

Benson Secondary School
4515 Campbell Airstrip Road
Anchorage, Ak 99507-1267

Description & Critical attributes

Benson Secondary School is founded on the premise that students who have had difficulty being successful in a comprehensive school setting will experience greater academic success in a more personalized educational environment.

Benson Secondary School is divided into two separate and distinct programs. The school for 7th & 8th graders is called SEARCH. It is primarily a behavior modification program. SEARCH serves approximately 100 at risk students. Students are defined as being "at risk" if they have experienced a previous grade level failure. Students in the SEARCH program learn in an environment where the behavior and learning parameters are clearly established and enforced. Prior to acceptance into the program, parents and students go through an extensive intake process. At the conclusion of the intake, parents and students sign a contract which clearly stipulates the expectations in the areas of academics, attendance and behavior.

The high school program is often referred to as SAVE II. It is a credit remediation program. Approximately 220 students are served. The majority of SAVE II students are in the 11th and 12th grades. In recent years we served 9th and 10th graders as well. But demand is so high for students that are at risk of not graduating as 4th and 5th year seniors, that we felt compelled to phase out the 9/10 program in order to meet the demand which is most pressing. As in the SEARCH program, SAVE II students and their parents also sign an academic, attendance and behavioral contract upon admission. In addition, SAVE II students sign a vocational contract.

While there are some similarities, SAVE II differs from SEARCH in a number of ways. SAVE II students attend school half day and work for an employer or attend vocational training half day. SAVE II students pursue their academics through individualized instructional contracts with their teachers.

Population best served

Students who have failed the equivalent of a grade level in middle school or high school.

Size and enrollment limitations

Benson serves approximately 320 students. The student population is held constant regardless of demand. Due to limits on physical space, teacher allocation and support staff, we could not easily expand the school. Neither is it a certainty that doing so would guarantee greater student success. It is not our goal to be all things to all students. We seek to serve only those students who are specifically "at risk." Thanks to the great job the comprehensive schools do, that number remains relatively low.

Cost as compared to regular high school instruction

Cost of delivery at Benson is equitable to, or slightly higher than at comprehensive schools. A key contributing factor to the success of the school is the small class size, approximately fifteen students per class. One way we are able to offset some of the additional expense of lower class size is through the vocational component of the program. At Benson, we offer elective credit to students who hold jobs. We are able to count each job holding student as a full time student even though we only serve that student directly in the classroom for half of each instructional day. This strategy effectively allows us to reduce class size without reducing student count. Not

offering direct route bus service also helps to significantly reduce school operating costs. Additional savings derive from the fact that we don't offer an after school activities program.

Advantages

One hundred percent of the students who come to us have experienced significant academic failure over the course of their school careers. In many instances, students we serve have become alienated, disengaged learners. In a few cases, due to their own behavior, the home schools from which they are referred, are happy to give someone else the opportunity to reengage them in the formalized learning process.

We've found that students who are unable or unwilling to successfully function in the academic environment of the larger schools, are usually very successful with us. Small class size is definitely a factor. In addition, the smaller size of the school itself, gives students a sense of scale to which they can more easily relate. The small school environment creates a personalized environment for students and teachers.

Pitfalls and disadvantages

There are no pitfalls or disadvantages.

Prediction if included in the Eagle River community

Currently we serve thirty seven students from Chugiak / Eagle River in the SAVE II program. We have no students in our middle school program from Gruening or Mirror Lake. The most likely reason attendance is not higher from Chugiak / Eagle River is transportation. Students attending Benson must provide their own transportation.

A similar program, but more conveniently located would probably be of great interest to many family's in the community.