

Guide to Alternative School Status Application & Verification Process



Arizona Department of Education
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ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Alternative School Status Annual Application Guidance

This document was created to provide additional information for schools interested in applying for alternative school status, as defined by the Arizona State Board of Education (last updated December 8, 2025). To be approved, schools must meet the State Board's definition of an alternative school, as verified using the school's mission, student population, and the student support services/programs offered to its population. Alternative school status lasts for one year, so alternative schools must reapply every fiscal year. Alternative school status will not be granted retroactively. Schools operating a Dropout Recovery Program (DRP) **must** be approved for alternative school status. The following are the criteria that applicant schools will have to meet to be granted alternative status:

Criteria	Guidance/Evidence
1. A district school has adopted a mission statement that clearly identifies its purpose is to serve a student population that is unable to profit from a traditional school setting; a charter holder expressly states in their charter that its purpose is to serve a student population that is unable to profit from a traditional school setting.	Mission statements submitted to ADE as part of the Alternative School Status application must score a 3 (distinguishable) when evaluated using the Alternative School Mission Statement Rubric (see appendix). This is a requirement for both district schools and charter schools. Mission statements submitted to ADE as part of the Alternative School Status application must be up to date with the State's School Report Card website and must be present on the district or charter school's website. For charter schools, the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (ASBCS) will verify that a charter holder's mission statement is on record with ASBCS and aligns with its charter.
2. The educational program and related student support services of the school must align with the mission and charter (if applicable) of the school.	Evidence could include a brief crosswalk from mission to programs and supports, a flexible master schedule and course catalog, ILP templates with a re-engagement flow, key partnership MOUs, a staff/PD plan tied to the mission, and so on.
3. Schools serving students in grade 12 must offer a high school diploma that fulfills the Arizona State Board of Education graduation requirements.	An entity shall not be considered a school for accountability purposes when offering grade 12 unless this criterion is met and, therefore, shall not be eligible for Alternative School status.
4. The school will receive current year state assessment scores for their students.	For a school to apply for Alternative School status, it must be in operation and must administer the state assessment annually. Please note: Schools shall not be granted Alternative School status until the first year of operation.

5. The school must intend to serve students in one or more of the categories below that may be unable to profit from a traditional school setting

All schools shall be subject to a quantitative review for student enrollment verification prior to confirmation of alternative status.

Seventy percent of the students enrolled by October 1 (current year – e.g., October 1, 2025 for SY 26-27 applications) shall have been listed in at least one of the categories of students primarily served in an alternative school setting upon **initial** enrollment at the school.

A. Students who have a documented history of disruptive behavioral issues.

Suspension records.
Expulsion records.
Referrals Threat of Suspension.
Documented relevant IEP.
Behavior Report.
Behavior Intervention Plan.

B. Students who have dropped out of school are now returning.

This can be verified by identifying a withdraw code from the previous school and a corresponding 'E' code at the current school.

C. Students who are behind on academic credits or grade level performance at initial enrollment

Academic transcripts: comparing the credits a student has earned with the type and/or amount needed to be on-track to graduate with their 4-year cohort.

A valid and reliable pre-test for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and/or Science. (e.g., standardized placement test) showing behind-grade-level performance, particularly for students in grades 6-10.

D. Students who are primary caregivers or are financially responsible for dependents that may require a flexible school schedule.

Signed and dated documentation from parent, guardian, or student of legal age.
McKinney-Vento eligibility form.
Emancipation documentation.

E. Students who are adjudicated.

Documentation provided by the Arizona justice system or the probation officer (e.g., enrollment form, enrollment hearing).

Request for records from a juvenile detention center school.

Transcript showing credits from a juvenile detention center school.

Juvenile Intervention Program Agreement signed by student & parent/guardian.

F. Students who are wards of the state, in foster care, or who are homeless	Letter assigning guardianship (foster care as assigned by DCS or court). McKinney-Vento eligibility form. Other documents issued by the Department of Child Safety (DCS).
G. Students with high mobility.	Frequent Address changes using proof of residency documents. McKinney-Vento eligibility form.
H. Students who are over-age (18+)	School records or transcripts showing date of birth.
I. Students returning to education from a residential or mental health facility	Program/facility/parent documentation. Service or treatment plan. Section 504 accommodations. Voucher documentation. EDP placement.

School Mission Statement and Student Population Reviews:

After a school submits an alternative status application, ADE will conduct reviews of the school's mission and student population to verify that it meets all the criteria outlined above. This review process will consist of the following steps:

1. ADE will verify that 70% of students enrolled at the school on October 1 of the current school year fall into one of the categories listed above as part of criteria 5. Schools submitting without current year enrollment data may be given temporary approval until this criterion can be verified using data from the first operational school year.
 - a ADE will first attempt to verify this criterion using data that is already being captured via AzEDS for other reporting purposes (i.e., enrollment records, withdrawal codes, need statuses, attendance records). Table 1 below contains all of the AzEDS-captured data points that ADE is currently using for verification.
 - b If ADE is unable to verify that this criterion is being met using AzEDS-captured data, the school will be asked to submit a list of Oct 1 enrolled students that fall into at least one of the categories, and a meeting may be scheduled between the school and a member of the Accountability and Research team to confirm that school has documentation available for the submitted students.
 - c The examples provided (A-I above) of documentation that could be used to verify student eligibility for an alternative school setting are not exhaustive.
2. ADE will review the mission statement submitted in the application and determine whether it meets the following requirements:
 - a The mission statement is distinguishable from a traditional school mission statement, as evaluated using the [Alternative School Mission Statement Rubric](#). ADE's Accountability and Research team will be able to provide guidance about creating a mission statement that meets the required criteria. **For school year 2026-2027 applications, mission statements of any school that was granted alternative school status during the prior application cycle will automatically be approved again, even if they do not yet meet the definition of a *distinguishable* alternative school mission statement. This is intended to give schools a full year to adjust their mission statement as needed to align with the updated requirement.**

- a. The mission statement provided in the Alternative School Status application is published on the school's website.
- b. The mission statement shown on the [school's School Report Card page](#) matches the mission statement provided in the Alternative School Status application.
- c. The mission statement on record with the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools matches the mission statement provided in the Alternative School Status application.

Table 1. Verifying Alternative School Population Categories Using AzEDS Data

Category	Qualifying data by ADE (initial source)	Secondary source (used in the absence of initial source)
Documented history of disruptive behavior	W3 withdrawal code	Documentation maintained by school.
Students who have dropped out of school and are now returning	W4/S4, W5/S5, W11, and W41/S41 withdrawal codes	
Students who are behind on academic credits or grade level performance at initial enrollment	W6, and R withdrawal codes, or cohort year greater than the current year	
Students who are over-age (18+)	18 or older as of Oct 1 using date of birth submitted to AzEDS	
Primary caregiver/financially responsible	Economically Disadvantaged need code AND average daily attendance rate less than 0.75 (at the same time)	
Adjudicated	W10/S10 withdrawal codes and E15/E16 enrollment codes	
Students who are wards of the state, in foster care, or who are homeless	Need codes	
Students with High Mobility	Enrollment gaps of 10+ days in a single year and enrollments at 3+ different schools in a single year	
Students returning to education from a residential or mental health facility	None	

If a school does not pass either the student population or mission statement reviews, it will be denied alternative status. Schools denied alternative status in the current year may apply in following years. The Department shall deny alternative status after having exhausted all available options to verify that student population and mission-related criteria are being met. If you have questions about the application process, please reach out to achieve@azed.gov.