

National Alternative Education Association



NAEA Vision

To engage and empower alternative/non-tradition educators to positively impact students' lives, by providing resources, advocacy, and professional learning.

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NAEA 2020 Virtual Conference

October 23, 2020

8:00 am - 2:10 pm PDT



Format will be Opening Session + 3 Breakout Sessions + Business Session
Total 9 breakout sessions to choose from

Sessions will be recorded and available until November 22, 2020

Fee also includes 5 additional Exemplary Practices Showcase Sessions throughout the
year

Additional showcase sessions in November, January, February, March, and April

Conference Fee ~ \$55.00

[2020 CONFERENCE SCHEDULE IS NOW AVAILABLE HERE](#)

What All Schools During the Pandemic Can Learn from Alternative Accountability

Amy Schlessman,
Ph.D.

During these uncertain and unprecedented times of public-school closures due to COVID-19, there is a quandary about how to measure the effectiveness of schools, the schools supported by taxpayer dollars.

Even though the author focuses on what other charters can learn from Alternative Education Campuses, this article suggests there are helpful lessons to be learned for all public schools:

<https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-seeking-new-ways-to-evaluate-charter-schools-serving-the-highest-needs-students-that-might-work-for-others-shattered-by-covid-19/>



Take a course or earn a Master's in Education or a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Standing (CAGS) in Alternative Education

For information on the programs contact
Debra Nitschke-Shaw, PhD
Director of Graduate Programs in Education
dnitschke@nec.edu

For information on how to apply contact
France Miserere
New England College Admission
tmiserere@nec.edu

Future Courses

Fall 2 - 2020

October 19, 2020 – December 13, 2020

ED 6751

Developing and Sustaining Excellence in Schools
3 credits

This course provides an overview of the development of sustainable policies, procedures, staffing, and professional development that lead to sustainable alternative programs. Emphasis on establishing and maintaining a balance of stability and flexibility as required by the nature of alternative education. The role of data analysis and program evaluation as it contributes to ongoing school improvement, the development of best practices, and individual staff and professional growth is covered. This course will focus on the National Alternative Education Association Exemplary Practices for Alternative Education. (3 credits)

Instructor: Frances Gooden, Ed.D.

Spring 1 - 2021

January 11, 2021 – February 28, 2021

ED 6752

Planning for Student Success in Alternative Education
3 credits

This course provides an overview of additional support for the students in the alternative environment to enable academic and behavioral improvements. Topics will introduce the definition, techniques, and examples of addressing modifying student behavior. The course will contain an exploration of options to prepare students for post-secondary success. This course will highlight the National Alternative Education Association Exemplary Practices for Alternative Education. (3 credits)

Instructor: Amy Schlessmann-Frost, Ph.D.

Spring 2 - 2021

March 8, 2021 – April 25, 2021

ED 6753

Transition Services for students in Alternative Education
3 credits

This course provides an overview of techniques and processes used in programming for the needs of individuals as they prepare for transition to alternative programs and back to a comprehensive school program. This course will also focus on the development of an Alternative Education Plan and Transition Plan. Discussion will also focus on post secondary programs and employment opportunities. Emphasis on skills related to professional liaison and support roles in the design of instructional arrangements and cooperative training. (3 credits)

Instructor: TBA



2020 Digital Principal of the Year

Robert Eichorn

[@WolfpackPrinci1](#)

**Independence Nontraditional School
Manassas, VA**

Principal Robert Eichorn believes that eliminating technology barriers to create educational equity for the most at-risk students and those who serve them begins with a vision of learner- and staff-centered access, modeling applications as a team, and continually evaluating and celebrating successes. As a new principal in 2009, he set out to help socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Independence Nontraditional School expanded all virtual and blended learning options for students enrolled directly at the school while simultaneously offering several hundred seats to students enrolled at all other high schools.

This Month's Technology Tip

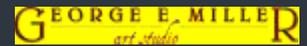
Free Resources for Schools During COVID-19

<https://thejournal.com/articles/2020/03/13/free-resources-ed-tech-companies-step-up-during-coronavirus-outbreak.aspx>



NAEA Partners
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If you would like to submit an article for consideration, please e-mail justin_demartin@yahoo.com.

Reaching out to At- Risk Students in the Middle of a Pandemic

By: Ben Hebisen
and Erik Bruner

Those of us that teach and work in an alternative school setting know the obstacles when working with at-risk students each day. Many of the students struggle with anything from drug addiction to mental health challenges and everything in between. So, keeping the connection and relationship strong while at school is crucial. Building the bond of trust is key and takes time. Students often struggle with distractions that keep them from coming to school on a consistent basis. As alternative educators, attendance has always been the top priority and one of the biggest challenges. It's at school they get the academic support, mental and physical health services, nutrition, and positive adult relationships that many may not get elsewhere. The dilemma today, particularly for alternative schools, is providing these supports when students are no longer able to safely come to school.

On March 16th the Wentzville School District shut down and Pearce Hall, the district's alternative programs building, was no longer operating as usual. All that time spent during the school year building the relationships and providing a safe and comfortable environment was immediately gone for our students. The support and guidance that they desperately needed was no longer available. They were once again going to be left with uncertainty and fear. Knowing that students are already vulnerable and walking the fine line, many questions came rushing through our minds. How would we continue to provide the support now that we would no longer be able to see the students face to face? What can we do to continue to support even when gatherings were not possible? How can we ensure our students are safe and healthy? What's our next move?

Maintaining Teacher-Student Connections

First, we had to make every attempt to continue to provide the academic support for our students. It would just look very different. Zoom, FaceTime, Google Chats, and texting quickly became the new normal. Our teachers made every effort to reach out and stay connected. They knew that this was going to be difficult. Many of the students were no longer staying at home. Some even went on to different states to stay with a relative or friend. Consistency and perseverance was the key. The teachers at Pearce Hall are masters of checking under every nook and cranny to figure out where each kid was staying and how they could get in touch with them. They wanted each student to know that there was still someone from the school looking out for them. In an age of email and texting, voice to voice phone calls have made a sudden comeback. Just hearing that trusted adult's voice has gone a long way to help our students feel better, even if just for a few minutes. Some teachers have even gone as far as to do a "through the front door," in person conversation to show their students that they care about them and make sure they are okay. Staying in contact and keeping the connections strong has been a blessing for both the student and teacher and their mental health and academic progress.

Modified Mental Health Services

Second, we wanted to make sure the students that were most vulnerable could still get the mental health support that they needed. We are lucky at Pearce Hall because we have three clinical therapists, what we call *educational support counselors*, that work in the school, providing much-needed mental health services during the school day to students who may not get them otherwise. Our support counselors provide both group and individual support on a regular basis to all of the students who enter our doors. However, when our doors closed and the pandemic was in full force, their roles and responsibilities were more important than ever. All three counselors made a list of their highest need and most vulnerable students, and came up with a predictable schedule for checking in providing sessions through video chat or phone. They made it clear to all of their students that they were still available and that regular and as-needed mental health check-ins and support groups would not go away. In fact, they would end up making contact more frequently with students and quickly adapt to the use of group hangouts and digital communication. As a generation born into a world of social media and online communication, it was an easy transition for most students, and a welcome one for some. Providing the voice of reason and a sounding board for students to talk about their fears and concerns were an important part of keeping students at ease and their mental health strong.

Community Partnerships

Third, we wanted to be able to provide support for both students and their families. Pearce Hall is fortunate to have several strong community partnerships that provide a

variety of services to our students on a daily basis. We did not want those resources to be lost for the rest of the year once school had transitioned to virtual learning. Our partnerships with Preferred Family Healthcare, an organization that provides a range of mental health, child welfare, and substance abuse services, continued despite the separation. Preferred Family provided several online groups for our school community, primarily for those students who struggle with drug and alcohol use and participate in our district's substance abuse intervention program. The counselors with Preferred Family continued to stay in touch and do their best to help those students that self-medicate as a way to ease the stress that they deal with on a daily basis, knowing that these coping behaviors would only increase at a time like this.

Other partnerships, like those with *Connections to Success*, a local career-readiness and life-coaching organization, and *Northeast Community Action Corporation*, a housing, financial training, and community services agency, made themselves available to help those families that were in desperate need of financial support, professional advice and general guidance during the chaotic time. Through these and other agencies, food deliveries, utility subsidizations, and financial support were made available to families who reached out to us for help or who were referred by our staff.

You hear phrases like "It takes a village" or "the community came together" when reading news stories about tragedies and disasters. First-hand knowledge proves those statements to be true. As alternative educators, we know how important wrap-around services that meet our families' basic needs are. They are the critical foundation to all of the other ways we want our students to find success, and it's been a moving experience to see groups of people working together for the common good and leaning on one another during this difficult time.

Looking to Next Year

Finally, it is crucial to start thinking about the next school year right away. Even though we haven't officially finished out the 2019-20 school year, our minds are already racing, thinking about next year. What is it going to look like? Will the kids be back? What safety and health precautions need to be in place before students enter the building? There are so many uncertainties and

unknowns. But, it is recognize the things know the students are and worried. We do students at the school need of support and safe to assume that problems that so struggle with will be as once they return. So, and ensure that we no matter what August believe strongly that and social/emotional whole-family, two-our efforts need to students, but also larger community.

We've meetings with Healthcare to provide office for their help provide additional mental

our students and families once they return. The goal is to have school-facilitated outreach to not just our students at Pearce Hall, but our entire community. We are working with Connections to Success to develop a food pantry in our gym to assist families in our area struggling to meet basic needs while dealing with loss of income and the student meals they count on. Additionally, housing is now a real concern for several of our families. We are working with partner programs to help provide temporary housing and, if needed, connections to permanent housing down the road.

This is just the start of our planning. We all know that with the uncertainty of these times, it's impossible to predict exactly what our students and communities will need in the next few months and beyond. For all of us in education, it's simply unclear what teaching will look like in August. At the tangible level, we don't know how schools might be physically organized and scheduled, if students will attend for limited times during the week, if they will be kept from socializing in communal areas, if they'll be able to continue extra-curricular activities, or if students will return at all next year. At the emotional level, we don't know how long this pandemic will keep our world in a new normal of isolation, grief, and a pervasive, base-level anxiety. Also unknown are the long-term traumatic effects. However, if this pandemic has taught us anything, it is how to stay connected despite the distance, the importance of planning for many different scenarios when faced with an uncertain future, and just how crucial schools are to the children and families in our communities. With staff members who think creatively and compassionately about how to stay connected to our students, by acknowledging that a world event like this has a true psychological impact on everyone, and by drawing closer to our students, co-workers and community partners in a time that lends itself toward isolation, we can come away from this pandemic stronger and with more tools in our toolbox for working with all kids.



also important to you do know. We going to be scared know that many of the will be in desperate additional help. It is the drug and alcohol many of our students significant as ever we must be prepared have supports in place looks like. Since we academic success health requires a generation approach, consider not only the their families and the

recently had planning Preferred Family an in-school satellite organization's staff to substance abuse and health resources for