

Name: Tessa Milks

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

In support of alternative programs

To Whom it May Concern

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed phasing out of the Alternative School program in the 2027 school year. As a parent of two children who currently attend Riverview Alternative School, I have seen firsthand the profound and positive impact this program has had not only on their academic growth, but on their emotional and social development.

I chose Riverview because of its emphasis on play-based learning and its commitment to student-centered education. My own experience with traditional schooling left me anxious and feeling inadequate, and I was determined to give my children something better. Thanks to Riverview's alternative approach, they go to school with excitement, return home with joy, and even express sadness on weekends when school is out. This level of enthusiasm for learning is no coincidence — it's a direct result of the environment cultivated by the alternative model.

The program's seven tenets — cooperation and teamwork, innovative approaches, balanced learning models, multi-age groupings, integrated curriculum, community-centered environments, and ongoing assessment — are not just theoretical pillars. They are embedded in the day-to-day practices at Riverview and have made a world of difference for my children.

For instance, my younger daughter began school in 2024 and initially struggled. She wasn't engaged by letters or numbers, had difficulty with transitions, and was overwhelmed in certain environments. But rather than falling behind or being labeled as a problem, she was met with creativity, patience, and care. Her educators adapted to her needs by exploring alternate ways to learn — from sensory play to personalized transitions — and the results were remarkable. Within weeks, she was writing her name and engaging confidently with her learning.

And if this level of support was necessary for my neurotypical, milestone-meeting child, I can only imagine the profound relief and empowerment it brings to families of children with higher needs — those who are non-verbal, who struggle with regulation, or who require additional accommodations.

Riverview is more than just a school — it is a vibrant, inclusive, and nurturing community. Teachers know every child by name, including my youngest who isn't yet of school age. The environment is one where families feel heard, valued, and respected. When considering a move last year, our greatest concern was taking our children away from this exceptional community.

To lose the alternative program over concerns of financial efficiency would be a tragic misstep. Yes, these programs may have higher transportation costs due to larger catchment areas — but the return on investment is immeasurable. These schools are safe havens for diverse learners, spaces where children thrive not in spite of their differences, but because their differences are embraced.

I urge you to consider what we stand to lose. The elimination of alternative schools would not only deprive many children of the kind of education they need and deserve — it would also send a message that innovation, inclusion, and responsiveness in education are not priorities.

Please protect what makes our education system compassionate and forward-thinking. Preserve the alternative school program for the families who depend on it — and the students who flourish because of it.

Sincerely,
Tessa Milks