



Student/Parent Handbook

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Program Description

Spark Alternative School resides within the school at Aurora Plains Academy in Plankinton, South Dakota. The school provides a structured education setting for students grade 5-12 who have struggles behaviorally in the traditional school setting. The staff at Spark Alternative School work to provide a trauma-informed, therapeutic approach to the behaviors that the student will exhibit within the school.

Spark Alternative School's goal is to provide stabilization, coping skills, and reintegration into their home district. To do this, the school follows a schedule that is as close to traditional as possible. The students will transition between classes and will have multiple teachers within their day. Class sizes are small, which will provide students with a more individualized education and behavior management. Both individual and group therapies will be offered to help the student identify triggers and learn coping skills that can be used to avoid behaviors. Students are supported by educational staff that receive intensive training in behavior management with a trauma-informed approach.

Spark Alternative School is a State of South Dakota Approved Alternative Program. All credits earned within the program will be added to the State Student Information System. Teachers are highly qualified and endorsed in the subject that they are teaching.

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Enrollment Process

To enroll in Spark Alternative School, the following process will be followed:

1. Admission packet, and all other required materials are submitted to the Aurora Plains Academy Admissions and Aftercare Coordinator, Michelle Payne: Michelle.Payne@auroraplains.com, by the referring school district.
2. The Admissions and Aftercare Coordinator will bring this referral to the Admissions Committee at Aurora Plains Academy where it will be reviewed, and the student will either be accepted, denied, or waitlisted.
 - a. If the student is denied, a formal denial letter will be sent to the referring district and a short explanation to the justification for denial
 - b. If the student is accepted, they will be placed on the “waitlist” for an available seat. If a seat is available right away the school will be notified.
3. Upon acceptance a Tuition Agreement will be sent to the referring district to be signed and returned prior to the students first day at Spark Alternative School
4. The Director of Education will reach out to the referring district to ask them to schedule an IEP meeting with the parent/guardian to discuss goals and accommodations prior to entering the alternative school.
5. A start date will be determined, and the student will be enrolled at Spark Alternative School.

Campus Security

All students will be required to turn out their pockets and be checked with a handheld metal detector prior to entering the school. All personal items are to be kept in the student's locker.

Video monitoring may be used to maximize safety security. Video is only reviewed if necessary and is only accessed by approved staff. Video is not used as a substitution for supervision.

Lockers

Lockers will be provided to each student attending Spark Alternative School. Each locker will come with a padlock that only the student and the approved staff at Spark have access to. All personal items are to be placed in the locker prior to entering the school. The locker is in our Administrative Building and the student will not have access to this during school hours.

Restitution/Deposit

Prior to enrollment in Spark Alternative School, a \$100 deposit is to be paid by the student’s referring district. This deposit will cover the costs of any potential damage caused by the student while attending the Alternative School. The items covered in this deposit include but are not limited to Chromebooks, lockers, physical property, and textbooks.

Excessive damage to property may result in local law enforcement involvement, and possible charges being pressed. Restitution for damages that meet this level of severity will be handled through law enforcement.

Personal Possessions

All personal possessions of the student are to be kept in their locker prior to entering the school. Because Spark Alternative resides within an intensive residential treatment center, some cautions are enforced in order to reduce residents from being distracted by their possessions from treatment or to maintain safety and security. The Academy is not responsible for lost or damaged items; therefore, it is requested that you do not bring expensive items.

Students are allowed to bring one clear water bottle for use during school. Water bottles must be empty when entering the Academy.

All school supplies will be provided by Spark Alternative School

Medication

Medication Authorization form is completed prior to admission. A trained medication technician with Aurora Plains Academy will administer prescribed medication. Medication must be brought to the school in its properly labeled container. Any changes to the medication must be communicated in writing to the school.

If the student needs to take an over the counter medication, short term. The parent/guardian must send a letter in writing stating the need for this medication and how often it needs to be administered.

Nursing

The Aurora Plains Academy Nursing Department will oversee all medical needs of the students while attending Spark Alternative School. These needs include administration of medication, first aid, and any medical emergencies that may happen.

Counseling

Professional counseling will be offered to all students that attend Spark Alternative School. This will be provided by a licensed therapist working for Aurora Plains Academy. If the student accepts, they will meet with the therapist for 30 minutes once a week. The mental health services will address the mental well-being of the student and provide a safe place for discussion of any needs, concerns, or assistance that is needed.

Group therapy will be offered to all students. Each group meets once a week from 3:05-3:45. The topics covered in these are: Occupational Therapy, Coping Skills, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Culture Groups, Recreational Therapy. The parent/guardian will select which groups they would like their student to participate in on the application.

All counseling and group therapies are offered with no additional cost.

Behavior Management

All staff at Aurora Plains Academy are trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and Safe Crisis Management (SCM.) YMHFA assists staff in having a mental health and trauma-informed approach to behaviors that they encounter while working with the youth in our care. SCM provides a structured de-escalation approach to assist the student in processing their emotions as safely as possible.

SCM also includes physical intervention if the student's behaviors become a danger to themselves or others. If a physical intervention is needed, the referring district and parents/guardians will be notified the same day. A report will be sent on the incident following documentation by staff. If the student is in frequent interventions that cause for an unsafe learning environment, a meeting will be held with the referring district, parent/guardian, and Spark Alternative school to discuss other possible actions. Frequent interventions may result in dismissal from Spark Alternative School and return to their referring district. If this happens, Spark Alternative School can assist in referring for higher levels of care.

Bullying

Spark Alternative School believes that all students have the right to a safe and healthy school environment regardless of gender, race, sexuality, or disability. Both victims and bullies need support and guidance to become happy healthy adults. All reports of bullying will be taken seriously.

Smoking/Vaping/Tobacco

Smoking /Vaping is against the law and considered a serious offense. Any student caught smoking/vaping, or with cigarettes or vape will incur one or more of the school consequences:

1. Monetary fine/Ticket (law enforcement will be contacted)
2. This could also result in being discharged from Spark Alternative School.

Parents and the home school district will be notified.

Transportation

The home school district is responsible for coordinating transportation for students. Students are responsible to practice safe and positive behavior during transportation to and from school. If someone else is picking up your student, we need a written note or phone call from parent/guardian for confirmation. Otherwise, students will go home as they are assigned.

All students are expected to be dropped off and picked up at the main entrance to Aurora Plains Academy. Students are allowed to drive themselves if the student driver agreement is signed and submitted to Spark Alternative School.

Emergency School Closings

Weather dismissals or late starts will be determined based on the referring school district or the Plankinton School District. In the case that Spark Alternative School is closed an email will be sent to the referring district, parents/guardians, and the closing will be posted to Keloland and KSFY.

Child Absence

Call the Aurora Plains Academy Shift Supervisor (605-770-5041) in the morning to notify the school if your child will be absent or arriving late for school. If we do not hear from the parent or guardian, the absence will be listed as “unexcused”. Students are not permitted to call and report themselves as being absent. Please send a written note/email following your child’s absence. Tuition is billed daily regardless of student presence. If the student does not arrive to school and Spark has not been notified of their absence, an education staff will contact the referring district and parent/guardian.

If the student becomes sick at school, an education staff will contact the parent or emergency contact person.

Truancy

Truancy is defined as any absence of part or all of one or more days from school during which the school staff has not been notified of the legal cause of such absence by the parent or guardian. The home school district will be notified of truancy issues by Spark Alternative School.

Meals

All meals provided are covered by the tuition of Spark Alternative School. The students will be provided with breakfast, lunch and two snacks each day. Each meal is approved by a registered nutritionist for the whole of Aurora Plains Academy.

Dress Code

Students are expected to be dressed in a clean and neat fashion. A student’s clothing will be considered unacceptable if it distracts from the learning environment. The following list includes, but is not limited to, unacceptable clothing:

1. Excessive jewelry/body piercing
2. Muscle shirts/tank tops
3. Ripped or torn clothing
4. Clothing that has been written on with pen or pencil
5. Hats, bandanas, or head apparel in the building
6. T-shirts promoting drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gangs, violence, sex, or racial discrimination
7. Short shorts.
8. Hip pouches, purses, or wallet chains
9. Tight fitting, suggestive clothes/ revealing or sagging clothes
10. Pants / shorts are to be worn with the waist band at the waist
11. See through clothing
12. Inappropriate tattoos must be covered
13. No excessive makeup
14. Heavy winter coats cannot be worn in the classroom

Summer School

Students attending Spark Alternative School will have the option to attend school year-round. Summer school is an option that can be selected on the application form. Summer school operates the same hours as the normal school year. The only difference is we focus primarily on learning losses, English and Math.

Daily Schedule

Breakfast will be offered from 8:30-8:55

Classes are in session at the Spark Alternative School from 9:00 – 3:00. Partial days are set up on an individual basis.

The final page of this handbook contains the yearly calendar for the Alternative School.

Group therapy will be after school and run from 3:05-3:45.

Entry Before School

Students can be dropped off beginning at 8:30. A handheld security wand will be utilized to scan students' clothing and personal items at the time of arrival or before entering the Academy in the morning. All personal items will be stored in locked lockers during the school day. Students' unauthorized items found at the time of a search will be kept until a parent or guardian personally claims the item(s).

Cell Phones

Cell phones are prohibited on the campus of Aurora Plains Academy. Students will be given a secure locker to place their phone in during the school day. They will not have access to this locker until the end of school. Refusal to keep the cell phone in this locker will result in the student being sent home for the day and the referring school and parents/guardians will be notified. If a parent/guardian needs to contact the student during school hours. They should call the Aurora Plains Academy Shift Supervisor (number listed above.)

Assessment/Evaluation

Upon starting, the student will undergo a placement test to see where they place academically. This test will determine eligibility for additional pull-out services while attending the alternative school.

Education System

Spark Alternative School provides self-paced instruction while encouraging the students to master the concepts that are taught to them. High School credits are earned by quarter credit and will be added to the official transcript at the time of completion. A Behavior Tracker will be completed daily by the student's education staff. The data from this will be sent out to the referring district and parents/guardians bi-weekly.

Students will be assessed daily in the following areas:

1. Behavior
2. Assignment accuracy
3. Assignment completion
4. Class participation
5. Effort

Grading Scale

Spark Alternative School follows the below grading scale.

Percent	Letter Grade
100-99	A+
96-98	A
96-97	A-
93-92	B+
91-89	B
87-88	B-
84-86	C+
80-83	C
77-79	C-
75-76	D+
72-74	D
70-71	D-
0-69	F

Field Trips

Educational and recreational field trips are designed to enhance the social, intellectual, and physical development of students. Participating in scheduled activities is based on specific behavioral criteria and academic assignment completion. Most school outings or field trips are within close proximity to the alternative school site. Parents sign a permission form at admission to the day school.

Photography

Spark Alternative school will photograph the youth upon admission; this photo will be used for identification purposes. Any other photographs taken while attending Spark will have the student's face blurred and not identifiable.

Computer/Internet Usage

The student will have access to the Academy's internet and devices. The internet is restricted to approved sites only and staff can monitor the usage. Any intentional violation of the rules/restrictions will terminate the privilege.

Mandated Reporting

In accordance with applicable law, all Aurora Plains Academy employees are mandated reporters of suspected cases of child abuse and shall be trained as if designated a mandated reporter by South Dakota law. All mandated reporters shall make an immediate report of suspected child abuse or cause a report to be made if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is victim of child abuse or neglect.