

# Alternative Learning Settings

## Context

The Inclusive Education Policy continues to apply and is consistent with the updated Provincial School Code of Conduct direction on Alternative Learning Settings.

The Inclusive Education Policy states that *“every student should be taught within a common learning environment (e.g., a classroom) with students of similar age within the community school, with **flexibility** that is based on, and **responsive** to, the student’s individual strengths and challenges.”*

Further, it is important to remember that, as part of the considerations made when using Alternative Learning Settings, inclusive education is a commitment to a high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable education, that supports the well-being and achievement of every student in Nova Scotia (Inclusive Education Policy, 2020).

## Guidance

**Alternative learning settings** refers to a range of locations within the school where students can work alone or in small groups. These areas help students feel better and do well in school. The utilization of these settings should be fluid and responsive, meaning that a student is not assigned to an alternate learning setting on a permanent basis. Alternate learning settings are considered a common learning environment and may include a learning centre with a dedicated space to support programming. Educators might use these settings to offer personalized instruction, targeted interventions, or simply a calmer environment for those who find busy classrooms overwhelming. By making these options available, schools aim to ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed academically and personally, considering their individual needs.

When it has been determined that a student may not be able to consistently demonstrate expected school behavior, intensive programming and services will be identified, and a Behavior Intervention Support Plan may be developed. The plan will include strategies required and the most appropriate pathway(s), including possible **alternate learning settings** or adapted schedules. This is described in 5.14 of the Provincial School Code of Conduct Policy.

When alternate learning settings are being considered, either after a serious incident or as a proactive strategy, in response to an emerging or changing complex behaviour, a Student Planning Team (SPT) meeting must be convened. These teams start with the shared goal of a student spending the majority of their instructional day with their peers while having access to specialized programming space as required.

The SPT includes parents/guardians, regional/board staff and relevant partner agencies or departments (e.g., community agencies, IWK, Opportunities and Social Development). All efforts should be made to ensure parents/guardians are part of decisions. If the school is experiencing difficulty in having a parent attend a meeting, regional/board office staff should be notified.

All efforts will be made to ensure parents/guardians can participate in an SPT meeting. In the event, that parents/guardians are unable to attend, follow-up communication will happen as soon as possible.

If it is determined that current programming can be enhanced through delivery in alternative learning settings, a plan is created keeping the needs of the student and their family at the center of all decisions.

**The alternate learning setting must be documented and include:**

- how the alternative learning setting is individualized to support students with diverse learning or emotional, social needs
- consideration of steps to support reduced time in alternate setting, when appropriate
- regular monitoring and evaluation criteria
- family communication plan
- how use will be tracked

## Review

The SPT should regularly review the alternative learning setting plan.

EECD and Regional/Board Student Services staff will review regional/board level alternate learning setting data on a quarterly basis and this information will be shared with the Education Council for Disability, Inclusion and Accessibility annually.

**Examples when a student might access an alternative learning setting:**

- Newcomer students may require support with language acquisition, school settlement needs/transition supports, or peer mentorship opportunities.
- Students with disabilities, medical needs, or sensory needs, diverse learning styles may benefit from spending time in locations designed to acquire new skills and support.
- Students may choose to attend a school funded through the Tuition Support Program.