

Boston's Alternative Education Initiative (AEI) Program Policy Principles for FY 2020

MISSION

It is our purpose as an innovative public agency to promote economic self-sufficiency to ensure the full participation of all Boston residents in the city's economic vitality and future. It is also our purpose to be an advocate, clearinghouse, and laboratory for "best practices" in literacy, beginning at birth; lifelong learning; job training/placement; and support services so Bostonians may fulfill their educational and employment aspirations.

OVERVIEW

In early February 2019, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (OWD) intends to release a Request for Proposal (RFP) for FY 2020 Alternative Education Initiative (AEI) funding. The AEI funds support Boston's high school diploma, HiSET and GED granting alternative education programs for youth between the ages of 16-24. Connecting youth to alternative education programs, where they can take advantage of personalized, flexible, and small student-centered learning environments, provides a foundation for participating youth to increase their future employability and earning potential.

This document outlines a set of policy principles, highlighting program and service priorities for FY 2020, including the extent and kinds of impact the AEI funds will have on participants. The policy principles will help guide the development of AEI programs for FY 2020. Updates from FY2018 are bolded and highlighted.

GOAL

The goal of Boston's AEI initiative is to ensure that youth who are not being effectively served in mainstream education systems are connected to alternative education programs so that they have the skills and credentials necessary to access career-oriented employment. **In Fiscal Year 2020, OWD seeks to fund programs that bridge youth who complete their educational credential directly into sector-specific career pathways training or post-secondary education, allowing for a seamless transition and continuity of services.**

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES¹

In general, the policy principles address the complex barriers faced by students whose needs are not met in a traditional academic environment.

- Investment in programs that establish a framework to move participant along the career pathways continuum, defined as high school diplomas/HiSET/GED attainment, matriculation into post-secondary education/training and placement into jobs with demonstrated career paths.
- Provision of alternative education programs employing highly individualized and accelerated curricula that allow participants to graduate and obtain high school diplomas/HiSET/GED.

¹ The methodology used to formulate a set of proposed policy principles included extensive literature review on well-documented best practices and a city-wide scan of community resources.

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Preference will be given to programs that provide innovative, career sector-based curriculum. For example: a HiSET program that is taught within the context of the construction trades.

- Curricula that emphasize students' ability to successfully demonstrate mastery of content, allowing teachers and staff to provide intensive support and guidance to improve student learning.
- The integration of trauma-informed intensive case management and support services to help youth overcome complex barriers and achieve academic success.
- The use of comprehensive assessment tools and strategies to track individual student progress, responding to the unique challenges of the student populations including those with disabilities.
- Alternative education programs that provide high school education and college/career preparation for dropouts and off-track students.
- Provision of school-to-college approaches with emphasis on an early introduction and exposure to post-secondary education and careers, allowing youth to establish career goals and interests, and to experience improved educational and employment outcomes, such as dual enrollment strategies.
- Participation in a referral network, including BYSN, the Re-engagement Center and the Mass Hire Career Centers, that allow programs to combine their specialized outreach, education and employment/career services into coherent pathways from disconnection to high school education.
- The use of structured work-based learning, such as career exploration and paid experiences, providing maximum opportunities for youth to learn theoretical and practical skills relevant to their career interests that lead to post-secondary education or employment.
- The inclusion of innovative post-secondary bridge programs designed to accelerate credentials and skill building, such as use of contextualized and integrated curriculum and instruction.
- The use of restorative justice principles in discipline policies to build safe classroom communities and contribute to socio-emotional learning for participants.
- Investment in long-term follow-up with program participants upon graduation to ensure continued support and success in post-secondary education, training, or employment.
- Investment in programs that incorporate trauma-informed approaches into their intensive case management models.
- The use of partnerships and collaborations are strongly encouraged to ensure that there are no gaps in a continuum of programs and supportive services. **A Memorandum of Agreement with at least one workforce development training partner or post-secondary institution will be required for all proposals.**

TARGET POPULATIONS

- Out-of-school youth between the ages of 16-24, defined as high school dropouts without high school diploma, GED or HiSET;
- In-school youth between the ages of 16-22 who are at risk of dropping out, including those who are two or more years behind in obtaining credits required for high school graduation;
- Youth who are basic skills deficient or English Language Learners;

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- Court-involved; homeless, runaway, in foster care, or aged out of the foster care system; pregnant or parenting; youth with disabilities; young men of color; immigrant youth; youth residing in Boston Housing Authority (BHA) facilities.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Attainment of high school diplomas/HiSET/GED.
- **Bridged placement** into post-secondary education or skills training programs that lead to attainment of industry-recognized degrees or certificates.
- Placement and retention into **unsubsidized employment in career sectors with expected job growth and opportunities.**

PROPOSED BIDDER COMPETENCIES

When procuring services under AEI, the following competencies will be prioritized:

- Demonstrated ability to provide alternative education programs to various youth populations who are drop-outs, off-track or at-risk of dropping out of high schools.
- Staff expertise and experience in creating personalized, student-centered environments to support participants' academic, social, and emotional success.
- Ability to implement curricula that meet the learning needs of the target population, including specific strategies that allow for multiple program entry and exit points for participants.
- Demonstrated ability to assess participant needs, coordinate service provision, and provide follow-up services.
- Staff expertise in successfully connecting and referring participants to programs that they may be eligible for, such as out-of-school activities and employment opportunities.
- Staff expertise in engaging post-secondary institutions in program development and implementation activities.
- Staff expertise in implementing work-based learning, job readiness and preparation activities.
- Ability to conduct process and outcome evaluations to implement mid-course program corrections, as necessary.
- Ability to partner with other organizations to allow provision of a full set of education, youth development and employment experiences for youth participants.
- Ability to provide culturally and linguistically competent programs and services.
- Evidence-based, scalable, and cost-effective intervention with opportunities for leveraging additional resources.
- **Demonstrated partnerships with workforce development training programs or post-secondary institutions with whom youth can immediately transition into upon completion of their educational credential.**