



# Washington State Auditor's Office Audit Description

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## Alternative Learning Experiences in Washington: A compliance and performance audit

### Audit background

Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) programs are designed to serve students outside of traditional classroom settings and offer school districts greater flexibility in educating Washington's diverse student population. Over the past five years, ALE programs have become increasingly prevalent and currently serve more than 35,000 students at an annual cost of \$150 million. State laws permit a number of ALE course types, including online learning, site-based, and remote. As ALE programs serve an increasing number of students, the state must evaluate how student performance outcomes from ALE models compare to those from traditional instructional models. And, as ALE programs use an increasing proportion of education funding, the state must ensure that the funds are spent responsibly.

In 2013, the Legislature approved significant changes to the rules governing ALE programs receiving state funding to encourage greater accountability and transparency. As part of these changes, the Legislature mandated that the State Auditor's Office carry out biennial evaluations of the state's ALE programs during the next four years (2014-2017).

### Audit overview

To comply with the legislative mandate, we will evaluate two important aspects of Washington's ALE programs: legal compliance and student performance. The School Programs team will audit ALE programs' written student learning plans, progress reviews and other areas of compliance relevant to state laws and regulations for reporting of ALE enrollment funding. Performance Audit will analyze ALE student performance to determine if ALE students are meeting academic standards and making appropriate progress toward graduation.

### Audit objectives

The School Program team will evaluate ALE program legal compliance by answering the following questions:

- Are ALE programs receiving state funding complying with the relevant laws and regulations?
- Have ALE programs implemented previous audit recommendations?

Performance Audit will evaluate the performance of ALE students by answering the following questions:

- Are ALE students progressing through school on time?
- Are students completing and passing ALE courses?
- Are ALE students meeting state academic standards in reading and math?
- Are ALE students improving academically from year to year compared to peers?

### Timing

We plan to publish our first in a series of ALE audit reports in fall 2014.