

Fall 2022

# Alternative Perspective

Informing and proactively shaping the alternative education landscape.



Featured school Southwest Open students participating in experiential learning.

## Measures, Assessments, and Tools You Can Use

Sharing helpful examples of AEC measures, assessments, and tools compiled by Momentum's AEC experts.

### A-GAME

Momentum is thrilled to announce that we are once again working with the National Charter Schools Institute (Institute) to *Measure What Matters* to schools, their boards, and their communities through a national Charter School Program Dissemination Grant. A continuation of the **A-GAME** work, Momentum and the Institute will work with 15 new charter school authorizers and their schools to develop Responsive Goals for use in their charter school contracts and/or evaluation frameworks, as well as nine new charter schools and their board of directors to develop Responsive Goals for internal school improvement. These opportunities will be open to AECs and non-AECs alike, and will incorporate goals around COVID recovery including student engagement, social-emotional development, well-being, and more.

In addition, the *Measure What Matters* project will develop and disseminate tools that can be used to walk schools, authorizers (a.k.a. sponsors), and charter school boards through the process of setting Responsive Goals without the need of an outside facilitator. These tools will be disseminated via online publications and during in-person and virtual A-GAME Community of Change Maker events. Historically, the Community of Change Maker events have focused on authorizers and authorizing practices. However, Momentum has seen how including schools in discussions has helped authorizers, charter school leaders, and board members gain a better understanding of the issues they all grapple with.

Grant-supported Responsive Goal facilitation and Community of Change Maker events will begin early next year. Please let us know if you are interested in receiving future messages regarding the A-GAME *Measure What Matters* project by completing [this form](#), and feel free to forward this information to your charter school authorizer (or sponsor).

Momentum Strategy & Research is a non-profit organization committed to strengthening all students' access to quality education. Alternative Education Campuses are among the most under-supported schools serving some of our nation's highest-needs students. Much of Momentum's work focuses on improving opportunities for AEC students and the schools they attend. This newsletter disseminates information to strengthen and support AECs and the landscape they operate within.

## NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

Measures, Assessments, and Tools You Can Use: A-GAME

Accountability Reimagined: Colorado's Local Accountability Systems Pilot

School Profile: Southwest Open School

AECs in Context: AECs by the Numbers

Events and Resources

## Accountability Reimagined

Profiling innovative policies and practices aligned with Momentum's *Accountability Reimagined* efforts to strengthen AEC opportunities through improved policy.

### COLORADO'S LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS PILOT

In Spring 2019, Colorado's legislature passed SB 19-204 which enabled and funded the creation of *Local Accountability Systems* to encourage accountability innovation by local education providers. Designed to supplement the state's accountability system, the program invited schools and districts to propose innovative measures that are important to their students and community. Fourteen proposals were approved including projects measuring individualized or competency-based systems, measuring school-provided opportunities (CTE programs and extra-curricular activities), and incorporating community-driven measures and indicators.

The *Measuring Opportunity Pilot Project* (MOPP), a consortium of thirteen Colorado AECs working with Momentum and the New America School, was one of the approved pilots. MOPP aims to demonstrate that customizing a school's measures and assessments to its students' specific needs and to the school's targeted programming benefits the students, and that an accountability system that incorporates school-specific measures can strengthen accountability overall.

MOPP participants begin with a *measure alignment review* that results in an Accountability Roadmap recommending revised measures, tools, or data calculations more closely aligned to each school's mission, student populations, and/or programming. The project team supports MOPP schools through their implementation of measure alignment recommendations, including the development of an annual Supplemental Accountability Report to add important data to the schools' performance profiles that are not otherwise provided through the state's School Performance Framework.

Colorado's *Local Accountability Systems* pilot is currently in its third and final year of the initial pilot effort, with discussions underway about lessons learned and what might come next.

Learn more about Colorado's *Local Accountability Systems* grant at  
[www.cde.state.co.us/localaccountabilitysystemgrant](http://www.cde.state.co.us/localaccountabilitysystemgrant)

## School Profile

Highlighting a noteworthy AEC and their innovative offerings, programming of interest, and lessons learned.

### SOUTHWEST OPEN CHARTER SCHOOL

Southwest Open Charter School (SWOS) is located in rural Cortez, Colorado, and serves students from several rural districts and the Ute Mountain Reservation. As the only AEC in a 2000+ square mile county, SWOS provides a wide range of supports and resources to their students.

Casey Simpson, Director at SWOS, shared that, "SWOS educators have learned that student engagement is closely tied to the strength and quality of the rapport/relationship between staff and student. Engagement is further strengthened if the rapport/relationship extends to the student's family and community. Innovation and CTE related offerings, such as the SWOS Bike Tech program, have been very popular with students as they can connect the learning to post-secondary goals".

### KEY ELEMENTS OF SWOS

**STUDENT POPULATION:** Over 90% of the SWOS student population is defined as 'high-risk'. Students come from 4 rural districts and struggle with a low value placed on education, geographic barriers, and cultural values, and 18% of SWOS students are from three different tribe affiliations.

**BIGGEST CHALLENGES:** Student engagement (a combination of post-COVID impact, as well as at-risk and rural impacts). Students also experience difficulty participating in, producing, and progressing in academic work due to trauma (as explained through the Neurosequential Model in Education).

**KEY PROGRAMMING:** SWOSology is a school-wide, onboarding program that introduces students into SWOS language, school expectations, and life skills. The course is reinforced with an AEC SEL survey to measure growth of social and emotional competency skills incorporated into SWOSology's character education programming.

**GOALS FOR THE FUTURE:** SWOS continues to work on being data responsive, dynamic with regards to new ideas and educational best practices, and to continue cultivating an inclusive and welcoming environment where students feel safe and supported in their learning and social emotional growth.

## AECs in Context

Improving our collective understanding of AECs and the students they serve through information updated annually by Momentum and project partners.

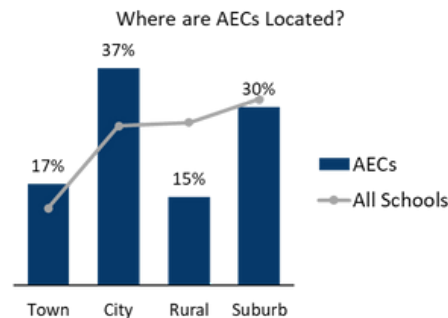
### AECs BY THE NUMBERS

For nearly a decade, Momentum Strategy & Research has assembled the AEC School, Performance, and Policy Database (AEC Database), the most comprehensive national database about AECs, their students, and performance data (where available). Momentum maintains and regularly updates the database to inform policy and practice to strengthen AEC opportunities. The AEC Database is the source of the following data.

AECs can be stand-alone schools, district or state-run programs, or programs within a mainstream school. Based on Momentum's data, in 2021-22 there were 3,223 AEC schools and 863 AEC programs across the country, and AEC schools enrolled 442,286 students. AECs are more likely to be in cities or suburbs than rural areas.

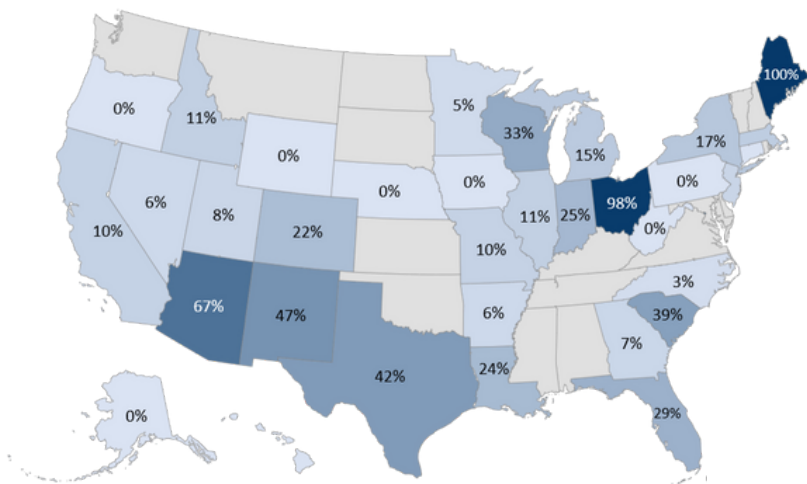
While AECs' common feature is their mission to meet the unique needs of a specific population of students, how they choose to meet those needs varies, often based on the targeted student population. At least 6% of all AEC schools serve student populations from juvenile justice departments and/or mental health departments.

Another 6% of AECs are special education schools. The remaining AEC schools may focus on credit recovery for over-age and under credited youth, specialized schedules and childcare for teen parents, competency-based models for youth who want to learn at their own pace, or career and technical education where youth earn credentials along with their diploma.



Proportion of AECs that are Charter Schools Across the Country

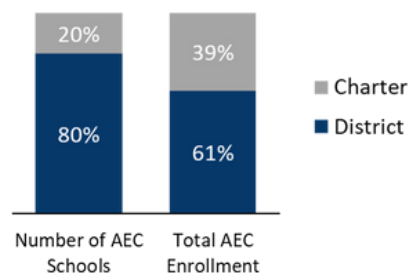
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Of the AEC schools, 651 are charter schools that enroll 170,428 students. AEC charter schools have the same range of missions and populations as non-charter schools, and while they make up about 20% of all AEC schools, they enroll 39% of the AEC students. The average enrollment for AEC charter schools is 262 compared to 105 for non-charter AECs.

The proportion of AEC charter schools varies from state to state, as seen in the map to the left, ranging from 0% to 100% (grey state do not have any AECs).

Charter School Proportion of AEC Schools and Students



## Events and Resources

### Upcoming conferences

**Reaching At-Promise Student Association (RAPSA):** February 15-17, 2023 in San Diego -  
Learn more at <https://forum.rapsa.org/rapsa-forum-2023/>

### Resources\*

**A-GAME Data Hub:** <https://nationalcharterschools.org/agame/data/>



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\*We would love to hear from you! Please reach out to the Momentum team if you have any resources or tools you want to share.