitments to an authentic experiential learning culture we wanted to build in their schools. The goals were admittedly ambitious, yet key feedback from students then was that the projects helped increase collaboration and gave them greater voice and agency with their learning.

And the Empowerment Zone planted its first seeds of a schoolwide shift that ultimately led to a food truck project as their starting point with authentic experiential learning. Principal Sharon Arrington recalls, “And it wasn't just our staff. We included the students, and that's the beauty of this [approach]...”



Halifax Empowerment Zone (continued)

With the students on board, the idea of creating a food truck took shape. Arrington continues, “We start talking about the steps of creating it, so what does it consist of? So you're talking about the art piece, the commercial piece, you have to advertise...” They worked through the entire process, from designing the truck and creating advertisements, to learning about food production, how to work in the kitchen, and the logistics of delivering handcrafted comfort food.

Motivated by this vision, the students collaborated with the teachers to build connections with local and global experts, organizing the project into milestones of student-led contests and iterative product designs. Together, they made the learning process visible for everyone involved.

The iterative nature of the projects ensured that students and staff learned from previous experiences, leading to sustainable growth over time. In subsequent years, the program expanded to include gardening and nutrition. With the help of NCSU’s Cooperative Extension, students planted and harvested their own crops, providing nutritious ingredients for their food truck products. Now, the district employs the students to supply and market their food truck at district and community events, while an EZ student’s family began developing their own food truck to serve the greater community!

Arrington and her staff weathered the typical setbacks associated with such a learner-centered, authentic experience with their students, which developed over time into an authentic, community-facing project, as exemplified by the following list of outcomes:

- Students learned how to collaborate effectively as their decisions shaped the food truck's look, feel, and operation. An intentional part of this collaboration involved other schools and students. This is experiential learning at its best!



Halifax Empowerment Zone (continued)

- Community and expert involvement deepened students’ understanding of local economies and fostered a sense of pride and responsibility toward their community.
- EZ educators repeatedly acknowledge the honor, pride, and joy they’ve received watching their students develop deeper curiosity and confidence in learning with ideas and practices that their students care about and can articulate as meaningful experiences for their growth in both knowledge and perspective.
- Students developed practical skills—such as teamwork, problem-solving, and event management—while improving interpersonal relationships across diverse student groups and including other student groups in the process.

The Empowerment Zone’s journey to innovation obviously did not happen overnight. Open Way Learning saw the impact of reaching for innovation through continuous improvement, and we often reference the “the food truck approach” in our work with new school and district partners. As it happened, the project created a ripple effect of innovation and generosity, further embedding the values of collaboration and mutual support within the community.

To learn more about how Sharon Arrington and Ben Pendarvis co-designed this transformative process, and to ask them questions directly, join them in the upcoming virtual workshop hosted by Open Way Learning.

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National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) 2024 Conference in Tucson, Arizona

Additional NAEA Conference information is available:

- [NAEA Conference Keynotes](#) (Instagram)
- [NAEA Information](#) (Website)
- [NAEA Post-Conference](#) (Instagram)

Thirty-three conference attendees represented North Carolina, and we provided four sessions including:

- Sandi Hyatt, Student Support Coordinator, Hickory City Schools “Creating a Successful and Welcoming Return from ALP“
- Ken Simeone, Executive Director of Alternative Learning, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, and Mallory Whitley, Assistant Principal at Henderson Independent, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, “Navigating Educational Crossroads: Seamless Transitions in Alternative Education”
- Mallory Whitley, Assistant Principal at Henderson Independent, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, and Ken Simeone, Executive Director of Alternative Learning, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, “Fostering Stronger Communities: The Power of School-Community Partnerships”
- Bridget Johnson, Specialist for State Projects, SERVE UNC Greensboro, Beth Rice, Specialist for State Projects, SERVE UNC Greensboro, and Fredrica Nash, Center Director, RTI Center for Education Services, RTI International, “Revive & Thrive: Rebuilding your State Association”



Are you implementing positive behavior intervention and support in your high school alternative program/school?

Check out this monthly, free opportunity to connect with other implementers across the nation.

APBS High School Implementers

Association for Positive Behavior Support (APBS): High School Think Tank
2023-2024 Academic Year

Dates: November 21, December 19, January 16, February 20, March 20, April 17, May 15 (check dates through registration/join link below).

Time: 12:30 PM Eastern

Register Here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMtd-uhqDkjHtw1jQYSlpSfsSLVtK5bVOk3#/registration>



Click here to register:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMtd-uhqDkjHtw1jQYSlpSfsSLVtK5bVOk3#/registration>



INCLUSIVE SKILL BUILDING LEARNING APPROACH

WHAT IS IT?

ISLA is an instructional and restorative alternative to exclusionary discipline.

HOW CAN ISLA SUPPORT SCHOOLS?

Improve education access and quality to prevent school exclusion and substance misuse.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Schools that serve students from 6th to 8th grade and have a data management system to track student discipline.

WHEN WOULD THE STUDY BEGIN?

Baseline data collection will begin Spring 2025, 2026, 2027.

BENEFITS FOR:

Schools/Teams:

- Enhanced behavior supports through fostering supportive and inclusive environments
- Paid two-day summer training for team members (total \$560)
- Receive monthly coaching support throughout the school year
- Data collected and summarized annually for the school

Educators:

- Team-guided rollout of ISLA supports throughout the year
- Prioritization of student-teacher relationships and positive classroom communities
- \$25 gift card for each completed survey (total \$75)

Students:

- Strengthened supportive and inclusive schools and classrooms
- A focus on relationship building and problem solving
- \$25 gift card for each completed survey (total \$75)

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AT ARLINGTON

Georgia State University



Lived Experience Expertise Needed

We are looking for a few families, youth and/or young adults who have experience accessing and navigating the Juvenile Justice system.



Are You A Youth/Young Adult or Family Member who has experience with a NC Juvenile Justice Youth Detention Center (YDC) or Detention Center?



If the answer is yes. WE NEED YOU!



Families & Youth/Young Adults will be compensated for their time.

We Need Families & Youth/Young Adults to:

- Serve as training reviewers
- Share their experience/story in person or by video
- Serve as a trainer

If you are interested in assisting on this project or need additional information contact either:

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Additional Resources

National Resources

[PBIS Adaptations in Alternative Programs](#) (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; April 2023)—In this brief, the Center on PBIS presents results from a facilitated discussion held at the 2022 PBIS Leadership Forum focused on modifications needed to PBIS in alternative programs and examples of those modifications. We also discuss how those modifications maintain fidelity to essential elements and provide recommendations based on our discussion.

[The Use of Level Systems in Alternative Settings: Fidelity, Design, and Alignment with PBIS](#) (Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, January 2023)- Level systems are widely used in alternative settings. When these settings adopt PBIS, it is essential to consider the design, implementation, and alignment of level systems with PBIS principles and practices. This Practice Brief stems from our Facilitated Discussion at the 2021 PBIS Leadership Forum. We describe themes from that discussion and provide specific recommendations for aligning level systems with PBIS.

[Adolescent and School Health: Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being in Schools: An Action Guide for School and District Leaders](#) (Centers for Disease Control). The Action Guide centers six school-based strategies and associated approaches, including increase students' mental health literacy; promote mindfulness; promote social, emotional, and behavioral learning; enhance connectedness among students, staff, and families; provide psychosocial skills training; and support staff well-being.

[Sources of Strength](#) (Suicide, Violence, Bullying, and Substance Misuse Prevention)- Sources of Strength provides exceptional training and curriculum for youth and adults, utilizing a strength-based and upstream approach to mental health promotion and prevention of adverse outcomes like suicide, violence, bullying, and substance misuse. Sources of Strength is committed to providing evidence-based programming responsive to local community context and needs.

[Session from the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\) Conference on Schoolwide Strategies for Supporting Student Attendance and Engagement](#) by Westat, AIR, and USDOE. The content is explicitly connected with the MTSS Framework, including a **[Youth Engagement Tool and a Family Engagement Tool](#)**. Here are some of the resources on attendance root cause analysis:

- <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/root-causes/>
- <https://oese.ed.gov/resources/oese-technical-assistance-centers/state-support-network/resources/approaches-root-cause-analysis/>

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Additional Resources

State Resources

[North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Alternative Learning Programs webpage](#)

The NCDPI ALPS webpage includes the ALPD Dashboard (connections with programs/schools across the state including an ALPS Directory, Survey Summary, Services Offered, and How Students Enter), Support Session Information, definitions, statutory requirements of the State Board of Education and Local Education Agencies, development resources, tools, and links to all Support Session Resources provided. **Additional Resource:** [ALPS FAQ](#)

NEW!

[North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Division of Accountability Services: Alternative Schools' Modified Accountability System Manual \(2023-2024\)](#)

This Manual provides a technical guide, including the purpose of the Alternative Schools' Modified Accountability System, Eligibility and Identification, Options for Participation, Reporting, Timeline, and Appendices.

Resilience Resources

- [North Caroling Center for Resilience and Learning](#) - Builds resilience and success for all North Carolina students and educators using school-specific training and coaching to create safer and more supportive schools that champion the whole child, reduce the impact of stress and trauma, and foster school communities where all feel valued.
- [Resources for Resilience™](#) - Resources for Resilience provides a variety of supports, including [training](#).
- [Rural Opportunity Institute \(ROI\) Resources](#) - ROI shared the following resources in spring 2023 sessions: Biofeedback Bookshelf ([Google Slide Link](#), [Canva Link](#)), Edgecombe County puts trauma front and center to heal the community ([link](#)), HOPE ALP THRIVE ([link](#)).

NEW!

School Mental Health Resources

- [Our Children's Place of Coastal Horizons Center](#) - provides resources for students of incarcerated parents.
- [NC Healthy Schools](#) - learn more about the vision and mission, the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework, and related best practices.
- [School Mental Health Initiative](#) - check out the upcoming state and regional meeting schedules. This is a helpful space to learn about statewide and regional practices and connect with others.

NEW!

Region 6 Comprehensive Center Resources

- Check out the [Alternative School Implementation Story](#) from South Providence School.

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Get Connected



Get Connected with NCAAE:

[North Carolina Association of Alternative Educators](#)

(NCAAE) is re-launching. To **join NCAAE** click [here](#). If you have questions about NCAAE, email **Mike Lutz**, NCAAE President, LutzM@pitt.k12.nc.us.



Get Connected through Social Media:

Connect with other alternative educators and share your best practices through **social media** [#RethinkingAltEd](#).

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