

Boston's Alternative Education Initiative (AEI) Program Policy Principles for FY 2023

MISSION

Our purpose as an innovative public agency is 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 January 2022, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (OWD) intends to release a Request for Proposal (RFP) for FY 2023 Alternative Education Initiative (AEI) funding. The AEI funds support Boston's high school diploma alternative education programs for youth 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 2023, including the extent and kinds of impact the AEI funds will have on participants. The policy principles will help guide the selection of AEI programs for FY 2023.

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 2023, OWD seeks alternative education programs that can 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. The AEI funding cycle has been lengthened to three years to build program stability and accommodate a longer time frame for program delivery.

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.

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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Principle 1: Proven intervention methods to re-engage and retain marginalized youth in meaningful learning and positive developmental activities. Curriculum, materials, and pedagogy should be aligned with recognized educational standards and supported by appropriate assessment practices. Preference will be given to programs that use evidence-based methodologies and incorporate common elements of effective alternative education programs identified by the Department of Early and Secondary Education. Recipients of the Department of Early and Secondary Education funding or BPS affiliated programs are strongly preferred.

Principle 2: Effective approaches and strategies to support the transition to post-secondary education and training. Preference will be given to programs and services that establish a framework to move participants from attainment of high school diplomas or GED/HiSETs to matriculation in post-secondary education/training. Programs should coordinate with relevant partners to deliver an integrated set of activities designed to promote students' successful transition from the AEI program into an industry-recognized training program or college enrollment. Scaffolded post-secondary readiness strategies such as dual enrollment or contextualized and integrated curriculum are strongly encouraged. Programs must demonstrate strong partnerships with workforce development training programs or post-secondary institutions with whom students can immediately transition upon completing their educational credential. Upon graduation, programs should also provide long-term follow-up with program participants to ensure continued support and success in post-secondary education, training, or employment.

Principle 3: Strong referral partnerships to provide a complete set of supportive and educational services for the students and their families. Programs must demonstrate an ability to facilitate access to support services that address students' special needs in a coordinated and efficient manner. Programs should maintain a network of referrals in areas like health, nutrition, teen parenting, childcare, transportation, substance abuse treatment, mental health, and instruction in English as a second language. Participation in resource and referral networks, including YTTF, BYSN and the Re-engagement Center that allows programs to combine their specialized outreach, education, and employment/career services into coherent pathways from disconnection to high school education is highly encouraged.

Principle 4: The use of comprehensive assessment tools and strategies to track students' functional, developmental, and academic progress and diagnose individual learning needs. Programs must have a comprehensive, well-articulated assessment system to help determine student needs and progress. Access to formal psycho-educational assessments to identify learning disabilities should be readily available. In addition, programs must have structured processes and protocols to intervene if an assessment indicates a need for additional or specialized support.

Principle 5: The integration of intensive case management and support services to help students overcome complex barriers and achieve academic success. Programs must provide case management that is strengths-based, trauma-informed, culturally competent, and evidence-based. In addition, case management should be intensive and deliberately planned based on comprehensive assessments and well-designed service plans.

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PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY

Program participants served with AEI funds under this procurement must be Boston residents, between the ages of 16-24 years old who are high school dropouts or at risk of dropping out from traditional high schools.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

- Attainment of high school diplomas/HiSET/GED.
- Bridged placement into post-secondary education or skills training programs.