



LAKEWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT'S

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL AT
LAKEWOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL
FOR THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL
YEAR

Dr. Laura A. Winters, Superintendent of Schools



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1. NEED

Rationale for Establishing an Alternative Middle School Program in the Lakewood School District

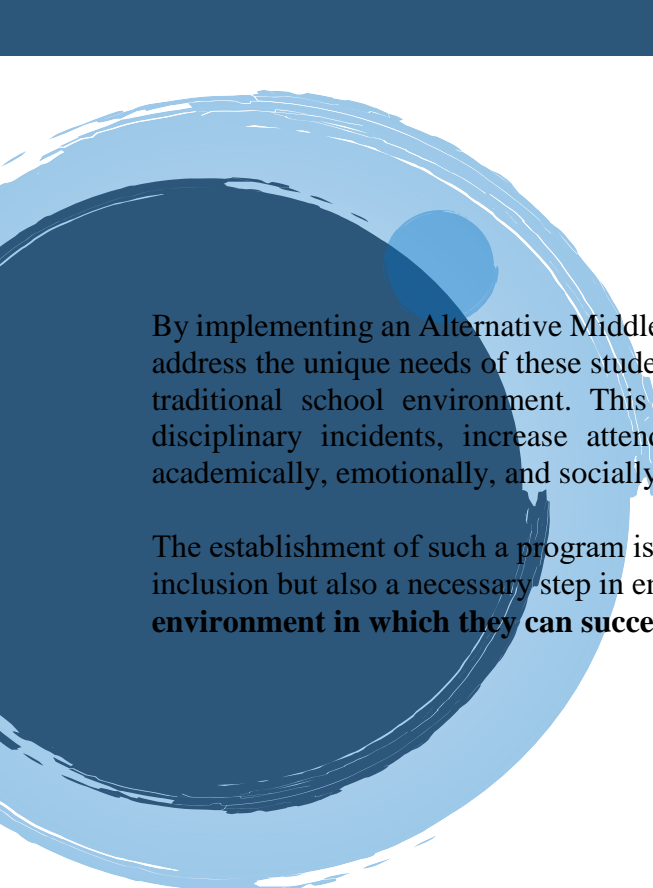
The Lakewood School District is committed to meeting the diverse academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of all students. In alignment with this commitment, the district recognizes the urgent need to establish an **Alternative Middle School Program** to support students in grades 6–8 who are not experiencing success within the traditional school setting.

Across the state of New Jersey, students are considered for alternative education placement based on a range of criteria, including chronic academic underperformance, repeated behavioral infractions, social-emotional or mental health challenges, and other factors that significantly interfere with their ability to thrive in a general education environment. Placement decisions are typically made through a collaborative process involving a review of academic and behavioral records, consultation with parents and guardians, and the input of a multidisciplinary school-based team, in accordance with best practices and NJDOE guidelines.

The Lakewood School District has seen a marked increase in the number of middle school students requiring individualized behavioral and emotional support. Many of these students—whether general education or classified—exhibit persistent disruptive behaviors, disengagement from learning, chronic absenteeism, or escalating discipline concerns that impact both their academic progress and the learning environment of their peers. Traditional interventions, such as in-class supports, counseling, and behavior plans, are often not sufficient for this subset of students. A more structured, targeted, and therapeutic approach is required.

An Alternative Middle School Program will provide:

- **A non-traditional, student-centered educational setting** that emphasizes relationship-building, trauma-informed practices, and wraparound supports.
- **Smaller class sizes and lower student-to-teacher ratios**, allowing for individualized instruction, greater supervision, and increased engagement.
- **Flexible and differentiated instructional models** designed to meet students at their current level and promote academic progress.
- **Integrated behavioral and social-emotional support services**, including on-site counseling, conflict resolution, goal setting, and mentoring.
- **Opportunities for skill development and reintegration**, with a focus on preparing students to return successfully to the general education setting when appropriate.



By implementing an Alternative Middle School Program, the Lakewood School District will proactively address the unique needs of these students while also preserving the academic climate and safety of the traditional school environment. This initiative will ultimately improve student outcomes, reduce disciplinary incidents, increase attendance and engagement, and better serve the whole child—academically, emotionally, and socially.

The establishment of such a program is not only a reflection of the district’s commitment to equity and inclusion but also a necessary step in ensuring that **every student has access to a learning environment in which they can succeed.**

2. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Program Overview: The Alternative School at Lakewood Middle School will be located on the property of Lakewood Middle School, it is a comprehensive, supportive alternative education program designed to address the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of students in Grades 6–8 who are not experiencing success in the traditional school setting. The program will provide a structured, nurturing, and inclusive environment aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) to ensure all students receive high-quality instruction and wraparound services that promote success.

Measurable Goals, Objectives, Activities, and Timelines Related to Student Outcomes

Goal	Objective	Activities	Timeline
Improve academic achievement	Increase students' proficiency in ELA and Math by 10% annually	Small group instruction, individualized learning plans, formative and summative assessments	Ongoing – progress measured quarterly
Improve student attendance	Achieve a 90% or higher attendance rate among program participants	Daily check-ins, mentoring, parent engagement, attendance incentives	Reviewed monthly
Reduce behavioral incidents	Decrease discipline referrals by 50% from baseline	Implementation of SEL curriculum, behavioral intervention plans, restorative circles	Baseline and bi-monthly review
Increase student engagement	Achieve 80% participation in enrichment, counseling, and service-learning activities	Weekly project-based learning, counseling groups, extracurricular clubs	Monitored quarterly
Prepare students for transition	All students have a transition or re-entry plan	Career exploration, life skills workshop	Plan developed within 30 days of enrollment; reviewed every 60 days



Alignment with New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS)

All instruction at the Alternative School at LMS will be fully aligned with the NJSLS, ensuring students have access to grade-level content across all core academic subjects. The program will emphasize individualized pacing while maintaining rigorous standards, leveraging diagnostic assessments and targeted instruction to close learning gaps and prepare students for academic success.

Educational Methods and Instructional Materials

The program will utilize research-based, trauma-informed teaching practices to foster a supportive and productive learning environment. Instructional methods include:

- Personalized learning through adaptive technology platforms
- Differentiated instruction in small group settings
- Project-based learning aligned with real-world applications
- Integrated social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices

Instructional materials will include NJSLS-aligned texts, digital learning platforms (e.g., i-Ready, iStation), manipulatives, and culturally responsive curriculum resources.

Strategies to Promote High Attendance, Engagement, and Graduation Readiness

- **Attendance:** Daily attendance tracking, personal outreach from staff, incentives for improved attendance, and partnerships with families to resolve chronic absenteeism.
 - **Engagement:** Student choice in extracurricular activities and goal-setting; incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy.
 - **Graduation Readiness:** Regular academic progress monitoring, transition planning, executive functioning skill development, and mentoring.
 - Assign each student a **Lakewood Middle School Mentor** such as office staff, paraprofessionals, security guards, coaches, teachers, etc., so the student has an additional person in the building that they can go to for support.
 - Build in regular mentor/mentee time during the day.
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Proposed Program Schedule

7:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

(Based on student need, some students may have a flex schedule.)

Arrival/Breakfast/Morning/ SEL Circle

Academic Instruction (ELA/Math/Science/SS)

Lunch/Break

Electives (Art, Music, Physical Education)

Counseling/Advisory/Restorative Circles

Project-Based Learning/Exit Reflection

Supportive Services Available to Students and Families

- **Mental Health Counseling:** On-site counselors
 - **Social Work and Case Management:** Family engagement, community resource linkage
 - **Student Assistance Counselor:** Prevention education and support groups
 - **Health Services:** On-site nurse (LMS) and access to district medical partners
 - **Academic Intervention:** Tutoring, & homework help
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Facilitating a Positive School Climate

The program will integrate evidence-based SEL curricula to promote emotional regulation, conflict resolution, empathy, and responsible decision-making. Service-learning projects will allow students to give back to their community, fostering purpose and connection. A trauma-informed approach will underlie all staff training and student support systems.



Transportation

Students enrolled in the Alternative School at Lakewood Middle School will receive transportation through the Lakewood School District's existing transportation services.

Community and Interagency Collaboration

The program will collaborate with local mental health providers, juvenile justice representatives, and community-based organizations to enhance the breadth of services and ensure coordinated care.

Parental Involvement

The program will actively engage families through:

- Bi-monthly family conferences
- Monthly workshops on parenting, student behavior, and academic support
- Access to a dedicated family liaison (Social Worker)
- Regular communication via newsletters, calls, and digital platforms
- Parent advisory group input on programming

3. ENTRANCE/EXIT CRITERIA

Identification and Referral Process

Students in grades 6 through 8 may be referred to the Lakewood Middle School Alternative Program when it is determined that they are not experiencing success in the traditional school setting due to academic difficulties, behavioral challenges, chronic absenteeism, or social-emotional needs that require a more structured and supportive educational environment.

Mechanism for Referral

Referrals to the Alternative School Program may originate from school-based intervention teams, or building administrators. Each referral must follow a standardized referral protocol, which includes:

- A documented review of the student's academic and behavioral history;
- Evidence of current and prior interventions with minimal improvement;
- Parent/guardian input and written consent for program consideration;
- A multidisciplinary team meeting involving the student, parent/guardian, school administrator, school counselor, case manager (if applicable), and members of the Alternative Program staff.

Final placement decisions will be made by the Alternative Program Placement Committee, which includes the Program Administrator, Principal of LMS, and district-level Intervention Team.

Selection Criteria

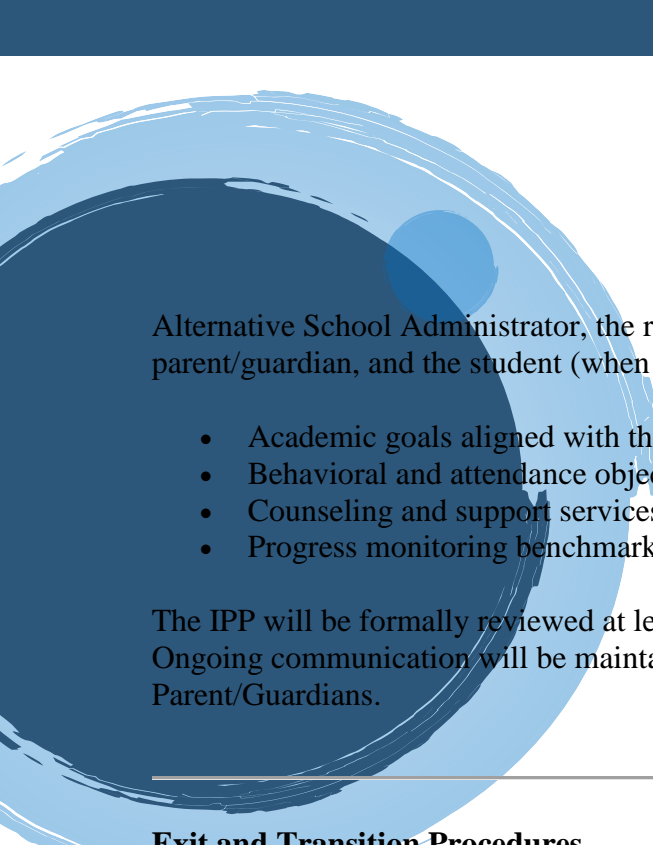
Students will be selected for placement based on one or more of the following criteria:

- Repeated disciplinary infractions and/or violations of the district Code of Conduct;
- Chronic absenteeism or truancy;
- Documented social-emotional needs or mental health concerns;
- A demonstrated need for more intensive counseling and behavioral support services.

Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) will be reviewed by the IEP team to ensure the placement aligns with their least restrictive environment and required services.

Individual Program Plans (IPP)

Each student admitted to the Alternative School will have an **Individual Program Plan (IPP)** developed within ten (10) school days of placement. The IPP will be collaboratively created by the



Alternative School Administrator, the referring school team, including the MS Principal, the parent/guardian, and the student (when appropriate). The IPP will outline:

- Academic goals aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards;
- Behavioral and attendance objectives;
- Counseling and support services to be provided;
- Progress monitoring benchmarks and timelines.

The IPP will be formally reviewed at least annually and revised as needed based on student progress. Ongoing communication will be maintained between the Alternative Program and the Parent/Guardians.

Exit and Transition Procedures

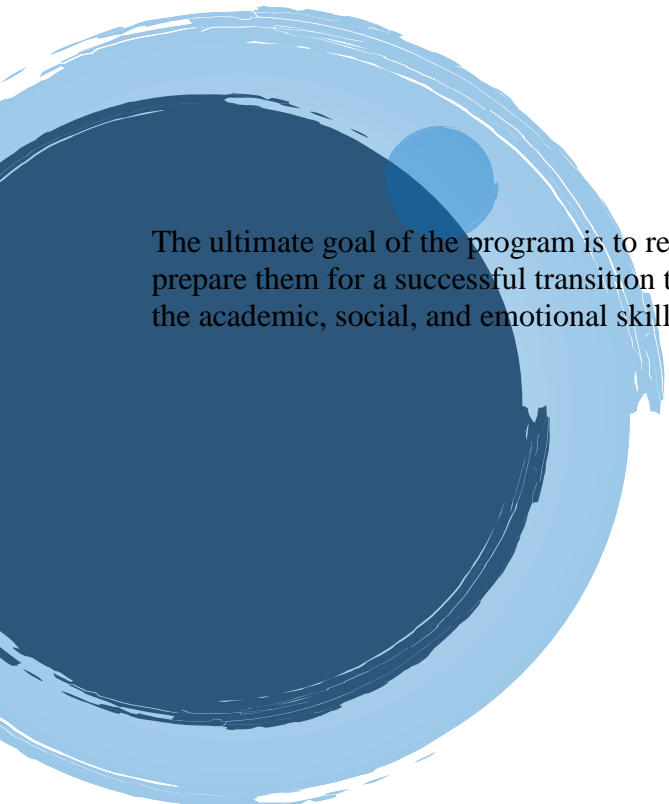
Students may transition out of the Alternative Program under the following conditions:

- Upon successful completion of academic, behavioral, and attendance goals as outlined in the IPP;
- Following a formal transition review meeting involving the student, parent/guardian, alternative program staff, and LMS Principal.
- When it is determined by the placement team that the student can be successful in a traditional setting with appropriate supports.

For students who have not met the IPP objectives but are aging out or reaching the end of the middle school grade span, a transition plan will be developed to ensure appropriate placement at the high school level or in other suitable programs.

In addition, the Alternative Program will support students in transitioning to high school, including:

- Exposure to career exploration activities;
- Individualized counseling focused on goal setting, life skills, and self-advocacy;
- Connections to high school-level career and technical education (CTE) opportunities, when appropriate.
- Meet students where they are: identify their interests, strengths, and barriers.
- Use tools like career interest inventories or aptitude assessments
- Meet with students and parents to discuss long and short term goals.

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The ultimate goal of the program is to reintegrate students into their general education environment or prepare them for a successful transition to high school, work, or continued education—equipped with the academic, social, and emotional skills necessary for long-term success.

4. Staffing

Staffing Structure and Student-Teacher Ratios

The Lakewood Middle School Alternative Program will maintain a **maximum student-to-teacher ratio of 10:1** in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16-9.2(a)2 for middle school alternative education programs. Class sizes will be intentionally small to allow for individualized attention, differentiated instruction, and targeted interventions. The program is designed to serve a total of 30–40 students in grades 6 through 8, supported by appropriately certified and highly qualified staff.

This Program will utilize current staff, and not require additional staff members.

Instructional and support staff will include:

- **Certified Teachers**
- **Certified School Counselor assigned to each grade level Cohort** to provide daily counseling services;
- **One (1) Paraprofessional** assigned each grade level Cohort to support classroom management, instruction, and student engagement;
- **One (1) Program Administrator**, responsible for the daily operations, supervision, and coordination of services within the Alternative School Program.
- **Student Assistance Counselor (SAC)** – to provide prevention Education and support groups.

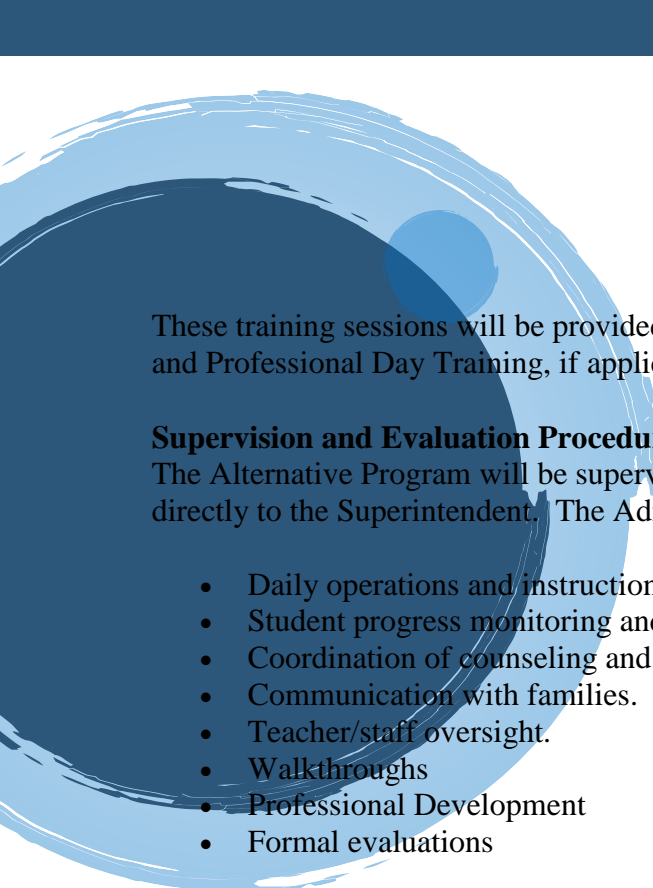
Certifications and Qualifications

All instructional staff will hold valid New Jersey teaching certificates aligned with their subject area(s) and grade level(s), in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:9 and 6A:8-5.1.

Professional Development for Alternative Program Staff

Staff in the Alternative Program will participate in professional development specifically tailored to the needs of an alternative school setting. Annual training topics will include:

- Trauma-informed care and behavioral de-escalation techniques;
- Restorative practices and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS);
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies;
- Classroom management and culturally responsive teaching;
- Crisis intervention and mental health awareness;
- Conflict resolution and student re-engagement strategies.



These training sessions will be provided through a combination of after school training, PLC Training and Professional Day Training, if applicable.

Supervision and Evaluation Procedures

The Alternative Program will be supervised by the Alternative School Administrator, who reports directly to the Superintendent. The Administrator will oversee:

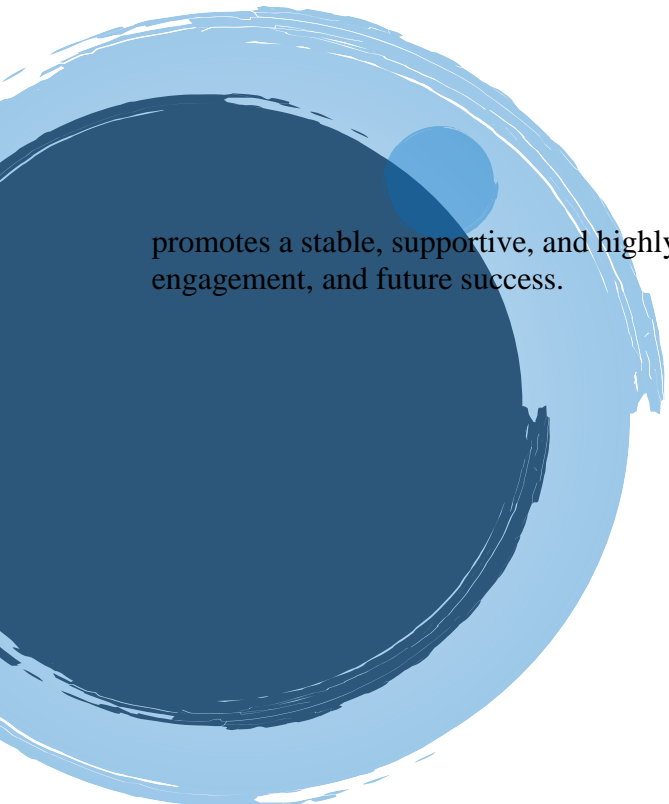
- Daily operations and instructional planning;
- Student progress monitoring and data review;
- Coordination of counseling and wraparound services;
- Communication with families.
- Teacher/staff oversight.
- Walkthroughs
- Professional Development
- Formal evaluations

Teachers and support staff will be formally evaluated in accordance with the **district's approved educator evaluation system**, aligned with N.J.A.C. 6A:10. Observations will focus on instructional effectiveness, student engagement, classroom climate, and fidelity to individualized student plans (IPPs).

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Program Administrator:** Oversees implementation, student placement, compliance with program requirements, scheduling, staff supervision, staff professional development and community partnerships.
- **Teachers:** Deliver standards-based instruction, maintain IPPs, provide accommodations and modifications, and monitor student performance and behavior.
- **Counselor:** Provides individual and group counseling, supports transition planning, monitors social-emotional development, and collaborates with families and outside agencies.
- **Paraprofessionals:** Support instructional delivery, reinforce behavioral expectations, and assist with supervision during transitions and non-instructional periods.
- **Community Resource Persons** (as applicable): Facilitate sessions in character education, service learning, career exploration, and mentorship aligned to IPP goals.

All staff will contribute to the development and review of students' Individual Program Plans and collaborate regularly to ensure student needs are met holistically. The integrated, team-based approach



promotes a stable, supportive, and highly structured educational setting to ensure student growth, engagement, and future success.

5. Evaluation

Assessment of Student Progress and Grade-Level Attainment:

Student progress in the Lakewood Middle School Alternative Program will be measured through a combination of formative and summative assessments aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). These assessments will include benchmark assessments, standards-based unit tests, individualized learning goals, and portfolio reviews. In addition, teachers will utilize ongoing progress monitoring tools such as i-Ready, i-Station!, and teacher-developed rubrics to evaluate academic growth in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Grade-level attainment will be assessed based on students' performance across multiple data points, including:

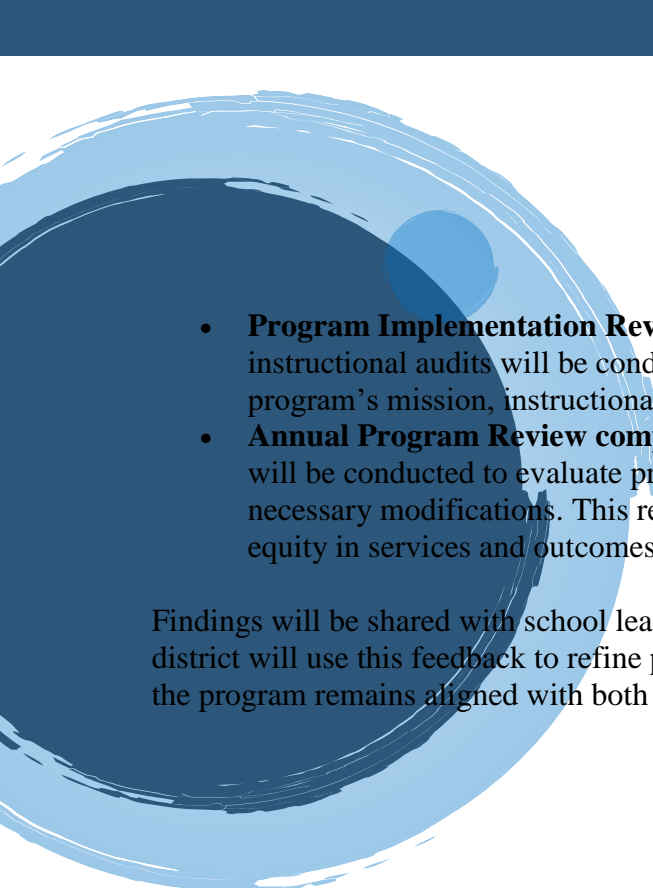
- Academic performance on district assessments and report cards;
- Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) derived from state assessments (when applicable);
- Attendance records and course completion rates;
- Progress on Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans, if applicable;
- Behavioral growth and socio-emotional development as observed and recorded by staff.

Promotion decisions will be guided by the district's promotion and retention policy, factoring in academic progress, assessment data, and teacher recommendations.

Program Evaluation and Effectiveness Monitoring:

The effectiveness of the Alternative Program will be evaluated through a structured, data-driven review process conducted quarterly. This will include:

- **Academic Outcomes:** Aggregated data on student performance, comparing beginning-of-year and end-of-year benchmarks to identify individual and group growth.
- **Behavioral Metrics:** Trends in disciplinary referrals, attendance improvement, and social-emotional assessments
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Regular surveys and feedback sessions involving students, parents, teachers, and counselors to assess satisfaction and identify areas of concern.

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- **Program Implementation Review:** Administrative walkthroughs, classroom observations, and instructional audits will be conducted by school and district leaders to ensure fidelity to the program's mission, instructional methods, and support structures.
 - **Annual Program Review completed by Program Administrator:** A formal year-end review will be conducted to evaluate program outcomes, identify strengths and challenges, and inform necessary modifications. This review will include disaggregated data by subgroup to ensure equity in services and outcomes.

Findings will be shared with school leadership, the Board of Education, and other stakeholders. The district will use this feedback to refine professional development, adjust staffing or services, and ensure the program remains aligned with both student needs and the goals of the district.