Bill as Introduced

SB 352 - AS INTRODUCED

2002 SESSION

02-3079
04/09

SENATE BILL ***352***

AN ACT establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

SPONSORS: Sen. O'Hearn, Dist 12

COMMITTEE: Education

ANALYSIS

This bill establishes a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

Explanation: Matter added to current law appears in ***bold italics.***
Matter removed from current law appears [~~in brackets and struckthrough.~~]
Matter which is either (a) all new or (b) repealed and reenacted appears in regular type.

SB 352 - AS INTRODUCED

02-3079
04/09

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Two

AN ACT establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court convened:

1 Committee Established. There is established a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

2 Membership and Compensation.

I. The members of the committee shall be as follows:

(a) Three members of the senate, appointed by the president of the senate.

(b) Three members of the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of the house.

II. Members of the committee shall receive mileage at the legislative rate when attending to the duties of the committee.

3 Duties. The committee shall study:

I. The feasibility of establishing alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk based on economic, social, or domestic factors.

II. The feasibility of funding such alternative programs using a shared allocation of adequate education grants.

4 Chairperson; Quorum. The members of the study committee shall elect a chairperson from among the members. The first meeting of the committee shall be called by the first-named senate member. The first meeting of the committee shall be held within 45 days of the effective date of this section. Four members of the committee shall constitute a quorum.

5 Report. The committee shall report its findings and any recommendations for proposed legislation to the senate president, the speaker of the house of representatives, the senate clerk, the house clerk, the governor, and the state library on or before November 1, 2002.

6 Effective Date. This act shall take effect upon its passage.

Committee Minutes

Date: January 16, 2002
Time: 1:10 PM
Room: SH 105-A

The Senate Committee on Education held a hearing on the following:

SB 352 establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

Members of Committee present: Senator O'Hearn
Senator McCarley
Senator Johnson

The Chair, Senator Carl Johnson, opened the hearing.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Good afternoon. For the record, I am Senator Jane O'Hearn and I represent District 12, which is Nashua Wards 1, 2, 3 and 5, Hollis, Brookline, Mason and Greenville.

I'm here at the request of both the Department of Ed and both the City of Nashua on establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

About a year and a half ago I met with my school board chair and he asked that this be addressed and I went to the Department Ed and talked with the Department of Ed and they felt that this was an important program.

One other piece that I'd like to add to it before I give you the experts on what this program is about is a study that I was on this summer, which is a bill to make certain changes in the delivery of services for children in need of services, which is the CHINS Process. From the testimony that was given in that committee and the difficulty in changing that CHINS Process, the one glaring thing that came out of that study was that we need to address children at an earlier age and we need to address them in alternative settings. This particular piece is coming along at an appropriate time to start an alternative program for children so that they are not failing in school, that they are fitting in school and that we reach them at an earlier age.

I have – speaking today for the Department of Ed is the Deputy Commissioner, Paul Ezen, who will explain more what the Department's program is but I am very pleased to introduce to you later on in this hearing

the Principal of the Alternative Middle School that's going to be open in Nashua when funding is approved in September for a middle school in Nashua which is something that we are very, very proud of and we would like to see going forward and being prepared to help the Department of Ed move forward with any of the alternative school programs that may go forward. I will answer any questions at this time.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: I have a question. Senator O'Hearn, what would you expect to come out of this study committee? What would you expect could be beneficial over and above what we are doing at the local school district level at the moment?

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Well, of course many of the problems that our school districts deal with is funding and if there's a possible way to tap into some type of funding for an alternative school district to help our local schools set-up an alternative program – not an alternative program, it's an alternative school itself with a program in the school – this is a free-standing school that we're looking at.

The issue that we were first considering in Nashua was how could we do this and put it into a building that was not necessarily approved by school approval standards. So, whether we were using a church hall or a building fitting into maybe the charter school laws so that you would have an actual charter school within a public school type program and how we could facilitate that and move forward for a purpose for children at-risk.

Senator Caroline McCarley, D. 6: Could I have a follow on to that?

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: Yes.

Senator Caroline McCarley, D. 6: Because that was my first thought was why didn't Nashua simply take the charter school approach? That was in the end put aside?

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: That was put aside because they did find a building to work with and I think the Principal of the Alternative School is here which will give you a good insight as to what Nashua is doing.

Senator Caroline McCarley, D. 6: Okay, great.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Next I would like to call Paul Ezen. Thank you.

Dr. Paul Ezen, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Education: Senator, thank you.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Welcome to Education.

Dr. Ezen: Thank you Senator. For the record my name is Paul Ezen. I am the Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Education. We did have the opportunity to meet late or this past fall and discuss alternative schools and alternative programming and the Department is here to support the bill as introduced and I think what's important is that is to acknowledge that there have been many districts and schools in the state that have tried to implement some form of manner of alternative programming and create alternative schools within the structures of their schools and it's been inconsistent at best, not a lot of resources available for those programs and as Senator O'Hearn pointed out and I want to make sure that I underscore, is that those alternative programs are typically not subjected to a – to minimum standards as created by the state. The schools are – the host schools are. So that high school A if wanted to have an alternative program, they create that alternative program but nowhere within the minimum standards are there any things that need to be addressed as far as developing, maintaining and successes around alternative school.

I think the other piece that is of great interest to us and we'd like to see the Committee look at is to further define and understand and create a uniform definition of at-risk, so that schools in the state can look at a specific definition and then that would enable them also to identify the students and therefore are identified more accurately the resources needed to develop alternative programs or alternative schools.

I think the other thing – we had an excellent conversation around that I want to make sure that I note in my comments and reasons for supporting this is that alternative schools really are schools that are created to help students focus on success and then transition back to the public schools to be successful in the public schools. I think that is a piece that the Committee can help us develop some information around and be able to make a strong statement around because I think one of the things that is important to the Department is that these schools are not schools where we are placing students for good, to get them out of a school or a particular public school. I think they have a very specific purpose to help students address certain issues but to also help students focus on how they can succeed academically. I think that's something that I would hope the Committee can look at very specifically.

Again, in supporting this, we would hope that the Committee as a result of looking at this would have some very strong statements that could be made around defining at-risk, looking at financial obligations of home districts, ways of consolidating and managing and maximizing resources for districts so that they can create the best possible alternative schools and again, I keep coming back to this point, and I think it's probably the most important, that there are certain kids that are not going to be at a point in time successful in what is the traditional public school. They need to have an alternative that can help them to focus on all the right things, to get the skills necessary to be successful in those public schools and the skills to transition back to those public schools and be successful. So I think we have an obligation to look at this real seriously as a state, and I think we have an obligation to look at it real seriously for the benefit of those students. Thank you.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Questions? Senator Johnson?

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: Thank you. Paul, is there any number at the moment of students that are in alternative school settings or at-risk?

Dr. Ezen: Right, we don't collect that data specifically because it comes in, again, under the umbrella of the whole school. So, those students are reported as students at high school A and not students in alternative programs.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: Further question? I ran into a gentleman a week or so again who admitted that he was a terrible student in school academically but he had a very deft hand in woodworking and he went on to become a very successful cabinetmaker and doing quite well. Would that be something that could be looked at if someone had a tendency to be good at auto-body repair or woodworking or whatever that even though academically they were struggling that they could get into an industry where they would be successful?

Dr. Ezen: I think that, again, is something that we haven't spent a lot of time defining at-risk versus looking at are we addressing within the context of A of that particular school or school system the diversity of learning styles that student may have. So, looking at at-risk behaviors versus different learning styles is something I think the Committee is definitely going to want to able to discern and separate out. So, if you go too broad then you're just really developing what we would call a really good public school and I think at-risk students bring very particular issues to the school that I think we can, with a little bit of research and understanding, can define and focus on.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: Follow-up? Are there any other states that are ahead of us in the curve addressing this issue?

Dr. Ezen: I think that the Committee would find, in doing their research, that yes there are.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: Thank you.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Any further questions? Thank you, Paul. Next I would like to call Patti Place who is the Principal for the Alternative Middle School in Nashua, who could probably answer a lot of those questions since she's been on tour.

Patti Place, Principal, Nashua Alternative Middle School: On tour, yes. (laughter) My name is Patti Place, for the record. I'm the Principal for the Alternative Middle School in Nashua. I was hired in August to fill this position and develop a proposal using research data. I've been conducting a nationwide study and also a New England kind of tour of alternative schools and we've developed a proposal which we submitted to our Board of Education Monday. There seems to be a lot of support for it.

We are proposing that 120 at-risk 6th, 7th, and 8th graders be housed in a separate school, to be out 4th middle level secondary school but on a middle level in our district. And, we're just like a mainstream school in that we will provide all services under state laws and have the development commensurate with the district curriculum – we aligned with that in a lot of ways but do things a little differently. We're proposing that teachers have 12:1 ratio with students in the school. So it will a much smaller learning community, much smaller teacher student ratio. All these guidelines are based on research that has been done on successful alternative school models and successful middle school level practices through agencies such the Carnegie Council, which has developed a whole continuum for adolescents, The National Center for Drop-Out Prevention, which has come up with a serious of recommendations and other research organizations throughout the nation.

We're also proposing that the curriculum look a little different, that it be more hands-on in some cases, as you were alluding to Senator Johnson. That it be project-based, cooperative learning base. That is be driven by the diversity of learning styles and the actual students that are in the program – this is a very student-centered model. We need to look at each individual and get them the opportunity to educate themselves through our school.

We also plan to have an adventure-based learning component. We plan to have a therapeutic piece in that we will have one full-time school psychologist and a half-time guidance counselor but this is not a therapeutic model, it is an academic, last best chance model in that we are going to focus on some quality student learning, which is our goal, and the other two indicators of developing a really close relationship between teacher and student – it may look a little different than a mainstream school and also the opportunity of success, which is the other main indicator for success in alternative models.

We're hoping to also get funds through the 21st Century grant that we have to be district for after-school components. Hopefully for a summer component that will dovetail and bring academic achievement and focus on quality learning through the summer months.

We hope to establish baselines for GPA, reading scores, math scores, behavior and attendance and also technological aptitude and then use those as indicators at the end of the year for individual progress as well as systemic change in the form of, hopefully, a decrease in our high drop-out rate in our district, a decrease in disruptive behavior on the middle school level and an increase in safety in each of our middle level schools.

The criteria for the mission to our school, we've broken it up into two categories; acting out and checking out. I really believe that before a student drops-out in the high school or after 16 when they sign themselves out, that they really act out and check out before that. By that I meant hey get into physical altercations under acting out, there may be violent conduct, there may be expulsions, suspensions, ongoing issues such as that or they check out. They just don't pay attention. They have either failing grades and grade detentions or they're on that low D, so they barely pass each level in a core curriculum and they're really skimming a long. They also become truant. We have that issue in our district and also they indulge in substance abuse and they become very intertwined with maybe the criminal or drug subculture in our city.

We want to develop student essential skills such as problem-solving, social skills communication, aspects of their lives which employers tell us are the most important things when a student gets out of school. We also hope to pull parents and embrace parents as part of the process because that's such a vital connection – the home school piece.

We also are hoping that we're going to foster a sense of hope for these kids and success and we're going to inspire them to go on to greater things and really become functioning members of our community and contributing members of our community in Nashua.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Any questions? Senator McCarley?

Senator Caroline McCarley, D. 6: Does Nashua currently have a middle school now, or are you still a junior- high/high school?

Ms. Place: That's a very good question. We're kind of – we are still a junior-high model. We will be moving – it's my understanding – to the middle school model as soon as the new high school's built. Because the 9th grade will go up to that high school and it's my understanding that the 6th grade will go to the current junior-high and then it will become a middle school and we'll develop a middle school model. That's my understanding.

Senator Caroline McCarley, D. 6: I just was curious only because obviously this is clearly a middle school model. It sounds like it's a middle school model, certainly, and I used to live in Nashua but I couldn't remember what they were.

Ms. Place: Our long-range goal, though, is that the first year we will be a 6th, 7th and 8th grade model. The second year we will also incorporate 9th grade because otherwise we'd be sending our students back to a junior-high. Some of them not ready to transition back and I totally agree with Deputy Commissioner Paul Ezen, that a big part of this is going to be transitioning students back to the mainstream and traditional school setting but as I know, after 18 years of working with at-risk population, success number one may look different for different students, and number two there's no quick fix in a lot of cases. So, I really think that we should focus on developing a continuum – an alternative continuum in our city and our long-range goal is to, within three years, buy or renovate or build a site of approximately 20,000sf where we would have a common infrastructure such as cafeteria, office, library, gym are and then have an alternative middle school on one side for 6th, 7th and 8th; an alternative high school for 9th through 12th purposes. The high school would dovetail with our other two high schools for vocational issues or vocational classes and work-study components but would provide an academic piece. We see students of having that continuum available and not going in and out of the continuum but as you know, at-risk issues can arise quickly in someone's life and they may need that extra help, that extra one-on-one attention and go into the alternative continuum. And then hopefully bring their skills, their lives into order and go back to the traditional program.

We see it as kid of an osmosis-type relationship where we become part of the continuum on a secondary level on all aspects and fulfill the needs for success for those students.

Senator Caroline McCarley, D. 6: Currently does Nashua not offer anything at its high school in terms of alternative programming at all? Regardless of whether it's anything new but do they not have any particular alternative programming in place at all?

Ms. Place: We currently have a small – I want o say a two or three teacher paraprofessional staff. I'm not sure what their certifications are or what their actual status are but we have three individuals that work with the alternative population in what we call the "alternative school program". This model isn't one that we would be replicating in the new school but it would eventually would join – either the positions would join our school or would be incorporated somewhere but it would be a different model.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Further questions? Senator Johnson?

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: Patti, this is only Nashua but I have a problem that we have students who are not identified at-risk until they get to the 7th or 8th grade but that's another problem. Could you tell me roughly what percentage 120 students are of the total class of 7th and 8th? What's the total population?

Ms. Place: That's a good question. Our junior-high population – I'm not that great at math – 1400 at Elm Street, about 1000 at Pennechuck, about 1200 at Fairgrounds. So that's about 3600,but that's 7th, 8th and 9th. That will give you – we currently have 16 schools in our district.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: A follow-up?

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Follow-up.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: On a 12:1 ratio, how would that cut down the class size relative to what your overall ratio is now? The reason I'm asking that question is we just went through that exercise in my school district and I was kind of surprise at the number.

Ms. Place: I'm not sure. That's a good question. It's going to depend – this is a needs driven program. It is not per high school allocated and you'll be able to determine that or junior-high allocated in that you'll be able to determine that much more effectively, but because I'm not sure which exact students right now will be coming, we probably have to aggregate that data after one year of operation or two years of operation.

Senator Carl R. Johnson, D. 3: How did you arrive at 12:1?

Ms. Place: Well, I saw Dr. Joyce and a colleague of his pulled together the initial research that I based my program foundation on and then used to jump off for research. I'm afraid that Dr. Joyce invented a 12:1 ratio. And after talking to administrators and teachers that are doing alternative education throughout the New England area and the country – I communicated with people in California, Wisconsin, Florida, Baltimore and around the New England area – they've all validated that 12:1 is a very good ratio. You get a lot of "bang for your buck" that way in that it's not a 10:1 – you don't need to go lower than that but the recommendation mostly has been 12:1. Programs operate higher and lower but that seems to be the most appropriate.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Any further questions? Patti, you mentioned that a couple of other states you were visiting. Who did you go see?

Ms. Place: I went to Maine. I've been to sites here in New Hampshire that are programs not schools. Providence, Rhode Island has a huge network of alternative communities. Boston has one individual who is in charge of all their alternative facilities and they're going to be opening their 17th facility this year. They'll be proposing and implementing that. So they have a lot of facilities. Also western Massachusetts – all through Massachusetts there are schools that I have been to. I'm going to the South Shore next week. I hope I find it. Where else? Lawrence, I still have to at another community there that I want to see. There's schools throughout but I've tried to go through the Department of Education in each state and ask them what they see their best practice models or word of mouth.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Nashua is opening theirs in September?

Ms. Place: Pending approval by the Alderman and the fiscal process. That's what we're proposing at this time.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Thank you. Any further questions? The building – can you disclose where the building is going to be?

Ms. Place: I can't yet. But as soon as I can I will.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Okay. Thank you Patti.

Ms. Place: Thank you.

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn, D. 12: Anyone else wishing to speak? Seeing none, I will close the hearing on Senate Bill 352.

Hearing closed at 1:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Merideth Ann Chandler,
Senate Secretary

Speakers

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Date: 01/16/02 *Time:* 1:00 PM

Public Hearing on: SB 352 - establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

FAVOR	OPPOSED	Name	Representing	SPEAKING?
☑	☐	Senator Jane O'Hearn - Dist. 12 - Prime Sponsor		☑
☑	☐	Patti Place - Principal Alternative Middle School - Nashua		☑
☑	☐	Sheila Evans	Henniker School Board	Henniker ☐
☑	☐	PAUL EZEN	DoE	☑
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Committee Report

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

SENATE

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

Date: January 31, 2001

THE COMMITTEE ON Education

to which was referred Senate Bill 352

AN ACT establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

VOTE: 4-0

Having considered the same, report the same without amendment and recommend that the bill: **OUGHT TO PASS.**

Senator Jane E. O'Hearn
For the Committee

|SB352 Docket

Next|Prev|Results List|Main|Bill Status

Bill Title: establishing a committee to study alternative regional public school programs for children who are at-risk.

Date	Body	Description
1/2/2002	S	Introduced and Ref. to Education; SJ 1, Pg.5
1/2/2002	S	Hearing; January 16, 2002, Room 105-A, SH, 1:00 p.m.; SC1
1/30/2002	S	Committee Report; Ought to Pass, [01/31/02]; SC8A
1/31/2002	S	Ought to Pass, MA, VV, OT3rdg, MA, VV; SJ 4, Pg.60
1/31/2002	H	Introduced and ref to Education; HJ20, p736
2/6/2002	H	Copy to Chairman on 2/7/2002
2/21/2002	H	Hearing Mar 5 1:00 RM207,LOB
4/2/2002	H	Hearing on Prop Am <#3196> Apr 10 10:00 RM207,LOB
4/10/2002	H	Maj Report OTP/AM for Apr 17 (vote 16-2;Reg)
4/10/2002	H	Prop Com Am{3369}(New Title); HC31, p1206-1209
4/17/2002	H	Comm Am, AA VV; Passed with Am and ref to Finance VV;
4/17/2002	H	Fin Div II Subcom Work and Exec Session Apr 18 10:00 RMs212,LOB
4/17/2002	H	Hearing on non-germane Am Apr 18 1:30 Rms210-211,LOB
4/17/2002	H	Fin Full Comm Work and Exec Session Apr 18 2:00 RMs210-211,LOB
4/18/2002	H	Fin Maj Report OTP/AM for Apr 25 (vote 17-0;Reg)
4/18/2002	H	Fin Prop Comm Am{3616}(New Title); HC33, p1285-1290
4/25/2002	H	Reps Kurk and Foster Susp Rules for Report, MA 2/3RC(223-71); Fin Comm Am {3616}, AA VV;
4/25/2002	H	Rep Sova div ?; Secs 6-13, Adopted VV; Rep Alger div ?, Secs 14-15, Adopted RC(225-102);
4/25/2002	H	OTP/AM MA VV; Reps Kurk & Foster Susp Rules for 3rd Reading, MA 2/3DIV (249-78);
4/25/2002	S	Sen. O'Hearn Non Concur With House Am {3616},(New Title),Requests C of C; MA, VV
4/25/2002	S	Pres. Appts.; Senators O'Hearn, Disnard, Gordon
4/25/2002	S	Conferee Change; Senator McCarley, Replaces Senator Disnard
4/25/2002	H	House Acceded to req for Conf Comm;
4/25/2002	H	(Spkr appts Reps: Henderson, Ward, Kurk & Naro)
4/29/2002	S	Committee of Conference Meeting; April 30, 2002, Room 105-A, SH, 9:00 a.m.

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Docket Abbreviations