

## The Alsace School for Alternative Education and Emotional Support: Helping students that may be at risk

The Alsace School for Alternative Education and Emotional Support provides educational opportunities for students that may be at-risk, in need of supports that cannot be implemented in another educational environment, or are struggling in the traditional school setting. Alsace serves all 18 school districts within Berks County.

The Alsace program focuses on three areas that foster learning and growth: climate, counseling, and curriculum. Alsace has undergone several changes in order to improve these aspects of the program. The changes ensure that students are better prepared to successfully transition to their home schools, enter the work force, or attend an institution of higher learning.

### An evolving structure

Changes involving class structure have been implemented recently. Students are now required to change classrooms throughout the day. Previously, students remained in the same classroom all day, and subject-area teachers operated on a rotation. The act of moving from room to room prepares students to return to their traditional schools, allows students some movement, and provides a change of environment and an opportunity for positive socialization.



*Mrs. Lucas employs a variety of therapeutic techniques as part of the counseling available to Alsace students.*



*Mr. Rizzo and Ms. Emge teach in Alsace's revised class structure. A combination of factors has improved the educational experience.*

In addition, the new schedule affords students a lesson in responsible time management.

Students are now grouped heterogeneously by grade level. In the past, students were grouped by gender and age (junior high school and high school). Physically, this new grouping has created smaller classes and allows for a more focused, grade-appropriate curriculum. As a result, academic rigor, as well as differentiated instruction based on individual student ability and interest, has increased. In order to reach all students with varying learning styles and aptitudes, teachers are implementing more hands-on and multi-sensory learning experiences for students.

### Electives and technology

The addition of elective courses has served to enhance learning experiences this quarter. Electives are now being offered to students to better engage them and serve their interests, career aspirations, and needs. These electives mirror courses that may be offered at students' home districts. Some electives include psychology, driver education, creative writing, nutrition, and employability skills.

The use of technology has grown by leaps and bounds at Alsace this school year. Smart boards and wireless Internet access in the classrooms now facilitate more dynamic instruction and interactive learning.



*In addition to classroom instruction, Alsace students are given the opportunity to choose elective courses to suit their interests.*

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) team is another part of the counseling component at Alsace. The SAP team schedules evaluations with a representative from the Reading Hospital after a student is referred to the program due to changes in behavior, suspected substance abuse, or other ongoing issues.

### **Community awareness and citizenship**

Alsace also places a strong focus on community awareness and citizenship. Each student enrolled at the Alsace School is responsible for completing

10 hours of community service per year. In conjunction with Hope Lutheran Church in Reading, students from the Alsace School assist with unloading pallets of food donated by the Greater Berks Food Bank that will be disseminated throughout the community. Students take advantage of another opportunity to learn and serve by removing debris from around Antietam Lake.

The latest addition to the Alsace School is the partnership with the Pennsylvania State Police. During the school day, a school resource officer is on site to support both students and staff and to maintain an environment conducive to teaching and learning. The officer also works to develop positive and meaningful relationships with students.

Finally, the intake process has been streamlined. Alsace's multi-disciplinary team of educational professionals is prepared to assist students, component school districts, and the families of individuals requiring an alternative placement. Representatives from the guidance department, special education team, and nursing services are eager to provide the highest quality of service to the community.

By developing new techniques and procedures that build on the Alsace program's strong foundation, BCIU continues to provide effective and compassionate alternative education for students that may be at risk.

For more information about the Alsace School for Alternative Education and Emotional Support, contact **Brian W. Kukulski**, program administrator, at 610-987-8659 or [brikuk@berksiu.org](mailto:brikuk@berksiu.org).

Progress monitoring is performed on a daily basis, and multi-disciplinary staff teams are working together to create appropriate plans and activities for the diverse body of students at Alsace. Each classroom is staffed by a highly qualified subject-area teacher and a specialist who work together to monitor and analyze student behavior and academic progress.

### **The role of counseling**

Counseling is another large part of the Alsace program. There are several means by which students may seek and receive counsel. Students receive group therapy as a class at least once a week. Counseling is also offered as an elective course and is always available to students during lunch periods. Based on student need, individual counseling by the school psychologist and school counselor is available.



*Mr. Gordon and the rest of the Alsace staff teach students skills that will prove useful after graduation.*