



July 27, 2016

## **One System and Alternative Schools' Unique Niches**

### **Challenge:**

The ESSA proposed regulations for accountability seem to imply that one accountability system would work best for all types of schools. An analogy is an ecosystem. Many different and unique populations comprise a healthy ecosystem. The fallacy of evaluating all life forms/populations with the exact same criteria is obvious in an ecosystem – one would not hold mammals and reptiles “accountable” in the same way for contributing to a thriving ecosystem. Similarly, alternative schools contribute to a thriving educational system; however, it does not make sense to hold them accountable in the same way traditional schools are academically accountable. Our understanding is that proposed ESSA regulations allow variation by grade span yet do not explicitly allow differentiated accountability ratings based on school type.

### **Opportunity:**

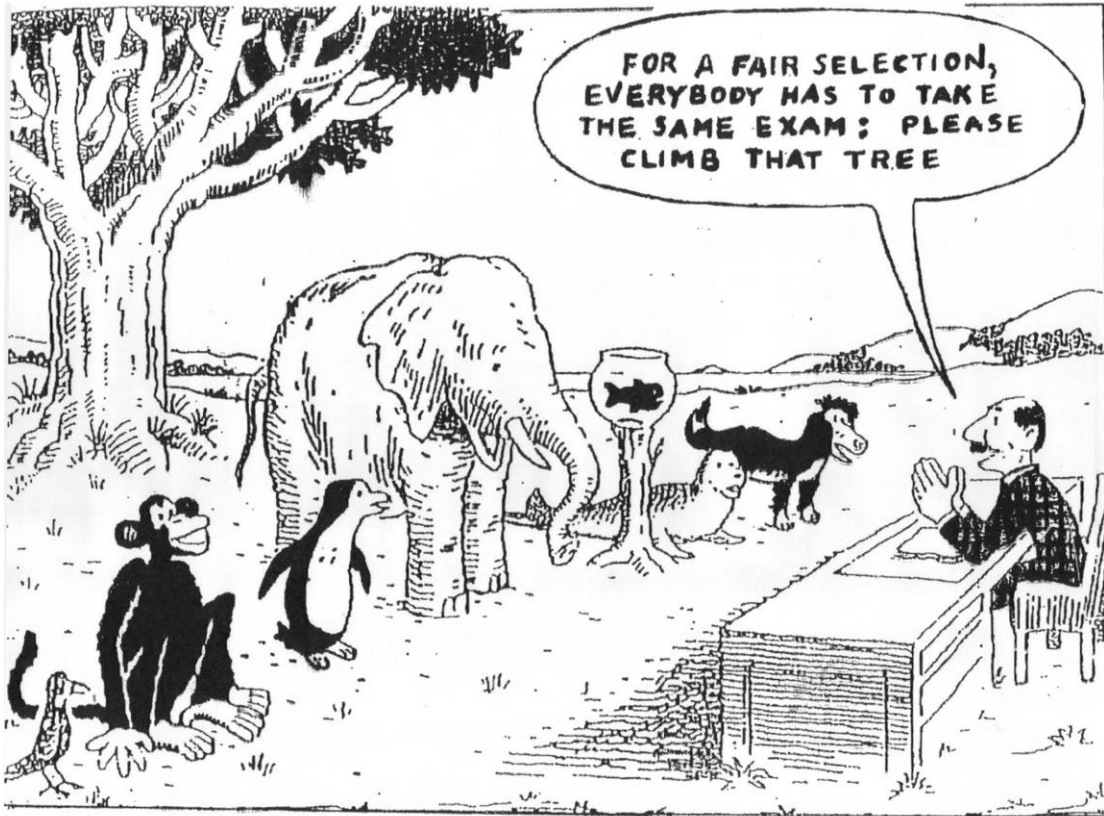
The Arizona State Board of Education recognizes that alternative schools serve a unique student population. To continue the ecosystem analogy, Arizona’s “ecosystem” is healthier because of alternative education schools and programs that serve particular niches of Arizona citizens – young people who have not thrived in traditional education. Alternative education engages these youth and helps them achieve a high school diploma, an integral part of a healthy life cycle to becoming a contributing citizen via the workforce, continued education, and/or the military. Stakeholders, the Arizona Department of Education, and the Arizona State Board of Education have worked hard to develop an alternative school accountability model, one ranked high nationally.

ESSA regulations should allow states like Arizona to continue exemplary national practice by including an alternative school accountability model as a valued part of a well-balanced educational system. The United States Department of Education should align the proposed ESSA regulations to be consistent with other language in ESSA, specifically including school type in the options for accountability ratings, in addition to those allowed in improvement activities.

### **Benefit:**

Continuing to refine an alternative school accountability model in Arizona allows schools to fill educational niches by engaging or re-engaging youth at greatest risk of not completing high school. Arizona society becomes a thriving “ecosystem” by recognizing the value of unique populations.

Vision: College & career (post-secondary education & workplace) ready school completion through accountable alternative education



*The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium is a grass-roots member association of personnel and leaders from alternative schools and alternative education programs at accommodation schools, districts, charters, county education service agencies, non-profits, community organizations, dropout recovery programs, and other dedicated stakeholders who support alternative education in Arizona. Our membership represents 100 schools and other organizations. The Arizona Alternative Education Consortium is the Arizona affiliate of the National Alternative Education Association.*

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