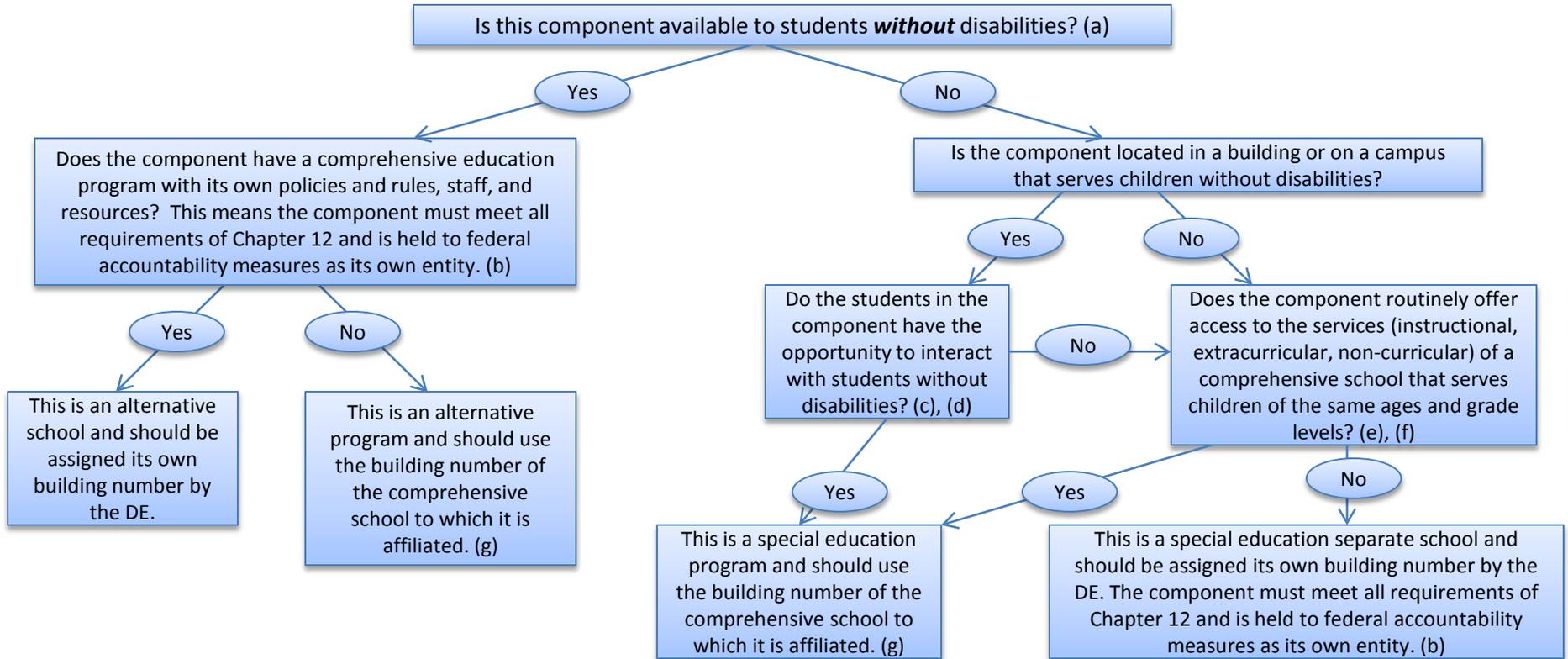


Alternative School, Alternative Program, Special Education Separate School, and Special Education Program Decision Tree



- a) To be the general education environment, the component must be made available to all students according to IAC 281—41.51(8). There is no particular ratio or number of children without disabilities that the general education environment must contain.
- b) A comprehensive education program is consistent with the student learning goals and content standards established by the school district and is required to meet all chapter 12 requirements including federal accountability and funding requirements, highly qualified teachers in all subject areas, meeting offer-and-teach in all subject areas, a full range of extracurricular activities, providing transportation, etc.
- c) Example of a “No” answer – A school district houses a separate component in the same building as its alternative school, which serves students with and without disabilities. Students of the component and the alternative school have no opportunities to interact, either in instructional or in unstructured time. The component and the alternative school have separate entrances and/or the internal doors between the component and the alternative school are locked.
- d) Example of a “Yes” answer – A comprehensive high school operates a component solely for children with disabilities on the high school’s campus. Students of the component have opportunities to interact with their nondisabled peers enrolled at the comprehensive high school, including but not limited to opportunities to take general education classes, opportunities for shared unstructured time (lunch, study hall, etc.), opportunities for participation in extracurricular and non-curricular activities.
- e) Consider the following factors: 1) Are decisions about student access to services from the comprehensive school made on an individual basis? 2) Is the component in reasonable proximity to a comprehensive school? Any distance greater than ten miles in travel distance would ordinarily compel a “No” answer.
- f) Other considerations: 1) Coordination of class/bell schedules, 2) Availability of transportation (If an IEP team places the child at the component, then required transportation to/from the component and the comprehensive school is the public agency’s responsibility.), 3) Ability to bring services to the location, if necessary, 4) Opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities at the comprehensive school.
- g) A district affiliates the component with a comprehensive school or schools in the district that serve the grade levels served by the component. If a district has more than one comprehensive school at a grade level, it may choose to affiliate the component with nearest comprehensive school or with the comprehensive schools that the children in attendance would ordinarily attend. For components that serve only children with disabilities, see notes e and f.

Alternative School, Alternative Program, Special Education Separate School, and Special Education Program Additional Guidance

Some school districts have off-site educational components that serve students with diverse learning needs, specifically students with disabilities [Iowa Code Ch. 256B] or students who would benefit from alternative educational options [Iowa Code § 280.19A]. School districts will need to decide whether such a component is (a) a separate school or (b) an off-site program affiliated with a comprehensive school. This guide, as well as the accompanying decision tree, will help districts make this decision.

I. Initial Questions. The first question is to ask whether this component serves only children with disabilities. If it can serve children without disabilities, it is not a “separate school” or “special school” under state and federal special education law. If it is only available to students with disabilities, then schools must consider the analysis under Part III. If the component is accessible to students without disabilities who need additional academic and behavioral supports, then the component is either an alternative school or an alternative program as described under Part II.

II. Alternative Schools and Alternative Programs. The key distinction here is whether the component that offers alternative education also offers a comprehensive educational program under Iowa’s general school accreditation standards. If an alternative education component has a comprehensive educational program with its own policies, rules, staff, and resources, and is held accountable as its own entity by the U.S. Department of Education, it is a school. It must meet all requirements under Chapter 12, unless a waiver is granted (for requirements that may be waived). It will receive its own building number from the Department of Education.

If an alternative education component does not have a comprehensive educational program, it is not a school. Rather it is an alternative program. Alternative programs use the building numbers of their affiliated comprehensive schools and must provide access to services and programs made available for other students in the district.

III. Special Education Schools and Programs. When the educational component at issue is available only to children with disabilities, the component must either offer opportunities for the students it serves to interact with students without disabilities of the same grade level, routinely offer access to the services and programs of a comprehensive school serving that grade level, or both. If the component offers either or both, it is an extension or program of the comprehensive school. It would use the affiliated comprehensive school’s building number. If the component offers neither, then it is a separate school and would need to meet the requirements of Chapter 12. It would receive its own building number.

IV. Requirements of Chapter 12. If an educational component is an alternative school (Part II) or a separate special education school (Part III), it must meet all accreditation requirements under Chapter 12, including but not limited to offer-and-teach, academic support services (teacher librarians, guidance counseling services, etc.), and building-wide professional development plans. It would be held accountable as its own entity by the U.S. Department of Education

V. District Options. If a district operates a component that would be a separate school (Parts II & III) but does not meet Chapter 12 requirements (Part IV), the district may take actions so that the component meets Chapter 12 requirements or reconfigure the component so it satisfies the criteria for being considered an alternative program or a special education program.