

# **How my Alternative Program Saved my High School Career**

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All alternative programs are different; they can be online, a charter, or project based. It doesn't mean that all alternative programs like this, but they are examples. I am apart of the Hopkins Alternative Program (HAP). I joined this Internship because my HAP teacher introduced it to me so we could have an alternative voice and perspective. I wanted to incorporate my sub-schools teachings/ideas, since it has me into a better student who actually enjoys school.

In HAP, we have very supportive and kind teachers that care about us as if we are their own children. Which is awesome because we have smaller class sizes with around 5-15 students which allows the teacher and student to create a positive relationship. It's crucial to have students and teachers to have a connection because it makes learning fun while also still learning what they're teaching you. It also helps with students who don't have anywhere to run to for mental health, and they help us in any way they can, they're always there for you for anything. Having 30-35 students in a classroom makes it harder for teachers to make a connection with their students, it's very overwhelming for some students.

In HAP, we don't go by grades like A, B, C, D, and F; we go by standards. In each class we have 8-10 standards we need to complete in a term. You need 8 standards to pass the class, to get a standard you need to get 3 out of 4 on the big assignments/tests/projects. It can be hard to meet the state standards sometimes but the teachers are always there for extra support and

encouragement. I think it would be easier to do it this way so students can understand what they're learning better than just memorizing stuff for tests and overwhelming homework.

In HAP, we have interesting topics to learn about. In world studies each term the teacher teaches a different part of the world, like term 1 could be Africa, term 2- Europe, term 3- Latin America, term 4- Asia. When they teach they teach the real history not the sugar coated stuff and lets us choose topics the class wants to learn together. Some topics we have learned about is a class on the 1960's and History of the CIA. In English, we did a whole class based around the book The Hate You Give by Angie Thomas, which deal with real life things like police brutality and cultural differences in America. We'd have class discussions on every chapter and our thoughts on it. She chose that topic because a mainstream teacher was saying that no HAP kid can finish a whole book, so she challenged that and proved to them that we can, because it's not a simple task to do.

Common tropes about alternative kids is that we can't finish a chapter book, which is extremely rude and unprofessional to say to a coworker at a school. They say we're taking the easy way out" which is false because we are a mix of people from people with just ADHD, Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, rehab, and some of us don't fit in with mainstream students. The schools expects us all to learn the same way but that's not how it works with everyone, so Hap allows us to learn in all different ways if we would like. They say we're "special ed" or "HAP won't look good for colleges". It's really messed up to say that because they're both incorrect.

We are not special ed, we actually learn like mainstream just in a different way, also HAP won't even show up on your college transcript, because we all get the same credits.

HAP has changed me in so many good ways. I joined the program after having a really bad first 2 terms of highschool with failing my entire 2nd term. I was desperate for a change and something that will make me a better student. I fell into a whole of anxiety and depression mixed with my ADHD, which is not a good mix at all. I even shaved my head and made very bad impulsive decisions that I am not proud of. Then my friend told me about HAP and I talked to my counsellor about, she said it would be a good fit, so she gave me an application. I did the interview to get into HAP, and the coordinator said I would be a perfect fit in the community. HAP is my second family, they welcome everyone with open arms and are very supportive. It really made me love going to school and love learning. I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for HAP, I would've probably dropped out.

In conclusion, our new school should have smaller class sizes (5-15 students per class), supportive teachers, minimal homework (have all work be done in classes), go by standards and not by letter grades, and teach relevant stuff the students and teachers can agree on.