A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF NONTRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN A SOUTHEASTERN STATE

by

ROBERT W. BROWN

ROSE MARY NEWTON, COMMITTEE CHAIR
DAVID DAGLEY
DAISY ARREDONDO-RUCINSKI
DAVID WHITFIELD
PHILIP WESTBROOK

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2011

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the various approaches taken within seven nontraditional high school programs provided in one school system. This program evaluation was focused on instructional approaches, behavioral approaches, and school culture approaches. Additionally, this program evaluation explored teacher and administrator perceptions regarding program effectiveness and educational outcomes for students in these programs.

Results revealed that characteristics of nontraditional high school programs vary greatly depending the purpose or mission of each program. Some elements were found to be common across programs, but no two nontraditional programs were characterized as the same. Educational outcomes for students enrolled in each program were identified. The findings suggest that some nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system are more successful than others. However, it is unreasonable to have the same expected outcomes for students enrolled in the various nontraditional programs since placement criteria is distinctly different depending on program approach. Results also revealed that teachers and supervisors perceived their program to be effectively meeting the needs of their students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing this dissertation was a significant task and would not have been possible without the support and guidance of others. Although there are others, I must single out some.

First and foremost, I thank God for giving me the physical and intellectual tools to accomplish this goal. It is through your will that all things are possible.

To my incredible wife, Betsy, you are my strength and my partner in life. Your patience and understanding through this process has been a gift that cannot be replaced. I will forever be indebted to you for your support!

To my amazing son, Keller, you are my inspiration to be the best that I can be both personally and professionally. Thank you for motivating me to be a better person each day. Roll Tide!

To my wonderful mother, Judy, you have supported me through my schooling which is finally coming to an end. I have always hoped to make you as proud of me as I am of you!

To my other family, sisters and in-laws, you have all encouraged me along this ride and I am greatly appreciative of your kindness and words of encouragement. Thank you!

To my mentor in life, Frank Keller, you have always inspired me to do my best and to use the strengths that God gave me. Thank you for coaching me not to be the best athlete I could be, but to be the best person I could be!

To my professional mentors and friends, Dave Whitfield, Rodney Arrington, Rodney Davis, Zach Spencer, Joey Godwin, Rick Spriggs, Elaine Hopkins, Christi Teal, Pam Nail, and

Barry Williams, your support and belief in me is appreciated more than you know. You have each had a significant impact on me both personally and professionally. Thank you!

To my dissertation chair, Rose Mary Newton, your patience and guidance will forever be appreciated! I wish you happiness in your retirement, and I am proud to be your final dissertation student!

And last, but not least, to my dissertation committee, Dr. Dagley, Dr. Arredondo-Rucinski, Dr. Whitfield, and Dr. Westbrook (who lost his home in the Tuscaloosa tornado just days before defense), thank you for your guidance and professionalism.

May God bless you all! Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In an effort to decrease the student drop-out rate, school systems across the country have been developing alternative approaches to education (Aron, 2003). Although many traditional high school alternatives were designed to serve difficult and often unruly students, these programs can serve students suffering from academic and behavioral deficiencies. Approaches to meeting the needs of students in unconventional settings can range from one-on-one instruction provided in total isolation to self-guided learning in an open environment.

Powell (2003) suggested that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has caused state educational leaders to approach alternative educational programs as a means to meet the needs of students at risk of failure. Method aside, school systems are charged with educating all students since many high schools are measured on graduation rates for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). With school system personnel realizing that a traditional approach to educating students is ineffective for some students and parents recognizing the need to keep their children in school, nontraditional high school programming has become increasingly popular.

In addition, parents whose children do not remain enrolled in school may face legal action. Compulsory school laws require students to remain enrolled until the age of 16. At the age of 16, students can withdraw from school and pursue other routes such as acquiring a General Education Diploma (G.E.D.) or entering the workforce. Although these may appear to be viable options to an average 16-year-old student, they tend to restrict the student's opportunities in life (Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, & Chapman, 2007).

For example, the lifelong wage earning opportunities for a high school drop-out are significantly less than those who complete high school diploma programs. According to researchers at the National Center for Educational Statistics, the average annual income of a high school drop-out is $9,600 below that of a high school graduate (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010). Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) indicated that because of lower employability for high school drop-outs, the estimated lifetime earnings are in excess of a quarter of a million dollars less than that of a high school graduate. In addition to the economic implications associated with the successful completion of high school, these authors found that high school drop-outs are at an increased risk for health problems.

Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) found that students report a variety of reasons for dropping out of school. Although complex situations exist regarding student, family, school, and community relationships, many students drop-out as a result of becoming disengaged from school over a substantial period of time. The underlying causal factors leading to disengagement fall on a wide scale and are often unidentifiable for educators, Therefore, educators focus on observable characteristics and behaviors that are often referred to as risk factors.

Risk factors lead to approximately 25% of students dropping out of the K-12 educational system without graduating from high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Some fall behind earning credits toward graduation and become discouraged because they cannot finish high school in a timely manner. Some fail to engage in the learning opportunities offered in traditional high schools and lose interest in their educational goals. For some students, disciplinary problems necessitate that they are sent to an alternative setting where they must conform to a new set of rules or face permanent expulsion. And, finally, some students are

transitioning into adulthood at an early age by becoming a parent or needing to work. The students in each of these situations are considered at risk of becoming high school drop-outs.

McCall (2003) identified various reasons that students are referred to a nontraditional high school program. Challenges with academic and attendance are identified as reasons. Students whose test scores show an academic deficiency may need a more individualized educational program than that found in the traditional school and students who have fallen behind on Carnegie units may need additional credit opportunities than those offered in the traditional school. For students with significant absenteeism, a referral to a nontraditional high school program is a frequently recommended route (McCall).

McCall (2003) suggested that some students who display behavioral problems and have been referred to the principal or disciplinary board are frequently referred to such programs. For these students, attending a nontraditional program is an opportunity to avoid long-term suspension or permanent expulsion. Other students with dysfunctional social skills or an inability to abide with community expectations may be required by the court system to attend a nontraditional high school program.

As indicated by McCall (2003), some students face challenges with their family situation that necessitates their attending a nontraditional high school program. Single parenting, family substance abuse, parent incarceration, and child abuse are a few examples of family situations that can impact student ability or willingness to attend a regular school. McCall identified a student's need to work and contribute to his or her household income as another example of how family situations can impact a student's need for attending a nontraditional high school program.

Carver et al. (2010) call to mind multiple persons that may request the placement of a student in a nontraditional program. District administrators, school staff, and school-based

committees are often responsible for student placement. However, many programs are reported as allowing parents or students to request placement in a nontraditional high school program. The results of a functional behavioral assessment and the criminal justice system have been identified as other routes by which a student may be placed in these programs.

To meet the needs of students at-risk of not completing high school, educators have created customized learning environments during the past three decades (Berg, 2003). The pervasiveness of these programs has increased dramatically in recent years as school systems have sought to meet the needs of 21st century learners. However, nontraditional high school education programs warrant further study because they may have the potential to positively impact student outcomes and increase graduation rates.

Statement of the Problem

De La Rosa (1998) argued that alternative measures for educating students have been initiated by a national concern that can have social and economic repercussions. Student drop-outs are more likely to become dependent on government assistance or engage in criminal activity. Additionally, students without a high school diploma are more likely to be unemployed and do not contribute taxes to the economy. Morley (1991) suggested that investments into alternative education programs can avert welfare, unemployment, and incarceration expenses that yield long-term savings for communities.

Kershaw and Blank (1993) suggested that alternative schools have flourished due to the inability of traditional schools to meet the needs of students. School systems are attempting to meet the educational needs of students from diverse populations in an ever-changing world. In the current era of accountability, the focus on meeting the needs of individual student needs and

increasing graduation rates is of critical importance for schools and school systems. Failure to meet adequate yearly progress can reduce local control of the school and result in additional state department regulations.

There is a growing interest in alternative education as states and communities increasingly become aware of their importance (Aron, 2003). Vulnerable youth who fail to engage in traditional schools need and deserve a viable alternative education option. Identifying nontraditional high school routes through alternative education programs is becoming a common practice to address student deficiencies.

Alternative education programs have the potential to significantly change public education (Farris-Berg, Schroder, Kolderie, & Graba, 2003). America's policymakers, educators, and families have two strategies for changing and improving K-12 education. One is to improve the current schools, and the other is to create different schools. The different schools, referred to as alternative schools, have been successful in serving students that were not successful in traditional high schools.

Hosley (2003) suggested that limited research exists regarding the approaches in alternative education settings. A baseline of data does not exist and there is a need to establish a body of evidence related to alternative education.

According to Foley and Pang (2006), alternative education programs have an extensive history, but few data were available describing critical components. Governance, facilities, educational programming, and student populations in alternative settings lack significant data. Further data describing the outcomes for students who have attended alternative school are also needed. These data can be impactful in determining program components that meet student needs.

For most alternative programs, a formal evaluation for effectiveness is not feasible since they are run by small organizations (Bloom, Thompson, & Ivry, 2010). Practitioners believe they know what is best in alternative programming, but do not have information from rigorous evaluations. The result is a gap in knowledge for educators.

Evidence of the efficacy of alternative programs is minimal (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Because many of these programs address different student populations and are located in a variety of settings, researchers have a very broad spectrum to address. Due to the differing approaches taken in alternative high school programs, generalizing successes is not reliable.

Ruzzi and Kraemer (2006) argued that a substantial body of research specifically describing or assessing the academic programming in alternative education is nonexistent. Very few studies have examined the academic programs found in alternative education. There is limited, if any, research that focuses on school systems that offer multiple nontraditional high school options. It is essential to synthesize the results of research findings regarding nontraditional or alternative school options and the impact they can have on student success.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because of the potentially positive effects nontraditional high school programs may have on student success. This study may provide educators with useful information when considering whether to begin or to continue nontraditional high school programs. This study is significant because of the possible positive influence offering multiple alternative programs may have on school and systems dropout rates. Additionally, this study may provide educators with information that may assist in determining whether to continue allocating resources for existing nontraditional high school programs.

Purpose of the Study

The investigated school system offers seven nontraditional high school programs that provide various options for students. The purpose of this study was to examine the various approaches taken within these programs, explore teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of each approach, and identify the educational outcomes for students in each program (e.g., on-track rates).

Research Questions

1. What characteristics and approaches are identified within the seven nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system?

2. What are the educational outcomes (e.g., on-track rates) for students enrolled in the nontraditional high school programs during the 2009-2010 school year?

3. Do the teachers and supervisors in the seven nontraditional high school education programs in the investigated school system perceive their program as effective?

Operational Definitions

The following terms need to be defined in order to be understood clearly by the reader:

At-risk students--students who are considered more vulnerable to permanently leaving school than is the average student (Cardon & Christenson, 1998).

School-within-a-School--a program that is housed within the school building, but in a separate area or set of classrooms (Howard, 2003).

Graduation rates--the percentage of students that complete all of the requirements established by the state and local boards of education within four years of entering high school.

High school drop-out--any student who does not complete all of the requirements established by the state and local boards of education within four years of entering high school.

Nontraditional Education Program (Alternative)--all educational activities that fall outside the traditional K-12 school system, an established environment apart from the regular school. With policies and rules, educational objectives, staff and resources designed to accommodate student needs; an alternative school provides a comprehensive education consistent with the goals established by the school district (Aron, 2003).

On-track Rate--the percentage of students that made academic progress as measured by passing at least 50% of courses in which the student is enrolled.

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy--an organizing framework that uses students' strengths and resources and is being applied in school settings with at-risk students (Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007).

Program evaluation--systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming (Patton, 2002).

Traditional school--refers to conventional schools with competitive programs, practices, and strategies found in most public school districts (Kellmayer, 1995).

Functional-level Programs--include high school completion and/or academic or skill remediation (Howard, 2003).

Program approaches--program goals for students include getting a job or vocational credit, learning a language, earning a high school diploma, gaining entry to college, and earning college credits (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Disciplinary approaches--programs that are applicable to students at-risk for antisocial behavior and/or failure in traditional classes (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Quality indicators--are elements many researchers and advocates identify as descriptors of effective alternative programs (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Instructional approaches--alternative programs that provide a specific instructional approach or philosophy that addresses specific academic needs of at-risk students.

School culture--is the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors which characterize a school, including how people treat and feel about each other; the extent to which people feel included and appreciated; and the rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality (Phillips & Wagner, 2003).

Resource room--consists of a separate room and/or teacher where additional services (study skills, guidance, anger management, small group, and individual instruction) are provided. Student use may range from after-school or homeroom services to multiple hours of instruction (Howard, 2003).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the following:

1. The sample for this study included the nontraditional high school education programs utilized in one school system in Georgia. These programs may not meet the state guidelines for schools in other states.

2. This study included the nontraditional high school programs provided in one school system, which is located in suburban Atlanta. The results may not be generalized for school systems in other geographic locations.

3. This study included the nontraditional high school programs provided in a school system that is 58% minority and 56% economically disadvantaged. The results may not be generalized for school systems with a different demographic make-up.

4. Time restraints did not allow for extended follow-up evaluations of the participants. Postsecondary success for students participating in nontraditional education programs was not evaluated.

5. Other school systems offering multiple nontraditional education programs were not analyzed. Therefore, the findings of this case study are specific to the investigated school system.

Assumptions

There were assumptions held by the researcher in the development and implementation of this study:

1. It was assumed that the investigated school system implemented the nontraditional high school education programs as reported.

2. It was assumed that the students attended the nontraditional high school education program on a regular basis and were exposed to the nontraditional methods of schooling identified for each site.

3. It was assumed that data were correctly collected and reported to the researcher in the requested manner.

4. It was assumed that the outside provider of nontraditional high school programs as identified by the school system provided valid information.

Summary

The following chapters in this study provide the reader with an overview of nontraditional high school education program offerings. The review of literature supplies the reader with numerous alternative and nontraditional programs utilized in school systems across the country. Program approaches, instructional approaches, disciplinary approaches, and alternative school culture are the predominate themes addressed. The literature review also identifies outcomes of similar studies.

The following chapters also provide a description of the methodology used to collect data, and an analysis of the data collected from each of the nontraditional programs in this study. The final section of the study offers conclusions made from the study and suggests implications for the continuation of nontraditional programs.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This purpose of this literature review was to provide the reader with a knowledge base of alternative educational approaches. For the purpose of this literature review, the terms nontraditional and alternative were used interchangeably. This literature review looked at program approaches, instructional approaches, disciplinary approaches, and school cultures found in nontraditional programs. In addition, the student outcomes and engagement in nontraditional education programs were reviewed. Aron (2003) suggested the term alternative education encompasses all educational programs that differ from the traditional K-12 school system.

High school dropouts have been a drain on the national economy. Welfare ($3 billion), crime prevention ($3 billion), and lost tax revenue ($71 billion) contributed to this financial tragedy (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). To avert the perpetuation of crime and poverty, alternative education may have helped students remain in school and graduate with higher credentials for employment (De La Rosa, 1998). To fully understand the need for nontraditional or alternative education programs, we investigated current practices and approaches that differ from traditional school.

According to Aron (2003), schools or programs that could not meet the educationally diverse needs of students could set the school and students up for failure. Students that had been

suspended, expelled, or removed from the general educational setting were the responsibility of the local school system. These students were often referred to as at-risk students and often placed in nontraditional settings. School systems were educationally accountable to prepare these students for post-secondary options, without regard to the student's individual academic or behavioral challenges.

The wide range of academic and social needs of students created a tremendous need for school systems to develop program opportunities to meet the demands of the No Child Left Behind legislation (Powell, 2003). By using the best teaching practices and addressing behavioral development problems, nontraditional educational programs were identified as a viable option for at-risk students.

Although a clear definition for alternative schooling was difficult to find, alternative educational programs have become more prominent in the United States (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). Some alternative education approaches worked to change the school and provided a nontraditional, but highly positive learning environment. Some alternative approaches were more systematic and targeted the traditional structures for change. Regardless of the approach, the research indicated that alternatives were necessary to prevent student failures in public schools (Aron, 2003).

Program Approaches

There was a continued need for programs that put dropouts and potential dropouts back on a path to education and to prepare them for employment (Bloom et al., 2010). In many communities, political leaders were making at-risk youth a priority and using community resources, including the Workforce Investment Act, in an effort to improve student outcomes. A

substantial portion of drop-outs were from low-income families and have become disconnected from school and work. These students were less likely to accept an opportunity in a nontraditional program. Therefore it was essential that school systems identify nontraditional opportunities for at-risk students while they were still enrolled in the district.

Project Succeed was a nontraditional education program in Pittsburgh that provided an opportunity for students to earn a high school diploma from a local district high school (Kruglik, 1991). This program required students to attend class 7 hours per week in the evenings and necessitated students completing the bulk of their work at home. In addition, students were required to accumulate 30 hours of community service during the semester to earn elective credits.

Although all of the students at Project Succeed had already been classified as a dropout, this program provided students with an option other than a G.E.D. (Kruglik, 1991). One aspect that led to 9 out of 12 dropouts remaining enrolled after the first semester was weekly advisement meetings. In these meetings, teachers met with three to four students to assess their various levels of commitment. These meetings, coupled with the use of audio-visual materials and field trips kept the students engaged in the program.

For students in Riverside County, California, the Come Back Kids program offered an alternative for students who have dropped out of school (Wilhelm, 2009). Local school districts lose track of students who simply disappear as the years go by. These students are calculated as drop outs. The Come Back Kids program targets these students and lures them into the program by providing a flexible schedule and an individualized learning plan (ILP). The ILP identifies options for long-term goals, employment possibilities, college opportunities, and job training programs.

At a Queens, New York, school, the evening approach to educating at-risk youth helped bridge the gap to graduation (Gewertz, 2007). John Adams High School began their evening program as soon as traditional students had exited the building. Student schedules were custom built to meet the individual needs of students and could be every day classes for some students and once a week for others. In addition, students received multiple non-academic services. Career and college planning, job-skills development, and emotional support was provided by counselors and social workers.

Gewertz (2007) indicated that students in New York City only stand a 1-in-5 chance of graduating. With an ultimate goal of helping students graduate, the school attempted to link schooling with real world work experiences. The learning-to-work initiative helped to focus students toward future post-secondary options and motivated the students while in school. This initiative also afforded students an opportunity to work in a paid internship at a variety of work locations.

Also with evening sessions, the Twilight Academy afforded troubled youth an opportunity to be educated from the hours of 3:00 to 7:00 p.m. (D'Angelo, 2009). With a focus on individualized attention and a student population of only 60 students in Grades 9-12, this urban Pennsylvania alternative school was highly selective of students that entered the program. Although each student had a history of either academic or behavioral failure, there was not a clear identifying set of characteristics of students to be placed in the program.

Teachers at the Twilight Academy were required to serve as mentors in addition to their instructional duties (D'Angelo, 2009). Students were also required to meet additional obligations while in the program. Students that were of working age were assisted in acquiring a job to fill their hours during the day. Students that were too young to work were required to attend

vocational training during the day hours. Teachers from the Twilight Academy visited students at their job sites or vocational training site and spoke to their managers. This helped the teachers establish a more personal relationship with each student under their direction.

Alternative programs such as Skill Force, targeted student participation and identified career choices as a means of meeting student needs (Hallam, Rogers, Rhamie, Shaw, Rees, Haskins, Blackmore, & Hallam, 2007). By improving student attendance and student attitude towards education, Skill Force helped students gain qualifications with former service personnel guiding an alternative curriculum filled with activities. Activities incorporated into the curriculum for Skill Force included guests from professional fields, outdoor activities, sports programs, and community work.

Hallam et al. (2007) discovered that 95% of the student participants in Skill Force enjoyed the programs. In addition, 80% of the students indicated they were excited to be a part of Skill Force and that their involvement was important to them. Personal characteristics such as respect for others, communication skills, and teamwork were enhanced for students participating in Skill Force. Through the development of positive relationships with students, Skill Force personnel were able to serve as mentors and counsel students.

Also utilizing mentors from a corporate perspective, the Target Program used mentors in a large retail setting to impact student success (Moylan, 2003). Established in Wisconsin, this program sought to keep students in school, develop student's work skills, and help students understand their role in society. An intervention team at the high school identified students for this program and then the students were interviewed by Target officials before being admitted for participation.

Once admitted into the Target program, students were assigned to a department within the company and assigned a mentor that would work with the student (Moylan, 2003). As a part of the program, students attended weekly sessions taught by department managers. The sessions covered topics such as time management, team building, decision making, resume writing, interviewing, conflict resolution, and diversity. In addition to receiving credits toward graduation, students were paid an hourly rate and received a store discount. Students reported leaving the Target Program with an increased focus on studies and a better career plan.

Education Resource Centers (ERCs) were another alternative with connections in corporate America. These schools were developed through a partnership between the Simon Youth Foundation, local school districts, and communities (Chalker & Stelsel, 2009). These schools were established in Simon Malls to utilize vacated mall space. The educational approach at ERCs was not designed to be more difficult than the traditional schools, but the intent was to take a different approach than that found in traditional schools.

While only required to attend half-day sessions, students at ERCs were able to work or care for their families during the remainder of the day (Chalker & Stelsor, 2009). At ERCs, students participated in community service activities that helped students take ownership in their communities. This program also used student input and empowerment to create a learning environment that accommodates multiple learning styles.

Although it was not considered an ERC, the Academy at Opry Mills in Tennessee was also established in vacant space at a Simon mall (Aarons, 2010). This program provided a flexible, alternative structure that enabled students an opportunity to work and go to school in the same facility. The students, typically between the ages of 17 and 21, had been close to

graduating when they dropped out of their traditional high school. The principal at Opry Mills actively recruited these students to attend the program.

Once these students accepted their enrollment in the Academy at Opry Mills, they completed course work with a combination of instructor guided and web-based curricula (Aarons, 2010). Students attended school for 4 hours per day and 5 days per week. This structure afforded students the opportunity to work or care for a child during the remainder of their day. Additionally, students could earn two academic credits each 9-week segment rather than having to finish a full semester before being awarded credit.

The surge of charter, cyber, and home schools was evidence that alternative educational approaches were an important concern of society (Huerta, Gonzalez, & d'Entremont, 2006). The authors discussed these methods which rely on the internet and parents to facilitate the delivery of instructional material. Depending on state regulations, these approaches were mentioned to be an avenue provided by local school systems as they seek alternative educational routes.

Although internet and home based instruction were criticized, these innovative approaches were becoming more prominent (Huerta et al. 2006). Home schools, charter schools, and voucher schools accounted for 4% of school age children in the United States (Isenberg, 2007). Reasons for the growing attraction of these alternative routes were attributed to parental dissatisfaction with public schools. The costs involved with private schools prevented many parents from considering them as an option, and led to their decision to seek other alternatives.

Farris-Berg et al. (2003) asserted that many people saw charter laws as an opportunity to create new learning models. Some states had relaxed requirements and simplified processes for charter schools to open. Although the focus of a charter school could vary greatly, one concept adopted in many states was career academies.

Bloom et al. (2010) suggested that career academies could produce significant effects on adult transition milestones. Career academies were often designed as a high school based model that incorporated a small learning community concept. The students took classes on a career-themed track and participated in job-shadowing. By improving the economic prospects for young people, career academies eased the transition into adult roles.

Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) described career academies as a school within a school. In a smaller and more intimate learning environment, students worked closely with the same teacher over the span of a few years. Pedagogically, these programs integrated academic and vocational coursework. Career academies also sought to identify career paths for students and often provided work-based opportunities where students gained real-world experience. Although the per-pupil cost to educate was minimally higher in career academies, these researchers found an eleven percent higher graduation rate than that for traditional school students.

Talent development high schools were another reform model that was classified as nontraditional (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). In these schools, the creation of learning communities helped to engage students by focusing on specific curricula. Some would focus on intensive math or English instruction, some would focus on career development, and some would focus on a high level college preparatory curriculum. Regardless of the focus, these programs sought to increase family involvement in the educational process.

In his research, Hosley (2003) identified three types of nontraditional programs. The first type was academic and had an emphasis on student responsibility for learning. It also included a full instructional program that could serve individualized needs of students and utilized more innovative methods. The second program identified was a discipline program that segregated and aimed to reform students in an alternative setting. These programs typically had a limited

instructional program and were punitive in nature. The final program type identified by the author was therapeutic. This program was a short-term placement for students with social or emotional issues and focused on attitude and behavior rehabilitation.

Seeking an affordable alternative was the goal of economically disadvantaged at-risk students. However, a study of an alternative educational program for at-risk Chicano students revealed curricular inadequacies and a lack of program evaluation (Munoz, 2005). Without these essential components, the students would not likely be prepared to compete for employment. Therefore, simply providing an alternative to traditional schooling was not adequate when the development of transferrable skills were not present.

The continuation high school identified by Gates and Stuht (2006) was a nontraditional placement in California. Sixty-four thousand students were educated in 521 schools. In this model, students aged 16 to 18 attended a shortened school day and completed a minimal high school diploma program. Without a library, gymnasium, athletic field, or science laboratory, continuation high schools provided the bare essentials necessary to educate students.

Project-based work was also a cornerstone of continuation high schools (Gates & Stuht, 2006). Students completed projects that intertwined content from multiple courses and allowed students to explore an area of personal interest. This component is an example of how continuation high schools helped to build personal and academic skills that students need for a successful future.

In Rockingham County, Virginia, educational options for suspended students were nonexistent until the school system partnered with a local college (Grove & Mullet, 1996). Utilizing the services of college students in the teacher preparation program gave the school district a place to start building a viable alternative. The college students worked in teams while

acquiring real-life teaching experience. Each team of pre-service teachers created individualized education plans for suspended high school students.

The suspended high school students were required to attend classes for ten hours a week on the college campus in addition to other requirements outlined in their individual plan (Grove & Mullet, 1996). While in the classes at the college, the pre-service teachers provided tutoring. Each college student serving as a pre-service teacher received compensation from the school district for their services.

The Rockingham County School District was selective of students that were permitted entrance into this program since it was rigorous and required a great deal of independent work (Grove & Mullet, 1996). Although this program was created to serve students on long-term suspension, students that had a history of chronic disciplinary problems or violent behavior were not accepted. With rigorous academic expectations, this program provided a serious educational alternative for students that had made a mistake.

Instructional Approaches

Kim and Taylor (2008) argued that a school program must provide content, processes, rigor, and concepts associated with future goals of students for the program to be beneficial (2008). Although these elements were present in many traditional school programs, the absence of these elements fostered inequality within alternative school populations. Alternative schools were often viewed as a place for underperforming or unwanted students. However, as indicated by Ruzzi and Kraemer (2006), the academic level of the student was a key element in identifying an appropriate placement for a student. These authors found that grade levels completed did not always correlate with the students' actual academic ability.

Utilizing nontraditional instructional approaches was a common practice at Prairie Alternative High School (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Integrating movies, field trips, and computers while limiting the use of traditional textbooks created an environment that differed greatly from the regular high school. In addition, a focus on job training enabled the students to discover how their schooling would translate into real life events.

Prairie Alternative High School was found to have a supportive and caring environment that was beneficial in building student to teacher relationships (Kim & Taylor, 2008). However, the curriculum lacked rigor and the students did not develop the ability to think critically. In addition, school decisions were made without the consideration of student or teacher input.

In Hueneme, California, smart classrooms provided an instructional setting that was filled with technological tools (Cardon & Christenson, 1998). The media-based instruction included student use of computerized robotics, computer-aided manufacturing, aeronautics, and pneumatic technology. With high attendance rates and achievement gains noted since the implementation of this program, the school system credited this technological environment with student success.

Also with a focus on using technology for instructional purposes, students in Azusa, California spent most of their school day in front of a computer (Cardon & Christenson, 1998). Software that enhanced core subject areas was used to keep students engaged while incorporating an integrated learning system. The application of this alternative program resulted in increased student attendance for at-risk students.

The Miami Valley Career Technology Youth Connections program utilized a technology-based curriculum with a focus mastery learning (Byrne, 2004). Youth Connections also had a strong mentoring component that paired mentor-teachers with students and parents. This aspect gave the school an avenue for weekly communication with parents. The mentoring element was

critical for program success since Youth Connections served students from multiple school districts. Unlike most alternative schools that were operated as a school within a certain district, this program was provided by an independent provider.

With an instructional emphasis on preparing students for careers, Youth Connections was strategically located in close proximity to employment opportunities for students (Byrne, 2004). The location of the program allowed students to participate in cooperative work experiences in both paid and unpaid internships. The work experience was an appropriate follow-up to a life and job skills course that students were required to take. Additionally, a unique component found in Youth Connections was the Career Exploration Lab that allowed students to explore 42 different careers ranging from aerodynamics to multimedia production.

Providing independent studies as an option for educating students was the approach in California (Gates & Stuht, 2006). Independent studies were offered in addition to or in replacement of traditional classes. Some of these programs were established in store front locations, but providing a small learning environment remained at the forefront of the instructional approach. Instructors in these settings served as counselors and student contacts, as well as teachers of content.

Barrat and Berliner found that full-time independent study programs had become increasingly popular (2009). Between the school year 2001-2002 and school year 2006-2007 there was an increase of 44% in enrollment at California independent study high schools. The authors indicated that almost 60,000 students were taking advantage of this nontraditional approach. Of these independent study programs, 55% reported targeting a specific population. Primarily these programs targeted students that were identified as at risk for school failure.

Independent study high schools in California were found to have lower percentages of students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners than those of traditional schools (Barrat & Berliner, 2009). Of students attending independent study schools, only 20% fell into one of these subgroups compared to 71% that made up traditional school populations. Additionally, females had a slightly higher enrollment percentage than males in independent study high schools at 55% and 49%, respectively.

Although lower in the total number of students served and total number of schools, independent study high schools were found to average larger numbers of students than other nontraditional schools (Barrat & Berliner, 2009). Independent study high schools served and average of 263 students in 231 locations as compared to other nontraditional programs that served an average of 132 students in 1,033 locations.

Allowing students to participate in determining their study method was found to be beneficial for some students (Brass, 2008). The benefits for one Latino student were evident as he incorporated his out-of-school experiences in his school work. While participating in the Technology and Literacy Project, the student who was unsuccessful with traditional literacy approaches, displayed competency using technology.

While creating a movie as a part of the project, the student honed his drafting and editing skills (Brass, 2008). The student was given the academic freedom to include portions of his home life into the project. By selecting song lyrics, advertisements, magazine images, and material goods endorsed by hip hop artists, the student was able to display his literacy skills with the use of his home-based influences. In addition to developing student literacy skills, this alternative instructional approach helped to bridge the separation between this student's school and home.

Class Wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT) was an instructional approach that seeks to break the cycle of school failure (Bowman-Perrott, Greenwood, & Tapia, 2007). Students were paired with a peer to work one-on-one while reviewing and learning basic skills. This approach enabled students to develop social skills, the ability to work as a team, and an opportunity to correct errors.

In reviewing the CWPT approach at the middle and high school levels, the authors observed considerable success (Bowman-Perrott, Greenwood, & Tapia, 2007). While participating in this approach, students were found to be on task 19% more of the time and engaged in the activity 11% more of the time than they had been during traditional teacher-led lessons. In addition, observations of students praising each other, working cooperatively with peers, and low-ability student learning improvements were identified.

For students at York County High School in Pennsylvania, individually paced learning proved to be effective (Kruglik, 1991). Although this program specifically targeted students that had already dropped out of school, about three-fourths of the students at York County were able to get back on track towards graduation. Working with a mix of computer based courses and textbook based courses, students were able to work at their own pace until they can display mastery of the content. Students had to score 70% on all assignments and exams before progressing to the next lesson.

With an average enrollment of 62 students, York County High School had a retention rate of 77% (Kruglik, 1991). The school served students from five school districts and was located in a renovated restaurant in a popular mall. The school remained open for 15 hours a day and permitted students to come in and out as they wished. The school required students to attend a minimum of 12 hours per week and one motivated student earned 16 credits in one semester.

Also located in a mall, the Digital School provided an alternative setting for students that had negative experiences in traditional schools (Claybaugh, 2005). The curriculum in this school was provided primarily through the use of computer-based instruction that covered core content and elective courses. The Digital School subscribed to NovaNET which was a comprehensive online courseware system. This system provided a standards-based curriculum that included assessment, student management and record keeping components. The NovaNET system was selected for use at the Digital School because school leaders felt it provided a more rigorous curriculum than other online options.

Providing effective instruction using a viable curriculum should be the priority for alternative programs (Hughes & Adera, 2006). Considered by many to be a model program for instructing students with Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD), the Centennial School in Pennsylvania used an instructional approach that adapts to individual students. While using research-based instructional practices, teachers altered lessons to match the ability level of their students. Teachers also used methods of analysis that identified error patterns in student work and an ongoing curriculum-based measurement system. The mastery learning approach allowed teachers to proceed when students were ready rather than when the material was covered.

In Texas, the Challenge Program is also considered a premier program that utilized research-based instructional methods to meet the educational needs of EBD students (Hughes & Adera, 2006). Diagnostic assessment results gave staff a basis to create a prescriptive learning plan unique for each student. Learning plans could include activities that were specifically designed to match the interests and abilities of individual students and included learning objectives or benchmarks for students to focus upon.

Disciplinary Approaches

States and schools districts have been adapting alternative program models for disciplinary purposes (Soleil, 1999). Providing a disciplinary alternative became necessary due to zero-tolerance policies and safe school legislation. Although many of the early alternative school models had a primary goal of educating students, the growing approach is correctional in nature. Whether disciplinary or therapeutic, the newfound focus is on altering student behaviors.

The Texas disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) were established by state legislators in 1995 (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). While implementing behavioral management approaches such as boot camps and point systems, DAEPs were a highly structured alternative to traditional schools. Many DAEPs had rigid guidelines using metal detectors, uniforms, and student escorts around campus. Although these programs were initially created with the intention of giving schools a viable option to educate unruly students that had committed criminal offenses, they evolved into dumping grounds for vulnerable youth.

Of the three quarters of a million students sent to DAEPs since 1995, a vast majority fell into at least one subgroup that performed below national achievement averages (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). The at-risk status of the students, accompanied with unqualified teachers at DAEPs, created a situation in which students were not successful. For example, students assigned to a DAEP in 2006 had a pass rate thirteen percentage points below average in reading and thirty percentage points below average in math.

Not all disciplinary alternatives included the structures and rigidity found in DAEPs. Prevention strategies, intervention strategies, and suppression strategies have each been identified as methods of addressing the social and behavioral needs of students (Van Acker, 2007). Educating students on the risks associated with behavior was a common preventive

approach. Common intervention approaches were used to target identified areas of need, such as emotional or economic inadequacies. To address disciplinary issues, suppression strategies such as punishment or rehabilitation were used. These approaches were often necessary components for alternative schools as students needed assistance overcoming their removal from a regular school population.

Van Acker (2007) suggested that some alternative programs were designed to address antisocial behaviors while others may address specific types of illegal activity (e.g., anti-violence, anti-gang intervention). Although these programs strive to provide a caring and engaging learning environment, placement in these programs had the potential to exacerbate the development of anti-social behavior. Combining multiple students that had displayed feelings of frustration and failure in a traditional school can be disastrous. However, by providing comprehensive services focused on individual needs of students, alternative schools can be successful in preparing students for achievement in the general education setting.

A common perception of alternative schools is that they exist to remediate student behavior and not focus on academics (Hughes & Adera, 2006). However, a more innovative approach of prescribing a specific learning plan for alternative school students was found in The Challenge Program. Based on research-based best practices, this model diagnostically identified a plan for each student based on the specific learning objectives for behaviorally disordered students. This instructional approach sought to fill the students' social and emotional needs while delivering proven instructional methods. As suggested by Aron (2003), students who are "off-track" need short-term recovery methods with a goal of getting them back in the regular school.

For students at the Cornerstone Achievement Center, "tough love" was the method of choice for students who had displayed unacceptable behavior (Howard, 2003). While enforcing a

zero tolerance policy for fighting, weapons, and swearing, the school leaders established a family atmosphere. Having a Thanksgiving feast and a Christmas breakfast that provided the best meals many attending students had all year, school leaders showed the students how much they cared about each student's welfare. In return, students who had been assigned to the program for serious behavior incidents displayed traits of self-discipline and self-motivation.

Mitchell and McCall (2007) discussed the benefits found in the Montcalm Adventure Challenge Program. The staff within this program worked to build relationships with students that have previously experienced conflict. By building respectful relationships with the students, the staff members took an informal approach to helping students adjust into the program. The staff members then guided the students through a goal setting process as they taught students how to properly deal with conflict. The end result was a student that could display leadership skills and began to assist other students in coping with challenges.

In an attempt to meet the needs of challenged youth, Response Ability Pathways (RAP) was an alternative disciplinary approach for adults that teach behaviorally challenged students (Forthun & McCombie, 2007). Training prepared staff members to focus on growth opportunities for students rather than targeting student misbehavior. This approach emphasized positive reinforcement and discouraged punitive measures. In addition, RAP encouraged a humanistic approach to working with students while creating a cooperative learning environment.

Teachers trained in RAP were found to be more likely to utilize positive behavioral strategies and not refer the students to the principal (Forthun & McCombie, 2007). Additionally, RAP trained teachers were less likely to focus on student misbehavior and less likely to use

restrictive measures to address misbehavior. The positive outcomes for RAP trained teachers led to improved classroom management and problem solving.

Also with roots in the psycho-educational frame of reference, the North Star Model of Alternative Education contended that living and learning must be cohesive (Olive, 2003). Students must comprehend the connectivity of feelings and behaviors with experiences and relationships. This alternative model did not focus on deficits and deviances, but rather on each individual student's strengths and interests. Behavioral advocates were well trained in emotional disturbance and crisis prevention, but served primarily as support personnel and assisted with academic tasks. By having these persons serve academic and disciplinary roles, and because of their specialized training; difficult situations were often controlled quickly and without further incident.

Although the term behavioral advocate was not used, the approach at the Inverness Center, located in Baltimore, Maryland, was similar to the North Star Model. The Inverness Center was a nontraditional education program that provided therapeutic services, educational remediation, and life skills for students that were unsuccessful in traditional school (Lloyd, 1997). Students were referred to this program after being suspended or expelled from their home school. With the goal of returning students to their home school, the staff at Inverness sought to provide students with coping mechanisms that would enable them to be successful in a multicultural world.

By developing a daily plan for success, the staff at Inverness focused on anger management, self-esteem, and conflict resolution (Lloyd, 1997). Therapeutic approaches with art, technology, and physical education enabled the staff to promote personal development and address individual behavioral needs. In addition, a service learning component included feeding

the elderly and working with special needs children. Within this component, students could earn points that would progress them through levels that could earn them privileges. Once they had progressed through the levels, students could earn a transition conference that would determine their preparedness to return to their base school.

The Village Model of Care was an after-school program for alternative school students that attempted to address student needs and reduce student involvement in criminal activities (Carswell et. al, 2009). This program targeted African American youth that had been expelled or suspended from city public schools for serious offenses. Student offenses ranged from violence towards staff to carrying dangerous weapons, and resulted in at least a one year placement in the alternative school.

The authors identified three components that made the Village Model of Care a successful model for alternative school students. The first component was structured group mentoring and required adult mentors to function in dual roles as educators and advisors (Carswell et. al, 2009). Activities for these mentoring sessions included remedial education, study skills exercises, social skills exercises, health promotion, and risk reduction strategies. The second component was parental support services that were provided in 2-hour bi-monthly gatherings at the school. This provided the parents an opportunity to communicate with school staff and network with other parents. The third component was community outreach services which assisted families in obtaining resources and assistance from community organizations. This component also provided students an opportunity to attend educational and recreational field trips.

Alternative School Culture

Three aspects of school culture have been identified that contribute to productive learning environments (Aleem & Moles, 1993). The first aspect was a targeted focus on the academic mission of the school. The staff viewed their primary role as improving student achievement and helping students meet academic standards. The second dimension was a discipline policy that was firmly and fairly enforced. A discipline policy ranged from consistent enforcement of classroom rules to taking appropriate punitive actions for serious violations. The final aspect contributing to productive learning environments was caring relationships between students and staff. Appropriate and authentic relationships between students and staff could foster support for student success.

Creating a nonthreatening learning environment was of critical importance in solution-focused alternative schools (Rumberger, 2004). Establishing a positive school culture that included staff taking personal responsibility for student success was a key component. With caring and committed teachers, solution-focused alternative schools emulated a climate that supported self-governance and professional collegiality. Accompanied with small class sizes, these schools allowed students to focus on an individualized curriculum with frequent interactions with teachers.

Establishing a culture of respect and a climate of support were the guiding principles in program decisions at AIM High School in New York (Grobe, 2002). AIM or “alternative instructional model” identified fundamental and effective strategies that contributed to their success and helped to establish the desired school culture. Individualized instruction and continuous progress were identified as two key components in this program. Teachers worked with students to identify deficiencies, remediate skills, and progress to the next skill. Without

established start and stop dates for classes, this program enabled students to move to the next course when they were ready.

Summer school, work programs, and community activities were also identified as important elements for AIM High School (Grobe, 2005). Summer school allowed students an opportunity to complete unfinished course work, while work programs and community activities kept students engaged in healthy social endeavors. Tutors, community service, and field trips were also identified to be strategies that helped AIM high school to be an effective alternative.

In Minnesota, the Compass Program sought to create an inviting place for students with a history of academic failure and challenging life circumstances (Zapf, 2008). Teachers at Compass worked to forge a positive learning environment that nourished the spirit of each student while welcoming students into the culture of learning. The positivity extended into grading practices where traditional grades have been shortened to include only A, B, and C. Work that did not meet a minimum level of C had to be redone and if work was not complete, the student had to complete a form that explained why. Additionally, each problem was viewed as an opportunity to teach the student rather than punish the student.

Establishing a positive school culture was also imperative at Shalom High School in Wisconsin (Howard, 2003). Including staff, faculty, community, and students in the decision making process was a method leaders of the school feel transfers the responsibility of learning to the student and helped to establish clear expectations for each student. Students at Shalom had to prove they deserved to graduate by developing a portfolio of work throughout their school years and then defending their work in front of an advisory board. Knowing the expectations, participating in decision making, and presenting a culmination of their efforts not only gave

students ownership of their actions, but also helped to establish a school culture that valued students as active participants.

Including students in the decision-making process was also an essential component for Parkside Community School (Swaminathan, 2004.) The school targeted service learning opportunities and issued course credit for working in internship programs. Unlike many alternative programs, Parkside was an optional enrollment program for at-risk students that may or may not have a discipline history. The program involved students in the development of their class schedule and the selection of their internships. By empowering students to make choices, this school created an atmosphere where students felt valued and respected.

Nelson and Eckstein (2008) also discussed a service learning alternative educational program that focused greatly on school culture. The Discipline Alternative Educational Program (DAEP) required students to identify, plan, and write a proposal for a service learning project. This model permitted at-risk students an opportunity to learn and participate while helping the community. Student participants in DAEP developed a sense of pride, self-confidence, and learned to contribute to a team effort.

After participating in the service learning project as part of the DAEP, students displayed a greater sense of responsibility for their education and were included in the development of lesson plans (Nelson & Eckstein, 2008). Through the ongoing process of service learning, the students developed a sense of ownership for their school and community. Furthermore, students opted to assist with day-to-day operations within the school.

Ellison and Trickett (1978) assessed the differences between traditional schools and alternative schools. The authors discovered that traditional schools typically did not permit students to be involved in the decision-making process. On the contrary, alternative schools were

more likely to include students in policy making and had a greater hand in their education. Alternative school settings were less competitive and displayed more student involvement, but the classrooms at alternative schools were found to have less teacher control. Thus, the emphasis on school culture was found to be much more evident in the alternative school.

Miller, Fitch, and Marshall (2003) found that students in alternative programs had a greater sense of control over their surroundings. In these settings, students were placed in alternative programs because they required corrective action for behavior or attendance, but found the school climate more accommodating to their needs. Teachers and counselors attempted to help students distinguish between elements that were within their control and out of their control. In addition, these staff members worked to help students understand consequences for actions, and focused on alternative ways to handle problems.

Aron (2003) identified a need for nontraditional programs that provided an educational opportunity for students that are entering adulthood prematurely due to becoming parents or having home situations that impeded their attendance in regular school. Students that became pregnant were often embarrassed and did not wish to attend the traditional school setting and be subjected to ridicule. Additionally, some students were the primary wage earner in their household and needed to work during traditional school hours.

The Canyon Program in Montana targeted at-risk youth such as this that had been excluded from attending their regular high school (Vadeboncoeur, 2009). With flexible arrangements, and efforts to build relationships, maintain engagement, and enable students to graduate; the staff at this program worked to create a welcoming environment. For students that had been expelled or counseled out of attending their base high school, a positive atmosphere in

an alternative setting gave new life to their educational perspective. Since 1992, over 500 students have earned a high school diploma through the Canyon Program.

Pre-service teachers from a local college were utilized to provide instruction in the Canyon Program (Vadeboncoeur, 2009). The pre-service teachers fulfilled college service learning requirements as they helped with math homework, guided science projects, discussed books, and read literature with Canyon students. For these pre-service teachers, it was an opportunity to apply university theory in a real life setting while gaining valuable experience.

The Digital School in Colorado did not create a partnership with a local college, but they did work to create a culture of acceptance based on staff building relationships with students (Claybaugh, 2005). However, at the Digital School it was the teachers and counselors that worked to make daily contact with students to keep them focused on their goals. The priority for hiring teachers in this program was not associated with content expertise or technological ability, but it was identifying candidates that were strong on communication skills and those that had the potential to build relationships with students.

The Digital School was located in a vacated store front in a mall to create a nonthreatening, neutral environment in which disenfranchised students were willing to attend (Claybaugh, 2005). Additionally, students could use public transportation to get to school and older students were not embarrassed attending a program that was not on a school campus. Students in this program were treated as adults in that they were permitted to create their own schedule and set their own goals. Students could sign up for blocks of time to use the computers as they left the day before. Students did not have a set schedule. This flexibility was one component that school leaders identified as enhancing the culture of the program.

Darling and Price (2004) identified ACCESS schools as a California alternative focused on providing a school culture inclusive of student input. While creating a personalized learning plan for each student, ACCESS staff concentrated on interactions with students that were positive and enhanced the student's desire to be there. With the four primary programs being county community schools, juvenile court schools, community day schools, and adult correctional education, ACCESS schools were established to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Although some students at ACCESS schools had behavioral problems or learning disabilities, other students were highly motivated and goal oriented (Darling & Price, 2004). With this range, using a variety of instructional strategies such as directed study, differentiated instruction, and mastery learning was necessary. With flexibility in the program, the staff had the flexibility to adjust the school structures to meet the individual needs of the student.

Outcomes of Other Studies

Exemplary alternative programs were analyzed to determine common aspects within different approaches (Quinn et al., 2006). Student input and assistance in decision making were found to have significant value. A correctional educational setting, a private single day treatment school, and a mental health center provided perceptual data to characterize qualities of effective alternative approaches. The results suggested a need for students to be treated with dignity, and included in the decision-making processes for the school. In addition, a sense of fairness and equity was also identified as a key characteristic of a successful alternative program.

Kershaw and Blank (1993) investigated perceptions of students, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators as they related to alternative school settings. The authors also identified criteria that resulted in student placement in the respective alternative school program.

The findings indicate that students may be assigned to alternative schools for offenses ranging from truancy to weapons possession. Although the range of violation is broad, a common perception exists that students in alternative placements have a history of being unsuccessful in traditional schools.

Participants in this study perceived small, supportive, and structured environments as being optimal for student success (Kershaw & Blank, 1993). Additionally, close relationships between students and staff in alternative settings was perceived to have a positive impact on both student academic and behavioral performance. However, alternative school teachers viewed their role as being significantly different than that of a teacher in a traditional setting. Alternative school teachers saw their role as being more patient, flexible, and understanding of individual student differences than regular program teachers.

Findings of this study also revealed that staff members perceived that a positive attitude and a unified approach of establishing high expectations for students were necessary for program success (Kershaw & Blank, 1993). Perceptions regarding student outcomes in alternative programs were consistent for students and staff based at the alternative school, but differed from perceptions of staff at the base school. Alternative school students and staff were able to identify areas of growth for each individual student, whether it was social, emotional, or academic. However, staff at the base school indicated that success was observed only for certain students and they did not notice improvement for all students.

A review of the Bryant Adult Alternative School in Alexandria, Virginia revealed significant challenges (Conner & McKenna, 2008). With an average dropout rate of 60%, the staff at Bryant opted to focus research efforts on students new to the school. As students entered the program, they had to complete a universal screener that determined the students' academic

skill level in reading, writing, and math. Although the results averaged below 50% competency in reading and math, an analysis of the essays revealed a strong desire for students to graduate from school.

Although the desire to graduate was evident in the essays, the program review indicated that only 25% of students enrolled during the course of a school year had remained enrolled in school (Conner & McKenna, 2008). Another aspect of the program review focused on students who had participated in a mentoring program. Of the mentored students, only 15% dropped out as compared to 62% of non-mentored students.

The program review at Bryant Adult Alternative suggested that the risk for new students to become dropouts is very high (Conner & McKenna, 2008). Although the mentoring component displayed some positive results, it was determined that mentors could not overcome poverty, pregnancy, or an achievement gap. Students attended Bryant with hopes of a speedy graduation, but lacked the commitment necessary to complete the rigorous course load required to graduate.

In South Dakota, a program review of the Rapid City Academy identified both positive and negative aspects of the online learning opportunities (Podoll & Randle, 2005). The flexibility of teaching the same course to current students and nontraditional students all over the country was a tremendous benefit. The ability for students to work when they desired as opposed to an established time was also identified as a positive aspect of the program. Additionally, using discussion boards, email, and journals as supplemental instructional materials was identified as beneficial.

Whereas technology provided some identifiable benefits, it was also identified as a major disadvantage to the program (Podoll & Randle, 2005). Using the online instructional methods

required internet access that was difficult for some students to maintain. Software upgrades and compatibility issues also provided challenges for some students. Additionally, pop-up blockers, computer system failures, and overflowing email accounts created barriers for online learners.

Although some challenges were identified, the overall experience for the Rapid City Academy was positive (Podoll & Randle, 2005). Reaching learners in an online capacity provided students in rural areas an opportunity to take courses they may not have been able to take otherwise. As time progressed, teachers became more familiar with the nuances of the program and they were able to further develop the content of their courses. To fully understand the challenges of taking an online course, 50% of the teachers at the Rapid City Academy took an online course as part of a professional development opportunity.

Biniker and Pindiprolu (2008) completed a case study of the Independence Education Center (IEC). This alternative school housed 150 students in Grades K-12. Each of the students had displayed chronic behavior problems in their previous setting and been assigned to attend the IEC. Students in this program progressed through a level system that rewarded good behavior and removed privileges for poor behavior.

Using functional behavioral assessments to identify root causes enabled teachers to identify activities that precipitated certain behaviors (Biniker & Pindiprolu, 2008). The results of these assessments were used to create behavior intervention plans that teachers used proactively to impede student behaviors before they escalated. These practices proved to be effective in the IEC and the case study results suggest these practices can be utilized in other schools.

Darling and Prince (2004) suggested that ACCESS schools in California provided an educational alternative to a variety of students. Students attending these schools included home-schooled students, homeless students, teen parents, and incarcerated students among others. With

105 sites and having served over 15,000 students, ACCESS schools were a significant contributor to the states alternative education program.

In an effort to improve, administrators at ACCESS schools completed a program review (Darling & Prince, 2004). A senior exit questionnaire completed by graduating seniors helped to anchor this program review. The data compiled from these surveys identified student recommendations for program improvement in three main areas.

Engagement was one theme that emerged (Darling & Prince, 2004). Although students felt safe and cared for while attending ACCESS schools, the data suggested that a greater emphasis on using technology could enhance student engagement. As a result, the administration of ACCESS has made a financial commitment to improve the availability of technology.

The second theme that emerged was the maximization of learning (Darling & Prince, 2004). The results show that 94% of students attending an ACCESS school improved academically. The student feedback indicated that students did not remain at a single site for extended periods of time, but they continued to attend ACCESS schools at other sites. However, a deeper investigative look identified inconsistencies with curricular delivery and quality. As a result, the administration of ACCESS has prioritized the use of standard-based instruction and is working towards accreditation.

The final theme identified was transition (Darling & Prince, 2004). Although the students reported that they had received support in the form of personal counseling or drug/alcohol counseling, the school needed to improve efforts of guidance on post-secondary options for students. As a result, each site now has a focus on personal transitional support for each student.

Hattie (2009) also identified specific factors that led to increased student achievement and suggested that best practices were similar across subject, age, and context. The author

identified six topics that contributed to student success. These topics included the child, the home, the school, the curricula, the teacher, and the approaches to teaching.

As stated by Hattie (2009), the contributions brought by the child include expectations, engagement, prior knowledge, and self-efficacy. However, the most important aspect of the child may be the value and worth they find in learning and developing a reputation as a learner among their peers. A major aspect of success is having and sharing challenging goals that promote student commitment and engagement. Schools should be working to get students excited and interested in their learning and open them to new learning experiences.

The home, as suggested by Hattie (2009), can be a tremendous enhancement or a tremendous detriment to a child's learning. Parental aspirations for their child and parental understanding of the educational processes are recognized as influencing student outcomes. When parents do not comprehend the processes or fail to speak the language of schools, opportunities for sharing learning expectations are missed. Schools are charged with reaching out and helping parents better understand student learning goals and the language of schooling.

Hattie (2009) suggested that the primary school contribution to student achievement is developing a school climate that is conducive to learning. The most powerful effects were found when the climate of the classroom is focused on learning and disruptive students were not present. An approach that encourages teachers and schools to make learning exciting and engaging is optimal for student achievement.

A curriculum that balances surface learning with deep understandings is acknowledged as having a positive influence on student learning (Hattie, 2009). Having planned strategies that teach specific skills and allow for active participation facilitate the best learning situations.

Regardless of subject area, conceptual clarity is found when a combination of problem solving, strategies to master content, and surface learning are balanced.

Hattie (2009) suggested multiple aspects in which teachers impacted student learning. Teacher expectations of students, teacher perceptions about student abilities, teacher clarity on articulating success criteria, and teachers fostering student effort were specified as impacting student success. However, teacher quality as perceived by students was identified as the most critical aspect and most influential to improving student achievement.

The author also identified teaching approaches that were associated with student learning (Hattie, 2009). Having specific learning intentions and establishing criteria for success were linked to the degree of challenge, the purpose, and the goals of the lesson. Teachers collaborating with a focus on learning outcomes for students, and receiving feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching efforts were described as impactful on student achievement.

Hattie's (2009) synthesis of more than 800 meta-analyses presented a plausible set of claims that have a high explanatory value. Hattie identified these six markers that can positively impact education: (1) teachers are among the most powerful influences in learning; (2) teachers need to be directive, influential, caring, and actively engaged in the passion of teaching and learning; (3) teachers must constantly know where students are in the learning process and adjust instruction to meet student needs; (4) teachers need to know the learning intentions and success criteria for their lessons; (5) teachers need to move from single ideas to multiple ideas, and extend these ideas so that learners can construct and reconstruct knowledge and ideas; and (6) school leaders and teachers need to create an environment that accepts errors as learning opportunities.

Summary

This literature review examined different alternative educational programs. This literature review also examined the effects of different approaches and the school culture within alternative programs. Multiple alternative school program approaches were reviewed. Ruzzi and Kraemer (2006) suggested a need to differentiate among program types in order to draw conclusions. In their research, these authors found a variety of learning environments and curricula. Class sizes, teacher qualifications, teaching methods, and the locations of the nontraditional programs varied greatly depending on resource allocation by the providing district.

Making the nontraditional program relevant to students and linking it to future careers through vocational or technical courses can have a significant impact (Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore, & Friant, 2010). By engaging students, teachers, and parents in the instructional processes, schools can keep the focus on preparing the student for post-secondary options and prevent them from dropping out. Although there is not a singular cause for dropping out, students identify boredom and a lack of relevance as contributing factors to developing a sense of apathy towards school.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education, reauthorized in 2004, requires districts to conduct a manifestation meeting and functional behavior assessment for special education students before assigning them to an alternative school (Etscheidt, 2006). Traditionally, students within this subgroup have performed lower than their peers on standardized tests and pose a tremendous challenge for educators. Providing a viable alternative program that can meet the educational needs of students with disabilities is of critical importance.

Students assigned to a district alternative school must receive services as identified in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and must participate in the general curriculum

(Etscheidt, 2006). Before removing a student with a disability from the traditional school, the district must determine that continuation in the current placement is likely to result in injury to the child or others. In addition, the district must assert that reasonable efforts had been made to minimize the risk of harm in the current setting.

Each alternative method reviewed had positive and negative aspects. The common theme among all was that multiple alternative approaches can lead to improvements if students are provided with the right placement opportunity (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). In addition, alternative instructional and behavioral approaches were reviewed. Instructional approaches utilizing technology, field trips, job training, and peer tutoring were each identified as successful alternative instructional practices.

It has been suggested by the research that nontraditional programs can positively impact academic performance and student success (Powell, 2003). Though, there are no known studies looking specifically at the impact of nontraditional education programs on the graduation rates of students, many students' needs are better met with nontraditional school options.

As identified by Tobin and Sprague (2006), there are some best practices for alternative education programs. A low student to teacher ratio keeps class sizes small and allows for more interaction. Clear expectations and rules that are frequently articulated to the student and enforced appropriately help to establish a highly structured classroom. Using positive behavior support and/or rewards rather than relying on punitive measures keeps the school climate more conducive to student success.

Staff members or community volunteers serving as adult mentors for at-risk students is also identified as a best practice for alternative schools (Tobin & Sprague, 2006). Functional behavioral assessments can serve as a precursor for problems and teaching appropriate social

skills may enable students to recognize destructive behaviors. A relevant and viable curriculum is also necessary for alternative program success. Finally, involving parents in planning and implementing the educational process for their child is recognized as a best practice.

Lange and Sletten (2002) also identified essential elements for nontraditional or alternative programs to be successful. A low teacher to student ratio and the availability of one-on-one interaction between staff and students are important aspects. An atmosphere of support and learning that provides experiences that the student can link to future goals are vital to achievement. Alternative programs should also provide support for student decision making and establish a caring environment.

Teachers in alternative programs need training and support to work with at-risk students (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Research based practices should be used for assessment, curriculum, and special education services. In addition, these authors advise that having clear enrollment criteria and appropriate program goals are essential elements. Finally, evaluating the impact of the program on student achievement is critical.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The literature review supports the idea that alternative education programs may have significant implications on student success. Alternative programming may be an appropriate option for students who struggle in traditional schools. Further research on alternative programming and the impact they may have on student outcomes is needed. According to Cox and Davidson (1995), some positive effects can be attributed to alternative education programs. School performance, student attitudes about school, and self-esteem can be impacted in a positive manner.

This review explores alternative programming in one suburban school system. This chapter describes the multiple-site review conducted at seven alternative educational programs in Douglas County, Georgia. Furthermore, alternative programs that target specific populations may have a more positive impact than those with an undefined target group.

As presented by Tyler and Lofstrom (2009), hundreds of drop-out prevention programs exist, but a rigorous evaluation has been conducted on relatively few of these programs. Confidently identifying effective alternative programs is difficult due to the limited evidence. The U.S. Department of Education's School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program and the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse are the two most rigorous evaluations available, but the combined findings are insufficient.

Prevatt and Kelly (2003) found that schools are not adopting research-based drop-out prevention programs because few studies have evaluated the effectiveness of various designs. The scarcity of research for alternative programs necessitates that school systems adopt unproven practices.

Purpose of the Study

The investigated school system offered seven nontraditional high school programs that provide various options for students. The purpose of this study was to examine the various approaches taken within these programs, explore teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of each approach, and identify the educational outcomes for students in each program (e.g., on-track rates).

Research Questions

1. What characteristics and approaches are identified within the seven nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system?

2. What are the educational outcomes (e.g., on-track rates) for students enrolled in the nontraditional high school programs during the 2009-2010 school year?

3. Do the teachers and supervisors in the seven nontraditional high school education programs in the investigated school system perceive their program as effective?

Use of Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods are often used to capture and communicate the story of participants (Patton, 2002). The purpose of qualitative studies is to gather humanistic data that can inform

decision making and potentially lead to program improvement. Persons within an organization are able to share their perceptions that are grounded in the day-to-day operations of the program. While using qualitative methods, the researcher can make observations and collect data while on-site of the program being evaluated.

Design and Program Evaluation Framework

The program evaluation method was used for this study because the researcher investigated all of the alternative education programs available in the investigated school system. Gathering detailed information about program implementation and perceived effectiveness may inform the research. According to Patton (2002), the following characteristics are reflective of program evaluations: (1) focus on program processes and outcomes, (2) aggregate data, (3) goals-based judgment, (4) intended for decision makers.

The evaluation model used in this study was a personalizing and humanizing evaluation. Patton (2002) suggested that by making the ideas and opinions of respondents the most critical data source for an evaluation, makes the evaluation qualitative in nature and eliminates impersonal components such as numbers. “Personalizing and humanizing evaluations are particularly important for education” (Patton, 2002, p. 176).

Permission to Conduct the Study

Approval was received from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at The University of Alabama. Approval was also received from the superintendent in the investigated school system and from outside service providers. Participation by the

supervisors and teachers was voluntary and each was asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix A) prior to data collection.

Study Sites

This program evaluation included seven nontraditional education programs in the investigated school system. The nontraditional programs examined in the investigated system were the Alternative Program, Career Institute, Behavior Academy, Learning Center, Night School, Last Resort, and Credit Recovery.

The investigated school system is in a community of approximately 130,000 people and is a bedroom community to a major city. The investigated school system consists of 32 schools that serve the educational needs of approximately 24,500 students. Of the students in the investigated school system, 47% are Black, 36% are White, 11% are Hispanic, 4% are Multi-racial, and 1% are Asian. Additionally, 51% of students are male and 49% are female. Fifty-six percent of students in the investigated school system are considered economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced price meals.

There are four traditional high schools in the investigated school system serving approximately 7,500 students in Grades 9-12. School “A” has a total student population of approximately 1,900 students of which 23% are Black, 67% are White, 6% are Hispanic, 3% are Multi-racial, and 1% is Asian. Of the students at School “A,” 38% are considered economically disadvantaged. School “B” has a total student population of approximately 1,800 students of which 56% are Black, 29% are White, 7% are Hispanic, 7% are Multi-racial, and 1% is Asian. Of the students at School “B,” 42% are identified as economically disadvantaged.

School “C” has a total student population of approximately 2,100 students of which 63% are Black, 26% are White, 6% are Hispanic, 3% are Multi-racial, and 2% are Asian. Sixty-one percent of students at School “C” are considered economically disadvantaged. School “D” has a total student population of approximately 1,700 students of which 52% are Black, 30% are White, 13% are Hispanic, 4% are Multi-racial, and 1% is Asian. Of the students at School “D”, 59% are identified as economically disadvantaged.

Site 1

Site 1 of the program evaluation is the Alternative Program. This program was established for the 2006-2007 school year. The Alternative Program has a high school student enrollment of 92 and a maximum capacity of 125 students. The students served in this program are in Grades 9-12 and represent all four of the base high schools within the investigated school system. The students in this program range in age from 14 to 19 years old for regular education students and 14 to 21 years old for special education students. Of the students in this program, 62% are Black, 36% are White, and 2% are Hispanic. Sixty-seven percent of students served in this program are considered economically disadvantaged.

The students served in the Alternative Program have been suspended from their base high school through a tribunal hearing or admission of guilt after being charged with a Level 1 offense. Examples of a Level 1 offense as identified by the investigated school system may include possession of a weapon, terroristic threats, assault, bullying, or gang-related activities. These are the most serious violations and students are suspended from their base high school with an option to enroll in the Alternative Program at no cost. Students attend this program for 3

hours per day, 5 days per week, and their overall length of assignment to this program is predetermined. The average enrollment in the Alternative Program is 25 weeks.

The investigated school system contracts with an outside service provider to operate the Alternative Program. There are multiple locations for this program, but each location is in a commercial strip-mall and has the same facility design and operational approach. For the purpose of this study, all of the individual locations will collectively represent one site as the Alternative Program.

Site 2

Site 2 is the Career Institute, and this program was established for the 2007-2008 school year. This program has a student enrollment of 225 students and no maximum capacity. The students served in this program represent all four base high schools and is operated in collaboration with a technical college. The high school students in this program are in Grades 10-12 and have a minimum age of 16. There is not a maximum age for students in this program, as many of them are college students. Of the students in this program, 41% are Black, 55% are White, and 4% are Hispanic. Of the high school students served in this program, 41% are considered economically disadvantaged.

The Career Institute is a dual-enrollment option for high school students. Entrance into the program is based on student choice. The location of this program is on the campus of a technical college and students can earn both high school and college credit while attending classes in this setting. High school students attend classes in this program for one half of their school day and they take core content courses at their base high school during the other half of the school day. There are some minimal costs incurred by students participating in this program,

but college tuition is primarily covered with the HOPE scholarship. Students determine their length of enrollment in this program with the minimum length being one semester.

The investigated school system partners with a technical college to provide this program and although the facility is located on the technical college campus, the building is jointly owned by the college and school system. Utility and maintenance costs are shared between these two entities as well. The facility is supervised by school system personnel from the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and by technical college staff from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Site 3

Site 3 is the Behavior Academy. This program was established for the 1995-1996 school year. This program has a student enrollment of 60 students and does not have a maximum student enrollment. The students served in this program represent all four base high schools. The students in this program range in age from 14 to 21 years old and all students have been identified as special education students. The students in this program are 46% Black, 52% White, and 2% Hispanic. Of the students served in this program, 56% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Students enrolled in the Behavior Academy have been classified as Emotionally & Behaviorally Disturbed (EBD) and the students have been placed in this program at the recommendation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) committee. Although the location of this program is on the campus at School “A,” it is in a separate facility and has a separate staff. Students attend this program on a full-time basis in accordance with the school system calendar and do so at no cost. The length of time students remain in this program is

determined by the IEP committee and students could be placed in this program for their entire high school career.

Site 4

Site 4 is the Learning Center, which was established for the 2006-2007 school year. This program has a student enrollment of 75 students and a maximum capacity of 75 students. The students served in this program are in Grades 9-12 and represent all four base high schools. The students in this program range in age from 14 to 19 years old for regular education students and 14 to 21 years old for special education students. The student population in this program is 39% Black, 56% White, and 5% Hispanic. Forty-six percent of students served in this program are considered economically disadvantaged.

The students served in the Learning Center have been identified at their base high school as at risk for dropping out or underperforming in their current setting. Many of these students have fallen behind on credits or have become disengaged in the traditional high school setting. Students attend the Learning Center during regular school hours on a full-time basis, in accordance with the school system calendar and do so at no cost. The length of time students remain in this program is based on student choice, but the average length is 54 weeks.

The Learning Center is primarily funded by the investigated school system, but with some initial financial assistance from the Communities in Schools of Georgia organization. Staff members at the Learning Center are employees of the investigated school system. The facility used for this program is on the campus of a technical college, but the program does not have an affiliation with the technical college.

Site 5

Site 5 is the Night School. This program was established for the 2007-2008 school year. This program has a high school student enrollment of 125 and a maximum capacity of 125 students. The students served in this program are in Grades 10-12 and represent all four of the base high schools within the investigated school system. The students in this program range in age from 16 to 19 years old for regular education students and 16 to 21 years old for special education students. The students in this program are 55% Black, 43% White, and 2% Hispanic. Fifty-six percent of the students served in this program are considered economically disadvantaged.

The students served in the Night School Program have chosen to attend this program because it best meets their individual needs. Some students choose this program so they can work during the day whereas others just perform better in the evening hours. In the Night School program, students attend school and earn credits based on mini-semesters that are 8 weeks long. Students attend school from 5:30 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. and they can accelerate their program by earning up to 12 credits per year. Students enrolled in the Night School program do not incur costs. The length of time students remain in this program ranges from one mini-semester to 2 years.

The investigated school system contracts with an outside provider to facilitate the Night School Program. There are multiple locations for this program, but each location is in a commercial strip-mall and has the same facility design and operational approach. For the purpose of this study, all of the individual locations will collectively represent one site as the Night High School Program.

Site 6

Site 6 is the Last Chance program, which was established for the 2008-2009 school year. This program has a high school student enrollment of 44 and a maximum capacity of 45 students. The students served in this program are in Grades 9-12 and represent all four of the base high schools within the investigated school system. The students in this program range in age from 14 to 19 years old for regular education students and 14 to 21 years old for special education students. The students in this program are 37% Black, 59% White, and 4% Hispanic. Forty-seven percent of students served in this program are considered economically disadvantaged.

The students served in the Last Chance program have been identified by the graduation coach at their school as an eminent drop-out. Students are referred by their graduation coach to their principal, who then discusses placement with system personnel. Placement in this program is highly selective because it is considered a last resort for student placement. In the Last Resort program, students attend school for a minimum of 3 hours per day, in accordance with the school system calendar. Students enrolled in the Last Resort program do not incur costs. The average length of time students remain in this program is 31 weeks.

The investigated school system contracts with an outside provider to facilitate the Last Chance program. There is one designated location for this program and it is located in a commercial strip-mall.

Site 7

Site 7 is the Credit Recovery Program. This program was established for the spring semester of the 2008-2009 school year. This program has a fluctuating student enrollment with a

system maximum of 155 students at any given time. The students served in this program are in Grades 9-12 and students are served in each of the four base high schools as an on-site program. The students in this program range in age from 14 to 19 years old for regular education students and 14 to 21 years old for special education students. The students in this program are 57% Black, 41% White, and 2% Hispanic. Fifty-three percent of the students served in this program are considered economically disadvantaged.

The students served in Credit Recovery have been identified as potentially failing to advance grade levels and/or significantly falling behind on core credits. Students that have failed courses in the traditional high school classroom are placed in this program. Students attend Credit Recovery during one of their regularly scheduled course times, and may transition into another course if they recover credit before the semester ends. If students complete this program during the school year, they do so at no cost. If they choose to participate in summer Credit Recovery, they must pay a non-refundable fee of $50. Students spend an average of 11 weeks in this program.

The Credit Recovery program is funded with a combination of federal grant funds and Special Education funds. The investigated school system allocates one teaching position to each high school specifically for the Credit Recovery program.

Table 1

Study Site Demographics

Site	Enrollment	Capacity	White	Black	Hispanic	Economically Disadvantaged
1 Alternative Program	92	125	36	62	2	67
2 Career Institute	225	N/A	55	41	4	41
3 Behavior Academy	60	N/A	52	46	2	56
4 Learning Center	75	75	56	39	5	46
5 Night School	125	125	43	55	2	56
6 Last Chance	44	45	59	37	4	47
7 Credit Recovery	N/A	155	41	57	2	53

Participants

The participants in this study included one supervisor and two teachers from each of the seven nontraditional programs in the investigated school system. The supervisor was predetermined based on employment status. Teachers with fewer than 3 years of experience in the respective program were not considered for selection. The teacher participants were randomly selected from a list of teachers within each program. The researcher contacted each nontraditional education program supervisor by telephone to ascertain his/her interest in participating in this study.

Data Collection

Data were collected via interviews with participants and through archival records for each program. The program evaluation approach was used for this research and consisted of three parts: (1) interviews with nontraditional high school program supervisors, (2) interviews with nontraditional high school program teachers, and (3) collection and review of student academic records.

Procedures

This study included multiple methods of data collection. The data collection methods included interviews with program supervisors and program teachers. The researcher visited each site to explain the research, provide the study's IRB Consent Form, and conduct the interviews. The methods of data collection also included emails requesting participation, scheduling interviews, and clarifying interview responses. Data were also collected from a database containing student information for all students in the investigated school system. Star Student is the student information software used by the investigated school system to track student records.

Data

Attendance rosters of each nontraditional high school program for the 2009-2010 school year were accessed in the student information system. For each student that appeared on an attendance roster, transcripts were reviewed to document course completion and credit earned for each course while the student was enrolled in the nontraditional program.

Interviews

Seven nontraditional education program supervisors were interviewed to acquire information on educational approaches utilized within their program. Two nontraditional education program teachers from each site were also interviewed to obtain detailed descriptions of strategies and approaches taken with students. Each of the interview participants were asked the same questions (Appendix B). The questions were based on current literature and focused on academic and disciplinary approaches taken at each site.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved several steps to ensure accuracy. The data analysis began with transcribing recordings of each interview. Each interview was coded for major themes, ideas, and concepts. The coding process was a method of generating a description of each setting based on the input of the participants. This process also enabled the researcher to identify differences among the seven alternative education programs. Archival data were also collected and verified. Patton (2002) suggested that combining several types of data, including quantitative and qualitative, can strengthen a study (p. 247).

Interviews

For each nontraditional education program investigated, a summarization of themes was created. Data collected via the supervisor interviews were analyzed to identify themes. Data collected via the teacher interviews were then analyzed to identify themes. A comparison of these data was conducted. Evidence provided from different sources was used to corroborate themes and concepts. The consistency of responses established repeatability. After transcribing the interviews, a summary of interview responses was made available to each interview participant for validation.

Archival Data

The archival data acquired from the Star Student information system were also analyzed. Student success in each course was analyzed to determine on-track rates for each program. The evaluation of evidence provided from different sources was used to corroborate data.

Researcher Positionality

In a qualitative study, it is important that the researcher maintain an open-minded and neutral position. Being reflexive helps researchers comprehend their own subjectivity. It also "allows researchers to be critical of their own biases and opens the door to examining ways in which they are part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon of the study" (Padgett, 2004, p. 135). Because the researcher is an employee within the investigated school system, it was essential that he maintain awareness of potential bias. Upholding objectivity was critical to the reliability of the study. Study participants reviewed summarizations and analyses of interviews to validate responses and to ensure the data accurately reflected their program.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Seven nontraditional high school programs were investigated for this study. Each program was given a pseudo name to keep its identity confidential: Alternative Program, Career Institute, Behavior Academy, Learning Center, Night School, Last Chance Program, and Credit Recovery Program. The purpose of this study was to examine the various approaches taken within these programs, explore teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of each approach, and identify the educational outcomes for students in each program (e.g., on-track rates). This chapter presents the data collected and the analysis of the data used to answer the following research questions:

1. What characteristics and approaches are identified within the seven nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system?

2. What are the educational outcomes (e.g., on-track rates) for students enrolled in the nontraditional high school programs during the 2009-2010 school year?

3. Do the teachers in the seven nontraditional high school education programs in the investigated school system perceive their program as effective?

Interviews

Interviews were conducted during the month of March at each of the nontraditional high school sites. Each participant was interviewed during non-instructional time and each interview

lasted approximately 30 minutes. Each interview consisted of 20 questions and all of participants were asked the same questions.

Synopsis of Alternative Program Interviews

The interview participants for the Alternative Program included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers and supervisor were employees of an outside provider that the investigated school system contracts with to provide the Alternative School and other programs. The teachers and supervisor only worked with students in this program.

Students were placed by the investigated school system in the Alternative Program as a punitive measure. Students placed in this program were found guilty of the most severe violations identified in the school system's discipline code. Violations of students that attended this program ranged from possession of a weapon to chronic disciplinary behavior. Students were given an option to attend this program while serving long-term suspensions from the traditional school.

The study participants identified a successful outcome for Alterative Program students as earning credit towards graduation. One participant suggested that "these students will be dropouts if this program doesn't keep them in school and give them some chance of making progress." As for what caused students to be successful in this program, the participants identified parental involvement, student self-motivation, relationships with Alternative Program staff, and graduation coach supervision as elements that impacted student success.

Program approaches for the Alternative Program included a small learning environment situated in a nontraditional location. Study participants suggested that having their learning centers in commercial areas created a non-threatening learning environment in which students

that were previously unsuccessful in traditional schools could succeed. Additionally, the shortened school day of 3 hours provided an opportunity for students to work a job or care for younger siblings. With multiple sessions each day, students were afforded the option of attending morning, mid-day, or afternoon sessions.

Although students in the Alternative Program were not required to complete community service, the participants indicated that multiple opportunities were provided for students to be involved in community activities. Some students had volunteered at the local food pantry whereas others had raised money for Relay for Life. These opportunities were provided by the Alternative Program staff as an effort to teach students the importance of helping others and not always serving one's self.

Study participants did not identify specific efforts to provide postsecondary guidance to students, but they did pinpoint informal practices that helped students identify long-term goals. These informal contacts, in addition to the work conducted by the school system's graduation coaches, were considered by the interview participants to be sufficient in meeting student needs for advisement. A low student to teacher ratio was also identified as something that enabled staff to address the individualized needs of students.

As stated by the study participants, the instructional approach at the Alternative Program was a competency-based educational model. When students entered the program, they were given a diagnostic assessment that determined their academic skill set. Each student was then prescribed a curriculum that met school system expectations and an individualized learning plan was created. As students displayed competency or mastered the curriculum, they advanced through the content. The content was aligned with the state curriculum standards and included a component to prepare students for state exit exams.

The participants identified Dr. William Glasser's Choice Theory as the primary discipline approach utilized in the Alternative Program. This approach focused on Glasser's Seven Caring Habits of supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences. Staff members tried to utilize these practices while working with students in the alternative setting. In addition, getting students to accept other components of Glasser's theory was noted as impactful to student behavior. The other components incorporated students accepting the concepts that all behavior is chosen and the only person whose behavior we can control is our own.

Interview participants suggested that the Choice Theory helped enhance the culture at the Alternative Program, but no specific measures had been put in place to include students in the decision-making process. Developing relationships with students in the program was identified by all participants as a contributing factor to enhance school culture. Establishing a supportive environment that revolved around positive reinforcements was described as significantly impacting outcomes for students in the program.

Synopsis of Career Institute Interviews

The interview participants for the Career Institute included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers were full-time teachers in the program with one an employee of the investigated school system and the other an employee of a local technical college. The supervisor was a central office level administrator responsible for this program and all career-technical programs in the district.

Students attended the Career Institute as either a traditional high school student or a dually enrolled high school student. Traditional high school students were recruited for

participation in two programs: broadcast video production and graphic arts. Dual enrollment students had options that included automotive technology, drafting, computer information systems, cosmetology, dental assisting, early childhood development, heating and air conditioning, law enforcement, patient care, pharmacy, and welding. There were no minimum entry requirements for students entering the high school programs.

Dually enrolled students were required to meet entrance qualifications as determined by the technical college. Students that entered as a dual enrollment student were eligible for all programs offered by the technical college and were eligible to earn certifications and/or degrees from the technical college. A typical school day for a Career Institute student consisted of a half-day spent at the base high school in core academic subjects and a half-day spent in the Career Institute courses.

Successful outcomes for students attending the Career Institute were identified as creating professional quality projects, earning credit for their respective courses, earning college credit, and earning professional certification. The interview participants perceived the Career Institute to be very effective and significantly relevant to student needs.

One study participant indicated that “a primary objective found at the Career Institute was to connect students with the workforce and we effectively meet that objective.” Identifying and placing students in internships, work study programs, and/or collaborative projects with businesses and community organizations were vitally important. In addition, students were encouraged, but not required to participate in community service projects.

Providing college and career guidance to Career Institute students was not identified by the study participants as a primary focus in the program. However, students attended the Career Institute for part of their school day and continued to receive guidance in their base high school.

The participants identified representatives from business and industry as in-the-field mentors for their students. These persons were brought in to present to classes and discuss real-world applications of concepts the students were learning.

The instructional approaches identified at the Career Institute covered a broad range of strategies. Direct instruction was identified as a method used frequently to introduce new ideas, whereas student-driven projects were used more often to give students a hands-on learning opportunity. The interview participants indicated that all courses in the Career Institute were taught at the college level of rigor and with a level of expectations typically found in college level courses.

Although a specific behavioral approach was not identified, the study participants indicated that each disciplinary situation is addressed appropriately. In the most severe cases of student misbehavior, students have been removed from the program. For minor incidents, teachers were encouraged to address students as if they were adults and focus on using positive reinforcements. Participants cited one-on-one conversations with students as the most effective way to curb behavior concerns.

To promote a positive school culture, one teacher participant suggested that “student input is considered for class decisions” and “every decision made within our classroom is made with student input.” Developing relationships based on trust and respect was identified as a critical component of success and one that enhanced the culture of the school.

Synopsis of Behavior Academy Interviews

The interview participants for the Behavior Academy program included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers were full-time Behavior Academy teachers and had no

other teaching responsibilities during the instructional day. The supervisor was a school system administrator and was responsible for supervising this program as well as other special areas.

The program supervisor indicated that "students were placed in the Behavior Academy when they met eligibility requirements for emotional behavioral disorders (EBD)." Placement was determined by the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) committee, and state guidelines were followed. Students in this program attended classes within an isolated facility, but on the campus of a traditional high school. Classes in this program were similar to traditional classes, but had significantly reduced class sizes.

A successful outcome for students in Behavior Academy was identified as "meeting IEP goals and objectives." One teacher participant identified success as "students learning to care about persons other than themselves." For students to be successful in this program, the participants responded that students could show growth in academic and emotional aspects. Students who improved their ability to communicate with their peers and adults were also considered to be successful. The participants responded that the program was effective for many students, but not all students had successful outcomes.

As described by the interview participants, the Behavior Academy was a nontraditional program which served a student's whole school day. Although the Behavior Academy did not provide vocational training, students could attend vocational classes in the traditional school building when their IEP committee deemed it appropriate. Additionally, students in this program were eligible for work study programs. The Behavior Academy did not have a community service requirement, but students were afforded opportunities for service learning.

Postsecondary guidance was identified as a primary component in the Behavior Academy. The study participants identified vocational rehabilitation and the development of

transition plans for students as critical aspects of guiding students. Additionally, a strong mentoring program was identified in the Behavior Academy. The participants stated that social workers sought to identify positive role models that were willing to work with "the baggage that these EBD students can have."

Study participants stated that the instructional model in the Behavior Academy was direct instruction with immediate feedback. The delivery system was a slower pace than a traditional setting and technology was used to support instruction. "Differentiated instruction and flexible grouping" were cited by one teacher as effective instructional strategies utilized in this program. In addition to focusing on the state curriculum, individualized learning plans enabled students to progress towards goals that were unique to their specific program.

One interview participant did not feel that learning opportunities in the Behavior Academy were comparable to those of traditional students. This participant stated "many special educators are not highly qualified as teachers in the content areas would be in a traditional setting." However, another participant indicated that students had more opportunities for learning because a team of highly trained educators worked with each student.

According to the supervisor participant, the Behavior Academy "sought to improve or correct inappropriate behavior, and teaching replacement skills is a key component of the program." Scripted feedback was used in order to address the inappropriate behaviors that students in the program often displayed. As the supervisor described,

> First, empathy statements are used. Then, the inappropriate behavior is identified. Next, a replacement behavior is identified and/or modeled. A rationale statement is provided to support the replacement behavior. Finally, students are afforded the opportunity to demonstrate the behavior in the appropriate manner.

According to interview participants, the Behavior Academy relied heavily on a point/level system. Students were rewarded through the use of points that can be exchanged for

tangibles as well as privileges. Positive reinforcement and powerful praise were essential pieces of the program. Functional behavioral assessments were completed prior to writing an individual behavior intervention plan. The function of the behavior was identified in order to find ways to address the target behavior. The behavior intervention plan was reviewed every 9 weeks to determine its effectiveness. As the behaviors changed for the better or for the worse, the behavior intervention plan was adjusted.

In the Behavior Academy, the teaching of replacement skills represented an effort to develop a school culture that provided students with choices. One teacher indicated that "learning new behaviors allowed students to make better decisions and to learn from mistakes." Teacher participants sought to empower students frequently by gathering input when program decisions were being made. The participants suggested that student involvement in program decisions had improved the culture of the program.

Synopsis of Learning Center Interviews

The interview participants for the Learning Center included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers were full-time Learning Center teachers and had no other teaching responsibilities during the instructional day. The supervisor was responsible for and was considered to be the equivalent of a principal for this program.

As explained by the program supervisor, "students that were at-risk of not graduating on time or were experiencing social challenges at their base high school were identified by the graduation coach as potential Learning Center students." These students completed an application and were interviewed to determine if the Learning Center was the best placement

option for each student. Additionally, each student completed a basic skills assessment and was required to score above a minimum threshold before being accepted into the program.

When asked to describe a typical day at the Learning Center, a teacher stated that "students began each school day with inspirational music and a motivational message delivered by a staff member." Students also started each day by reciting the Learning Center Creed and completing a life skills lesson. After these daily rituals were completed, students attended academic and elective classes in a small learning environment.

The study participants identified successful outcomes for students in the Learning Center as "improved attendance, improved academic achievement, improved self-esteem, and an increase in student focus on future goals." The participants identified relationships with parents as a primary factor that contributed to student success. This program was perceived by the participants as effective in meeting student needs.

As indicated by interview participants, a program approach at the Learning Center was the incorporation of career goals into each student's learning plan. The career goals were transformed into a culminating project that each student was required to present for graduation. Students presented their final projects to a panel of judges made of community volunteers. The panel of judges scored the student projects and determined whether each student had adequately met the requirements for graduation.

Another program approach identified by the staff at the Learning Center was service learning. Each Learning Center student was required to complete at least one service learning project each semester. Projects varied in nature, but were linked to the curricular goals of academic classes the students were taking. The projects were completed in the community and intended to teach students the value of helping others.

According to the study participants, the Learning Center also had a strong advisement and mentoring component. “Through partnerships with guidance counselors at the base high schools, Learning Center staff provides frequent advisement sessions that helped students establish future goals.” Each student was assigned a mentor who helped monitor student performance and used the student-set goals as a foundation to motivate students. Additionally, mentors were identified based on their occupation and were matched to students with similar career interests.

The instructional delivery system at the Learning Center consisted of a mastery-based, technology driven curriculum and project-based learning opportunities. Learning facilitators helped guide students in the self-paced instructional processes and they provided supplementary assignments when necessary. When compared to the learning opportunities in the base high school, the participants suggested that Learning Center students “had greater chances for success.” This determination was based on lower teacher to student ratios and more individualized instruction.

A specific disciplinary approach was not identified as a part of the Learning Center. The supervisor indicated that “some minor infractions were addressed on an individual basis, but a zero tolerance approach was taken for serious offenses.” Students who had committed any major violation were removed from the program immediately. Positive reinforcement was used in the form of parent phone calls when students behaved appropriately. One participant stated “many of our students have experienced limited academic success so it is a treat for them and their parents to receive phone calls of a positive nature.”

Although there was no formal process for student involvement in the decision-making process, one teacher suggested that “students often share ideas with staff members that are then

shared with leadership and result in changes." This receptiveness to feedback helped the staff create a supportive environment that relied heavily upon building relationships with students and trusting their opinions. In addition, the participants identified out-of-school activities which they attended to support their students. By doing so, "the students see staff truly cares about them and that enhances the culture of the Learning Center."

Synopsis of Night School Program Interviews

The interview participants for the Night School program included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers and supervisor were employees of an outside provider that the investigated school system contracts with to provide the Night School and other programs. The supervisor oversaw this program in collaboration with others that supervised various day programs.

The participants indicated that attending the Night School program was optional for students. The program supervisor stated that "students are not placed, referred, or assigned to attend this program; the only requirement is a minimum age of 16." Most students attended the night school as their entire school program, but some students opted to pay a fee and take courses in this program that were in addition to their traditional day school.

Enrollment in the Night School program was determined on a first-come first-served basis and students were not guaranteed admittance each mini-semester. However, the participants prioritized enrollment to first accept seniors that could possibly graduate that school year. One teacher suggested "students remaining enrolled in school or graduating is a successful outcome for the Night School program." The program supervisor suggested that the biggest

indicator of success was “getting students within reach of graduating to actually accomplish that feat during the school year.”

Other than having classes at night, the participants did not identify a specific philosophical or program approach for the Night School. Although the program did not have a vocational element, students had an opportunity to be in a work study program in which they earned school credit for having a job. Additionally, students in the Night School program were not required to participate in service learning projects, but were provided multiple opportunities to perform community service.

Study participants described the Night School instructional delivery as a “mastery-based online curriculum.” In this program, certified teachers were accessible to students during instructional time and helped guide them through curricular modules. The Night School permitted students to accelerate their program by earning up to 12 credits per year.

The Night School program participants did not identify a specific disciplinary model or approach for handling unruly students. One teacher stated “we rely on communicating expectations to students and work to correct inappropriate behaviors.” Because enrollment in this program was optional for students, the study participants declared that students were held to high behavioral expectations. Failure to comply with guidelines resulted in removal from the program.

School culture in the Night School program was perceived to be a positive aspect of the program. Teachers used verbal cues to encourage students and indicated that they kept open lines of communication with students. Whereas many schools or programs would rely on communicating with parents, the Night School approach was to communicate directly with the student and to treat them as adults. “Talking directly to the student and not the parent gives the student ownership in their behavior.”

Synopsis of Last Chance Program Interviews

The interview participants for the Last Chance program included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers were full-time Last Chance teachers and had no other teaching responsibilities during the instructional day. The supervisor was an employee of an outside provider in which the investigated school system contracts with on an annual basis. The supervisor oversaw this program and collaborated with others to supervise the Last Chance program.

For placement in the Last Chance program, students were identified as at-risk of dropping out of their traditional school. Students in this program had fallen behind on credits or become disengaged in the traditional setting. One study participant suggested that this program was "the last ditch effort of the school to keep a student from giving up." Students in this program did not have minimum entry requirements and did not have to qualify with a basic skills assessment. However, before being placed in this program each student was referred by their graduation coach, and approved by the building principal and a central office administrator.

A successful outcome for a student in the Last Chance program was measured with earning credits. "If students are progressing towards meeting graduation requirements, they are considered as being successful." Because students in this program were the most severe cases of potential dropouts, meeting the stringent attendance guidelines of the Last Chance program was considered a success by one study participant. All interview participants considered the Last Chance program as an effective alternative for at-risk students.

The approach at the Last Chance program was very simplistic and did not encompass anything other than earning credits. This program did not have work study options, hands-on instruction, or any vocational training. The primary goal for students in this program was to

make incremental gains toward graduation and to simplify the educational process for students. Students followed an individualized learning plan and received frequent visits from their graduation coach. Although no formal mentoring component existed for this program, all study participants indicated that they had served this role on multiple occasions.

As explained by study participants, instructional delivery in the Last Chance program was accomplished via a mastery-based online curriculum. Students also received supportive instruction and special education services from certified staff. Students in this program worked at their own pace, but were prodded frequently to remain on-task and progress toward their goals. Students who had not passed state graduation tests were required to spend a portion of each day working on test preparation web sites.

The Last Chance program did not have a prescribed disciplinary approach. One teacher stated “we rely on building relationships with individual students and try to redirect negative behavior.” Because this program was targeted for students most at risk of dropping out, the interview participants suggested that an over-aggressive disciplinary approach would deter students from staying in the program.

To develop a positive school culture in the Last Chance program, teachers used frequent positive encouragement to motivate students. As one study participant stated, “Keeping students focused on the reason they were there was our primary goal.” All participants indicated that they talked to students about “getting a diploma” and “walking across the stage.” Building a relationship with each student was the focus of the program supervisor. This effort was cited as the most effective way to build a supportive environment for students.

Synopsis of Credit Recovery Program Interviews

The study participants for the credit recovery program included two teachers and one program supervisor. The teachers were full-time credit recovery teachers and had no other teaching responsibilities during the instructional day. The supervisor was a high school administrator and was responsible for this and all other instructional programs at the high school.

Students were placed in the Credit Recovery program when they had failed a traditional class. Placement was based on the students' planned graduation date, schedule, and seat availability. Students in this program followed a prescriptive curriculum while using a web-based instructional delivery system. "During a typical school day, students may complete warm-up activities, pre-quizzes, lectures, vocabulary, science and math labs, text readings, and post-quizzes." Students must display mastery of the curriculum with their performance on topic tests.

A successful outcome for students in this program was identified as "earning credit toward graduation." One teacher participant stated, "Success on state created end-of-course tests is how I determine success." For students to be successful in this program, the interview participants responded that students must pay attention to the lessons and focus on completing coursework. The participants considered their program as effective to meet the needs of most students. One teacher suggested that "the program is effective for 85% of students."

The Credit Recovery program was a nontraditional program that served a portion of a traditional student's school day. Although the Credit Recovery program did not provide hands-on opportunities to develop work skills, there was a course available that was titled Career Skills. This course guided students on creating resumes and preparing for interviews. The credit recovery program did not have a community service requirement or component, but students were eligible to participate in clubs that were available at the school.

One study participant indicated that “students in my program are required to complete a graduation plan,” while the other study participants did not identify a guidance component. Whereas a formal mentoring program was not identified as a part of the Credit Recovery program, all participants viewed their role as one that encompassed multiple opportunities to mentor at-risk students.

The instructional model in the Credit Recovery program was a mastery-based learning approach. The delivery system was web-based and required technology that supported video streaming. Students followed a prescriptive curriculum and proceeded through learning modules at their own pace. All study participants identified the flexibility of the curricula as a major benefit for this program. One interview participant stated, “There may be 25 different curricula going on at one time in my class.” Despite the variety of curricula, the participants suggested that the learning opportunities and instructional quality for students in this program were comparable to those in a traditional setting.

No specific behavioral model was identified for the Credit Recovery program. However, the study participants stated that they considered the Credit Recovery program to be much more structured than other classes. As indicated by one supervisor, “students are permitted three warnings for inappropriate behavior that could include interfering with the learning of others or improper use of the internet. On the third violation, the student is removed from the program.”

Behavioral assessments and/or behavior plans were not identified by study participants as components of the Credit Recovery program. Expectations for student behavior were communicated to students on their first day in the program and revisited daily. Additionally, rules and guidelines for student behavior were posted in the Credit Recovery classroom.

Students in the Credit Recovery program were included in the decision-making process when they were in need of multiple courses. One teacher suggested “students can choose to take one course before another.” Students were also empowered to decide what components of the curriculum they would complete each day. “If they felt more like listening to a lecture or reading text, they could choose what fit their mood at that time.”

The study participants identified a need to promote a positive learning environment and a culture that was supportive of students. Establishing relationships with students in this program was identified as a critical component due to the academic history of students in the program. One participant stated that “these are the students that have already failed in a traditional class and my program may be their only hope.” Getting parents involved through frequent communication was also cited as an aspect that enhanced the culture of the program.

Themes from Interviews

Several themes emerged from the interview data (Table 2): (1) student outcomes, (2) program approaches, (3) instructional model, (4) school culture, and (5) placement criteria.

Table 2

Interview Themes

Theme 1	Student outcomes
Theme 2	Program approaches
Theme 3	Instructional model
Theme 4	School culture
Theme 5	Placement criteria

Theme 1: Student outcomes. During the interview process, teachers and supervisors at the Alternative Program, Career Institute, Night School, Last Chance Program, and Credit Recovery talked about students making progress toward graduation as the student outcome of most concern. When asked for clarification, participants made reference to students earning credits as the most significant measure of student and program success. Participants from the Career Institute were the only ones who mentioned students earning any certification or college credit as a measure of program success.

Theme 2: Program approaches. Study participants from five of the seven programs identified a small learning environment and a low student to teacher ratio as important aspects for their program to be successful. Study participants from five of the seven programs also indicated that students attended their program for a lesser amount of time than they would be required to attend a traditional school. Time spent in the nontraditional program ranged from 90 minutes to 3 hours.

Another program approach that emerged from the interviews was service learning. Study participants from five programs made reference to providing community service opportunities or connecting students with community organizations in which they could volunteer. Study participants in six programs indicated that specific measures were not in place to provide guidance to students. Only the Career Center participants indicated that postsecondary guidance was provided as an aspect of their program.

Theme 3: Instructional model. In six of the seven programs, the primary instructional model was computer-based. Study participants indicated that students worked through mastery-based modules and received supportive instruction from teachers in the classroom. The specific computer-based models were contracted through different vendors, but were each aligned with

the state curriculum and required teachers on site to administer assessments. Only the Career Center participants indicated that their instructional model relied on direct teacher instruction.

Theme 4: School culture. All of the study participants referenced teacher-student relationships as a critical component of overall program success. Additionally, three programs' participants identified a structured model for teachers to serve as mentors or for program staff to identify outside persons as mentors. Nonetheless, establishing appropriate relationships with students was a pervasive effort referenced by study participants. Participants in three of the seven programs mentioned student involvement in the decision-making process as impacting the culture of their program.

Theme 5: Placement criteria. Study participants in five of the seven programs indicated that students attended their program by choice. In the other two programs, students were placed in the program and did not have another option. In two of the five programs that students attended by choice, minimum skill levels were measured using a standardized assessment and the results determined whether or not students were permitted in the program.

Archival Data

Transcripts were reviewed to document course completion and credit earned for each student who attended a nontraditional high school program during the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 3

Alternative Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "A"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status at Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	16	B	9.5	4/4	100
2	F	16	B	6.0	4/4	100
3	M	16	B	1.0	3/4	75
4	M	18	B	12.5	8/8	100
5	M	16	B	3.0	4/4	100
6	F	16	B	3.0	3/4	75
7	M	17	B	7.5	2/4	50
8	F	16	B	5.0	4/4	100
9	F	16	W	10.0	8/8	100
10	F	17	B	14.5	4/4	100
11	M	15	B	3.0	0/4	0
12	M	17	B	3.0	4/4	100
13	F	17	B	14.5	8/8	100
14	M	17	B	5.0	4/8	50
15	M	15	B	1.0	6/8	75
16	M	15	W	7.0	4/4	100
17	F	16	B	3.0	4/4	100
18	F	17	B	12.5	8/8	100
19	M	17	M	9.0	8/8	100
20	M	16	B	2.0	8/8	100
21	M	18	B	13.0	6/8	75
22	M	18	B	8.0	4/4	100
23	M	16	B	0.0	4/4	100
24	M	17	H	3.0	4/4	100
25	M	18	B	13.0	4/4	100
26	F	17	W	6.5	8/8	100
27	M	17	B	5.5	8/8	100
28	M	16	W	3.0	4/4	100
29	F	18	B	11.0	4/4	100
30	F	16	B	0.0	4/4	100
31	M	17	B	1.5	6/8	75
32	M	15	B	0.0	3/4	75
33	M	17	B	1.0	4/4	100
34	M	18	B	7.0	4/4	100
35	M	18	B	7.5	6/8	75
36	M	19	B	11.5	4/4	100
			Total		175/196	89

Table 4

Alternative Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "B"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status at Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	M	18	B	11.0	0/4	0
2	M	18	W	10.0	0/4	0
3	F	18	B	13.5	0/4	0
4	M	17	W	19.0	2/4	50
5	M	17	B	21.5	4/4	100
6	M	17	W	12.0	0/4	0
7	M	17	B	16.5	2/4	50
8	M	18	W	17.5	4/4	100
9	M	18	B	19.5	4/4	100
10	M	17	W	11.0	7/9	78
11	M	16	W	12.5	8/8	100
12	M	16	A	15.0	4/5	80
13	M	16	W	12.0	3/9	33
14	M	16	W	10.0	3/9	33
15	M	16	H	13.0	4/8	50
16	M	16	W	16.0	4/4	100
17	M	18	B	12.0	4/4	100
18	M	16	W	10.0	4/4	100
19	M	17	B	7.5	5/8	63
20	M	16	W	11.0	8/8	100
21	M	17	W	10.0	4/4	100
22	M	17	H	7.5	4/4	100
23	F	17	W	12.5	8/8	100
24	M	17	B	14.5	4/4	100
25	M	15	W	2.0	0/4	0
26	M	16	W	0.0	4/4	100
27	F	15	B	8.0	8/8	100
28	F	15	W	8.0	8/8	100
29	F	16	H	8.0	4/4	100
				Total	114/160	71

Table 5

Alternative Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "C"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status at Time of Entry	Courses Passed /Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	14	B	2	4/4	100
2	M	17	B	16	4/4	100
3	M	16	B	4	8/8	100
4	M	17	B	11	4/4	100
5	M	16	H	1	4/5	80
6	M	18	W	14	4/4	100
7	F	16	B	14	8/8	100
8	M	14	B	0	0/4	0
9	M	14	W	3	4/5	80
10	M	17	B	18	3/4	75
11	M	15	B	0	3/5	60
12	M	16	B	19	4/4	100
13	M	15	H	0	3/4	75
14	F	16	W	2	0/4	0
15	F	15	W	8	1/5	20
16	M	15	B	1.5	4/4	100
17	M	16	B	0	3/8	38
18	M	15	B	0	0/4	0
19	F	16	W	14	4/4	100
20	M	15	B	1.5	2/5	40
21	M	14	B	0	2/5	40
22	M	14	B	1.5	3/5	60
23	M	16	H	0	5/8	63
24	M	16	B	0	2/4	50
			Total		79/119	66

Table 6

Alternative Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "D"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status at Time of Entry	Courses Passed /Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	15	W	7.0	4/4	100
2	M	14	B	0.0	4/4	100
3	M	16	B	6.0	6/8	75
4	F	17	B	11.0	2/4	50
5	M	16	H	6.5	7/8	83
6	M	17	W	16.0	4/4	100
7	F	18	B	17.0	8/8	100
8	M	15	B	2.0	0/4	0
9	M	16	W	9.0	4/5	80
10	F	16	B	11.0	2/4	50
11	M	15	B	0.0	3/5	60
12	M	16	B	14.0	4/4	100
13	M	15	W	6.0	3/4	75
14	M	16	B	7.0	1/4	25
15	M	15	W	8.0	2/4	50
16	M	17	B	11.5	4/4	100
17	M	16	B	4.0	6/8	75
18	M	14	B	0.0	0/4	0
19	M	15	W	6.0	4/4	100
20	M	17	B	13.0	2/5	40
21	M	16	B	8.0	4/5	80
22	M	16	B	4.5	3/5	60
23	M	15	H	3.0	7/8	83
24	M	16	B	2.0	2/4	50
25	M	17	B	12.0	6/8	75
26	M	18	W	17.5	7/8	83
27	M	16	B	5.0	4/4	100
28	M	15	H	6.0	3/4	75
			Total		106/145	73

Table 7

Alternative Program: 2009-2010 Student Data Summary

School	# of Students in Program	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
A	36	175/196	89
B	29	114/160	71
C	24	79/119	66
D	28	106/145	73
Total	117	474/620	76

Table 8

Career Institute: 2009-2010 Student Data

Program	# of Students Enrolled in Program	# of Students Earning Credit in Program	% Credit Earned
Auto Tech	8	8	100
CAD	10	10	100
Comp. Inf. Sys.	35	34	97
Cosmetology	15	15	100
Dental Asst.	18	18	100
Early Childhood	24	22	92
Graphic Arts	31	31	100
HVAC	7	7	100
Law Enforcement	13	13	100
Patient Care	50	49	98
Pharmacy Tech.	16	16	100
Video Production	44	44	100
Welding	5	5	100
Total	276	272	99

Table 9

Behavior Academy: 2009-2010 Student Data

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	M	18	B	17.0	7/8	88
2	M	17	B	12.0	5/8	63
3	M	16	W	6.5	8/8	100
4	F	15	H	8.0	8/8	100
5	M	16	W	12.0	6/8	75
6	M	17	W	17.0	7/8	88
7	F	19	B	20.0	4/8	50
8	M	17	W	15.5	5/8	63
9	M	15	W	0.0	2/8	25
10	M	15	B	3.0	4/8	50
11	M	14	A	0.0	7/8	88
12	F	16	H	14.0	6/8	75
13	F	15	W	8.0	5/8	63
14	M	17	W	19.0	7/8	88
15	M	18	W	22.0	4/8	50
16	M	17	W	16.0	8/8	100
17	F	16	B	12.0	6/8	75
18	M	15	W	5.0	7/8	88
19	M	15	B	8.0	8/8	100
20	M	16	B	7.5	7/8	88
21	M	14	B	0.0	6/8	75
22	M	17	H	11.5	7/8	88
23	F	15	W	4.0	4/8	50
			Total		138/184	75

Table 10

Learning Center: 2009-2010 Student Data School "A"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	15	W	7.0	8/8	100
2	M	18	B	16.0	4/4	100
3	M	16	B	19.0	4/4	100
4	M	19	B	23.0	4/4	100
5	M	17	W	23.0	4/4	100
6	M	17	H	17.0	5/5	100
7	M	17	W	15.0	8/8	100
8	M	17	B	7.0	8/8	100
9	F	17	W	27.0	4/4	100
10	F	18	B	14.5	4/4	100
11	M	16	B	12.0	8/8	100
12	F	16	W	9.0	8/8	100
13	F	18	W	22.5	4/4	100
14	F	17	W	28.0	4/4	100
15	F	17	B	20.0	8/8	100
16	F	16	W	17.0	4/4	100
17	F	15	W	9.0	8/8	100
18	M	19	W	21.5	4/4	100
19	M	15	W	8.5	8/8	100
20	F	16	B	10.0	0/4	0
			Total		109/113	96

Table 11

Learning Center: 2009-2010 Student Data School "B"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	17	W	21.0	0/4	0
2	F	17	W	20.0	8/8	100
3	F	15	B	0.0	0/4	0
4	F	16	W	16.0	0/4	0
5	M	16	W	13.0	4/4	100
6	F	16	W	13.0	3/4	75
7	F	16	B	8.0	0/4	0
8	F	16	W	15.0	4/4	100
9	F	17	B	8.0	8/8	100
10	F	17	M	8.0	8/8	100
11	M	17	H	7.0	4/4	100
12	M	17	H	7.0	4/4	100
13	M	17	W	6.0	8/8	100
14	M	17	M	10.0	8/8	100
			Total		59/76	78

Table 12

Learning Center: 2009-2010 Student Data School "C"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	16	B	3.0	8/8	100
2	M	16	B	16.0	4/4	100
3	F	17	B	4.0	8/8	100
4	F	17	W	8.0	4/4	100
5	F	17	H	11.0	8/8	100
6	M	18	W	16.0	4/4	100
7	M	17	M	14.0	4/4	100
8	M	17	B	13.0	8/8	100
9	F	18	B	16.0	3/4	75
10	F	18	B	14.0	4/4	100
11	F	17	B	19.0	4/4	100
12	F	17	A	24.0	5/5	100
13	F	16	W	13.5	7/8	87.5
14	M	16	W	6.0	8/8	100
15	M	18	W	17.0	4/4	100
16	M	16	W	16.0	4/4	100
17	F	18	B	21.0	7/7	100
18	F	18	B	21.0	4/4	100
19	F	17	W	22.0	4/4	100
20	F	18	B	15.0	8/8	100
21	M	19	H	22.5	4/4	100
22	M	19	H	21.0	4/4	100
			Total		118/120	98

Table 13

Learning Center: 2009-2010 Student Data School "D"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	18	H	21.0	4/4	100
2	F	16	H	8.0	4/4	100
3	F	18	H	25.5	4/4	100
4	F	18	H	25.0	4/4	100
5	F	18	H	14.0	8/8	100
6	M	17	W	4.5	7/8	87.5
7	M	17	W	15.0	4/4	100
8	F	18	H	12.0	8/8	100
9	M	19	B	17.0	4/4	100
10	M	17	B	20.0	4/4	100
11	F	17	B	11.0	8/8	100
12	F	19	B	26.0	3/3	100
13	F	17	W	23.0	4/4	100
14	F	16	B	10.0	3/4	75
15	F	16	B	12.0	4/4	100
16	F	17	B	17.0	7/7	100
17	M	16	W	14.5	3/4	75
18	F	17	B	11.0	4/4	100
19	F	18	W	19.0	5/5	100
				Total	92/95	97

Table 14

Learning Center 2009-2010 Student Data Summary

School	# of Students in Program	Courses Passed/Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
A	20	109/113	96
B	14	59/76	78
C	22	118/120	98
D	19	92/95	97
Total	75	378/404	94

Table 15

Night School: 2009-2010 Student Data School "A"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	17	W	18.0	6/6	100
2	M	17	B	11.0	11/12	92
3	M	17	B	10.0	10/12	83
4	F	17	H	17.0	6/6	100
5	M	18	W	19.0	5/5	100
6	F	17	W	14.5	10/10	100
7	F	16	W	10.5	7/9	78
8	F	18	B	17.5	6/6	100
9	F	18	B	18.0	5/5	100
10	M	17	W	11.0	8/9	89
11	F	17	B	18.0	6/6	100
12	F	18	W	20.0	6/6	100
13	F	17	W	12.0	7/9	78
14	F	17	W	13.5	8/9	89
15	M	17	B	11.0	6/6	100
16	M	18	B	18.0	6/6	100
17	M	16	B	8.5	9/9	100
18	M	17	W	6.0	1/6	17
19	M	17	W	6.0	11/12	92
20	M	16	W	10.0	3/3	100
21	F	16	W	10.0	0/3	0
22	F	18	B	19.0	3/3	100
23	F	18	B	17.0	6/6	100
24	F	18	A	27.0	3/3	100
25	M	18	B	30.0	1/1	100
26	M	17	B	21.5	3/3	100
27	M	18	B	22.5	3/3	100
28	F	18	B	23.5	3/3	100
29	M	17	W	16.5	7/12	58
30	M	18	B	16.0	9/9	100
31	M	17	W	12.0	7/9	78
32	M	17	B	10.0	0/3	0
33	F	17	B	23.5	3/3	100
			Total		185/213	87

Table 16

Night School: 2009-2010 Student Data School "B"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	17	B	21.0	3/3	100
2	M	18	B	22.0	3/3	100
3	F	18	M	8.5	7/9	78
4	M	18	B	19.5	6/6	100
5	F	16	B	6.0	12/12	100
6	M	18	W	24.0	3/3	100
7	F	18	B	20.5	6/6	100
8	F	16	B	6.0	6/6	100
9	F	19	W	19.0	3/3	100
10	F	16	W	14.0	10/12	83
11	M	16	W	4.5	9/9	100
12	M	18	B	8.0	6/6	100
13	F	17	B	5.0	12/12	100
14	F	17	W	15.5	6/9	67
15	M	17	W	7.0	1/3	33
16	M	17	B	18.0	6/6	100
17	F	16	W	8.0	3/3	100
18	F	17	M	13.0	3/6	50
19	M	17	B	9.0	3/6	50
20	M	18	W	7.0	9/12	75
21	M	17	B	8.5	6/6	100
22	M	17	B	6.0	6/6	100
23	M	17	W	2.0	3/6	50
24	M	17	B	4.0	9/12	75
25	M	17	W	11.0	9/9	100
26	M	18	B	11.0	12/12	100
27	F	18	B	10.0	9/9	100
28	F	18	B	4.5	12/12	100
29	M	18	B	8.5	6/6	100
30	M	17	B	9.5	6/6	100
31	M	18	B	7.5	9/9	100
32	F	17	W	13.0	9/12	75
33	F	18	H	11.5	9/12	75
34	F	18	B	14.5	3/3	100
35	F	17	W	15.0	9/9	100
			Total		234/264	89

Table 17

Night School: 2009-2010 Student Data School "C"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	17	M	8.5	6/6	100
2	M	18	B	16.0	9/12	75
3	M	17	B	8.0	9/12	75
4	F	16	A	6.0	3/3	100
5	M	18	B	5.0	6/6	100
6	M	19	B	14.5	6/6	100
7	F	19	B	15.5	8/8	100
8	M	20	B	22.0	3/4	75
9	F	19	B	22.5	3/3	100
10	F	18	W	22.0	3/3	100
11	M	20	B	17.0	6/6	100
12	M	19	W	17.5	6/8	75
13	M	18	W	9.0	9/12	75
14	F	19	B	19.5	5/5	100
15	M	20	H	16.0	6/6	100
16	M	19	W	4.0	9/12	75
17	M	18	W	11.0	9/9	100
18	F	18	B	11.5	9/12	75
19	F	19	B	18.0	6/6	100
20	M	19	B	22.0	3/3	100
21	F	19	B	23.0	3/3	100
22	M	19	B	8.0	3/6	50
23	M	18	B	2.0	12/12	100
24	F	18	B	3.0	12/12	100
25	F	19	B	19.0	3/3	100
26	W	19	B	21.0	2/2	100
27	W	18	W	6.5	9/9	100
28	F	18	B	5.5	9/12	75
29	F	18	B	13.0	6/6	100
30	F	18	B	16.5	6/8	75
31	F	18	B	12.5	3/6	50
32	F	18	H	1.5	12/12	100
33	F	18	W	18.0	6/8	75
34	M	19	B	15.0	8/8	100
35	F	18	B	12.0	6/8	75
36	F	20	B	11.0	6/6	100
37	F	20	B	15.0	9/12	75
38	M	17	B	3.0	9/9	100
39	F	19	B	21.0	3/3	100
40	F	18	B	15.5	6/8	75
41	F	19	B	17.0	6/6	100
42	F	20	B	16.5	6/8	75
43	F	19	B	22.5	3/3	100
44	M	20	B	5.5	9/12	75
45	M	19	B	14.5	6/9	67
46	F	20	B	18.0	6/6	100
47	M	19	B	18.0	6/6	100
48	F	19	W	17.0	5/5	100
49	F	18	W	7.0	9/12	75
			Total		313/362	86

Table 18

Night School: 2009-2010 Student Data School "D"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	M	17	B	4.0	9/9	100
2	F	18	B	13.5	9/9	100
3	M	17	B	12.5	9/12	75
4	F	17	B	12.5	3/3	100
5	M	18	B	8.0	3/3	100
6	M	18	B	8.0	6/6	100
7	M	17	W	15.0	6/6	100
8	F	18	W	12.0	6/6	100
9	M	19	B	17.0	9/9	100
10	F	17	B	13.0	3/3	100
11	M	17	B	11.0	3/6	50
12	M	17	B	20.0	3/3	100
13	F	17	W	14.0	9/9	100
14	M	19	B	10.0	6/6	100
15	F	18	B	23.0	3/3	100
16	F	18	W	20.0	3/3	100
17	M	19	B	15.0	8/8	100
18	M	17	W	22.0	3/3	100
19	F	17	B	11.0	6/6	100
20	M	17	B	17.5	6/6	100
21	M	18	B	18.5	5/5	100
22	F	19	B	26.0	2/2	100
23	M	17	H	15.0	0/3	0
24	F	18	B	7.5	7/9	78
25	M	19	B	25.0	2/4	50
26	M	18	W	17.0	6/6	100
27	M	16	W	16.0	6/6	100
28	M	18	H	24.0	3/3	100
29	F	18	B	21.0	3/3	100
30	F	18	B	9.0	8/9	89
31	F	18	B	21.0	3/3	100
32	M	18	W	15.0	8/8	100
33	M	19	W	26.0	2/2	100
34	F	17	W	22.0	3/3	100
35	F	18	W	18.0	6/6	100
36	M	18	W	22.0	2/2	100
37	M	19	W	21.0	3/3	100
38	M	19	W	23.0	1/1	100
39	F	18	B	15.0	8/8	100
40	M	17	W	10.0	2/6	33
41	F	17	A	24.0	1/1	100
				Total	194/212	92

Table 19

Night School: 2009-2010 Student Data Summary

School	# of Students in Program	Courses Passed / Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
A	33	185/213	87
B	35	234/264	89
C	49	313/362	86
D	41	194/212	92
Total	158	926/1051	88

Table 20

Last Chance Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "A"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	M	17	W	14.0	0/4	0
2	F	18	B	19.0	4/4	100
3	F	17	B	10.0	0/4	0
4	M	17	H	17.0	8/8	100
5	F	16	W	13.0	4/4	100
6	M	17	W	15.0	4/4	100
7	M	18	B	16.0	8/8	100
8	F	16	W	8.0	4/4	100
9	M	18	B	15.0	4/4	100
10	M	16	W	11.5	3/4	75
11	F	17	W	23.0	8/8	100
12	M	16	W	16.5	2/4	50
13	M	17	B	15.0	4/4	100
14	M	18	W	19.0	8/8	100
15	F	16	W	12.5	6/8	75
16	F	16	H	20.0	4/4	100
17	M	18	B	13.0	8/8	100
				Total	79/92	86

Table 21

Last Chance Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "B"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	18	B	19.0	4/4	100
2	F	16	M	18.0	3/4	75
3	F	16	B	6.0	0/4	0
4	M	18	B	19.0	4/4	100
5	M	18	H	22.0	3/3	100
6	M	15	W	0.0	4/4	100
7	F	17	W	18.0	0/4	0
8	F	17	W	22.5	2/2	100
9	F	17	W	20.0	0/4	0
10	M	17	W	16.0	0/4	0
11	M	18	B	16.0	0/4	0
12	F	17	W	21.0	0/4	0
13	F	17	W	19.5	4/4	100
14	F	18	B	16.0	0/4	0
15	F	18	W	19.5	7/8	87.5
				Total	31/61	51

Table 22

Last Chance Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "C"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	M	17	W	9.0	0/4	0
2	F	19	W	15.0	4/4	100
3	M	20	B	15.0	4/4	100
4	F	18	W	12.0	3/4	75
5	F	19	W	16.0	8/8	100
6	F	17	W	6.0	3/4	75
7	M	17	W	2.0	2/4	50
8	M	17	B	6.0	8/8	100
9	M	17	B	9.0	8/8	100
10	F	17	W	12.0	4/4	100
11	F	17	W	4.0	8/8	100
12	M	16	W	4.0	2/4	50
13	F	17	B	16.0	4/4	100
14	F	16	M	6.0	4/4	100
15	M	17	W	7.5	4/4	100
16	M	17	M	13.5	8/8	100
				Total	74/84	88

Table 23

Last Chance Program: 2009-2010 Student Data School "D"

Student	Gender	Age	Race	Credit Status At Time of Entry	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
1	F	16	W	5.0	3/4	75
2	F	17	W	11.0	4/4	100
3	M	17	H	15.0	8/8	100
4	F	16	B	7.0	6/8	75
5	F	17	W	13.0	4/4	100
6	M	18	W	17.0	3/4	75
7	F	16	W	5.0	8/8	100
8	M	18	B	18.0	3/4	75
9	F	17	W	2.0	4/4	100
10	F	17	H	15.5	8/8	100
11	M	19	W	21.0	4/4	100
				Total	55/60	92

Table 24

Last Chance Program: 2009-2010 Student Data Summary

School	# of Students in Program	Courses Passed/ Courses Taken	% Credit Earned
A	17	79/92	86
B	15	31/61	51
C	16	74/84	88
D	11	55/60	92
Total	59	239/287	83

Table 25

Credit Recovery: 2009-2010 Student Data

School	Fall 2009 Credits Completed/ Credits Attempted	Spring 2010 Credits Completed/ Credits Attempted	Summer 2010 Credits Completed/ Credits Attempted	2009-2010 Credits Completed / Credits Attempted	% Credit Earned
A	159/161	171/177	27/41	357/379	94
B	157/167	195/247	24/42	376/456	82
C	52/234	197/217	96/119	345/570	61
D	143/232	297/336	59/68	499/636	78
Total	511/794	860/977	206/270	1577/2041	77

Summary of Findings

Findings Related to the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What characteristics and approaches are identified within the seven nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system?

Teachers and a supervisor representing the Alternative Program reported that their program was founded upon Glaser's Choice Theory and that a low student to teacher ratio helped them implement their strategies. These study participants also described the small learning environment, shortened school day, and an opportunity for service learning as important aspects of their program. Teachers responded that including students in the decision-making process helped to improve school culture, and staff developing relationships with students had a significant impact on student success.

Representatives from the Career Institute were the only study participants who reported a teacher-driven instructional approach whereas others identified a technology-based instructional model. Study participants from the Career Institute intimated that their program was successful because students made a choice to be in their program and that students played an active role in

decision making. The interview responses also identified the opportunity for students to earn college credits and/or certificates as impacting student focus and motivation. Finally, Career Institute teachers and a supervisor agreed that teachers developing relationships and serving as unofficial mentors for students were critically important for their program to be successful.

Teachers and a supervisor from the Behavior Academy reported a behavioral replacement skills approach for helping students avoid disastrous behaviors. This approach, coupled with a small learning environment and low student to teacher ratio, enabled staff to better meet the needs of the emotionally disturbed students. Creating opportunities for service learning and helping students identify ways to help other people were referenced as impactful for helping students grow emotionally. Although students did not have a choice to be in this program, they were given choices while in the program. Study participants suggested that students were included in the decision-making process and that this practice positively impacted school culture.

Study participants from the Learning Center reflected on their efforts to develop a positive school culture that was inviting to students. With a school-wide service learning project and each student having to complete a culminating project for graduation, the teachers and supervisor were highly supportive of their project-based model. The participants reported that the computer-based instructional delivery system can become impersonal, but the hands-on projects allowed staff to build relationships with students. These relationships, coupled with a formal mentoring program and a structured postsecondary guidance plan, were instrumental in addressing the needs of Learning Center students.

Teachers and a supervisor in the Night School reported the shortened time requirements and the time of their program as critical aspects of their program. According to the participants, many students enrolled in this program had daytime responsibilities and most would not be in

school if a night option were not available. Teachers at the night school worked to develop relationships with students in addition to providing supportive instruction. The program supervisor indicated that she made extensive efforts to get students involved in community service projects. Study participants also reported that their program met the instructional needs of students and that they had made efforts to enhance the humanistic elements of their program.

Representatives from the Last Chance program identified the small learning environment and low student to teacher ratio as positively impacting their program. Additionally, a shortened school day and a nonthreatening atmosphere established a place where students could have an opportunity for success. Study participants indicated that students in this program were the most at-risk students in the district and that their students had been labeled as eminent dropouts. Teachers and a supervisor intimated that their primary objective was to keep students in school, frequently remind them of their ultimate goal to graduate, and to guide students as they made progress towards graduation.

Teachers and a supervisor from the Credit Recovery program reported that their goal was to help individual students make up courses in which they had failed. They did this during the traditional school day, but maintained flexibility so students could be transferred in and out of the program at any point of the school year. Study participants indicated that students were permitted to make choices while in the program and students responded better when more responsibility was given to them.

Research Question 2: What are the educational outcomes (e.g., on-track rates) for students enrolled in the nontraditional high school programs during the 2009-2010 school year? According to the data (Table 26), on-track rates ranged from 77% for the Credit Recovery program to 99% for the Career Institute. Of the other programs, the Behavior Academy and the

Night School each had a 96% on-track rate, whereas the Learning Center had a 93% on-track rate. The Alternative Program and the Last Chance program had 84% and 83% on-track rates.

Table 26

On-Track Rates 2009-2010

Program	% Credits Earned	Students Considered On-Track	On-Track Rate
Alternative Program	76	98/117	84
Career Institute	99	272/276	99
Behavior Academy	75	22/23	96
Learning Center	94	70/75	93
Night School	88	152/158	96
Last Chance	83	49/59	83
Credit Recovery	77	1577/2041	77

Research Question 3: Do the teachers and supervisors in the seven nontraditional high school education programs in the investigated school system perceive their program as effective? The teachers and supervisors in all programs reported that their program was effective in meeting the needs of the students targeted for enrollment in their program. Each participant was asked to identify their measure for program effectiveness. Measures of effectiveness were identified as earning credits towards graduation, helping students grow in emotional maturity, meeting the social and emotional needs of each student, and keeping students in school and off of the streets. Whereas all interview participants intimated that their program was effective, the reasons varied. However, all interviewed teachers and supervisors identified their program as an essential element in providing services to students and were adamant that their program was a critical piece of school system success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the various approaches taken within the seven nontraditional programs in the investigated school system, explore teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of each approach, and identify the educational outcomes for students in each program (e.g., on-track rates). The study was guided with an investigation of program approaches, instructional approaches, behavioral approaches, and school culture as they related to program success. I examined how teacher and supervisor perceptions of program effectiveness remained constant or differed among site and among program type. Three research questions guided this study. This chapter summarizes the study according to the research questions and provides implications and recommendations for practice.

Discussion of Findings

As suggested in the research (Bloom et al., 2010), the investigated school system identified a need to address potential dropouts with nontraditional education options. With the creation of a multi-faceted nontraditional approach, the investigated school system documented evidence of positive student outcomes as most students made progress toward graduation.

In addition, Kershaw and Blank (1993) indicated that school systems have flourished due to the inability of traditional schools to meet the needs of students. Since the inception of nontraditional high school education programs, the investigated school system has documented a

15% gain in graduation rate. This dramatic improvement suggests that prior to the establishment of nontraditional programs, the investigated school system failed to meet the needs of some students.

Numerous nontraditional high school programs were identified in the literature. Although characteristics similar to those found in the nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system were referenced in the literature, none of the programs were duplicates of another program. For example, the Twilight Academy, as discussed by D'Angelo (2009), was similar in structure and concept to the Night School program in the investigated school system. However, the Twilight Academy had specific entrance requirements and differing timeframes than that found in the Night School.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Lange and Sletten (2002). These authors found that creating an atmosphere of support, a culture that is inclusive of student opinions, and interactions between students and staff are of critical importance for program success. In addition, the findings of this study are consistent with those identified by Ruzzi and Kraemer (2006). Providing multiple nontraditional high school options for students can significantly impact student achievement. The findings of this study support this notion.

Findings by Research Question

Research Question 1: What characteristics and approaches are identified within the seven nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system? Characteristics identified within the seven nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system include concepts such as small learning environments, service learning opportunities, and a shortened

school day. The use of online learning systems and a mastery-based instructional model were also constant across multiple programs.

However, the most pervasive attribute was a focus on developing a positive school culture through the development of relationships between teachers and students. Participants from all seven research sites indicated a conscious effort in their program to build relationships with students. Hattie (2009) suggested that teacher-to-student relationships is one of the most critical elements effecting student learning. Hattie's research is supported with the findings of this study.

Research Question 2: What are the educational outcomes (e.g., on-track rates) for students enrolled in the nontraditional high school programs during the 2009-2010 school year? The educational outcomes for students enrolled in the nontraditional high school programs during the 2009-2010 school year were determined with students' progression toward graduation as indicated with their earning of credits. On-track rates for students in these programs are identified in Table 26.

As indicated in the data, on-track rates ranged from 77% for the Credit Recovery program to 99% for the Career Institute. Of the other programs, the Behavior Academy and the Night School each had a 96% on-track rate, whereas the Learning Center had a 93% on-track rate. The Alternative Program and the Last Chance program had 84% and 83% on-track rates.

The findings suggest that some nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system are more successful than others. However, it is unreasonable to have the same expected outcomes for students enrolled in the various nontraditional programs because placement criteria are distinctly different depending on program approach. For example, it is unreasonable to expect students identified for and desiring to attend a high school/college

dual-enrollment program to perform at the same level as students identified as at risk and enrolled in a dropout prevention program.

Research Question 3: Do the teachers in the seven nontraditional high school education programs in the investigated school system perceive their program as effective?

Teachers and supervisors in all programs reported that their program was effective in meeting the needs of the students targeted for enrollment in their program. Each participant was asked to identify their measure for program effectiveness. Measures of effectiveness were identified as earning credits toward graduation, helping students grow in emotional maturity, meeting the social and emotional needs of each student, and keeping students in school and off of the streets.

All interview participants stated that their program was effective, but the reasons identified varied. Some participants suggested program effectiveness based on keeping students in school, whereas other participants referenced specific incidents in which they had helped a student overcome a personal challenge. Participants identified the most influential aspect regarding program effectiveness was providing a place in which students could avoid common distractions found in traditional schools and progress towards graduation.

Discussion of Implications

Implications for Administrators

This study may have significant implications for administrators as they consider nontraditional options for students. Whether implementing a new program or continuing an existing program, knowing the perceived effectiveness and on-track rates for students may help administrators make more informed decisions. Additionally, knowing the various types of

programs available and the specific components that teachers and supervisors feel were impactful for student success can better inform administrators when creating programs to fit their district's needs.

This study may also have budgetary implications for administrators. As school system leaders wrestle with the ongoing battle between necessary budget cuts and necessary instructional programming, this information can inform decisions. Whereas a district may consider the costs associated with various programs to be a limitation, the program success both perceptually and statistically, may outweigh the actual cost.

Implications for Teachers

This study may have implications for high school teachers as they reflect on best practices and what best serves the needs of at-risk students. The perceptual data identified in this study can better inform instructional approaches in the classroom and social approaches as they interact with students. As teachers work to motivate students, this study may provide some clear examples of what has worked with varying student populations in nontraditional high school settings.

This study may also impact the perceptions of teachers who consider nontraditional education programs as a challenge to traditional schools. As nontraditional programs emerge, traditional school teachers may be leery of computer-based instruction and project-based learning. This study may better inform traditional teachers of the positive impact nontraditional programs may have on student outcomes.

Discussion of Recommendations for Future Research

This study revealed some gaps in the literature that could be addressed in future research. Future research regarding specific program types and data to display the impact different program types have on student outcomes is needed. This study also further identified a need for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of nontraditional programs.

Discussion of Conclusions

The seven nontraditional high school education programs in the investigated school system were perceived by teachers and administrators as effective in meeting the needs of students. Most of the programs were designed to serve the needs of students identified as at-risk of not graduating from high school. One of the seven programs investigated was designed to serve the needs of students seeking training in a specified vocation. Perceptual data from teacher and supervisor interviews indicated that the nontraditional programs appropriately served the needs of students targeted for attendance in their program. Furthermore, teachers and supervisors relied heavily on building relationships with at-risk students and suggested this aspect was the most critical in helping students succeed.

Student outcome data revealed a significant level of success for all programs. In fact, the average on-track rate for nontraditional high school programs in the investigated school system was 90%, whereas the average on-track rate for traditional high schools in the investigated school system was 87%.

Placement in nontraditional high school programs may not be appropriate for all students, but it does provide a viable option for many students who are underperforming in traditional schools. Therefore, based on this study, it is recommended that school systems consider

providing a multiple-program approach for nontraditional education. The adage “one size fits all” is not applicable for nontraditional programs. Creating and establishing programs that are designed based on the needs of individual school districts is an ideal approach. Having a variety of programs available for at-risk students is optimal.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Dear Prospective Participant:

You are being asked to take part in a research study that will examine how teachers/supervisors in alternative educational programs perceive their roles. You were randomly selected for participation in this study. Involvement in this study will require audio taped interviews and review of some documents produced by your program.

This is a request for your voluntary participation in this study. Your responses will remain completely confidential.

You are free not to answer any questions you find objectionable, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your interview will be conducted by Robert Brown, a doctoral student at the University of Alabama. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact Dr. Rosemary Newton at (205)348-6997 or Robert Brown at (770)314-1690. I hope that you will be willing to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Brown

I have read and fully understand this consent form. By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research project focusing on alternative education programs. If I have any questions, I will contact Robert Brown at (770)314-1690.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTION

Interview Questions

General

1. What is your role in the program?
2. How are students identified or placed in your program? Can you describe a typical school day for a student in your program?
3. What do you consider as successful outcomes for students in your program?
4. What causes students to be successful in your program? Is the program effective?

Program Approach

1. Does your program connect students with the workforce through work study or vocational training?
2. Does your program require or provide opportunities for students to complete community service?
3. Does your program include post-secondary guidance for students?
4. Does your program have a mentoring component?

Instructional Approach

1. What is the instructional delivery model in your program? Is there a mastery-based learning aspect?
2. Does the curriculum in your program include a technology-based component?
3. Do students work or learn at their own pace? Do students have an individualized learning plan?
4. Are the learning opportunities for students in your program comparable to those of students in the base high schools? Please explain.

Disciplinary Approach

1. Does your program aim to improve or correct bad behavior? How is inappropriate behavior addressed?
2. Does your program use a point or level system? Are students rewarded for good behavior? Do you use positive reinforcement?
3. Does your program incorporate a functional behavior assessment or an individual behavior plan? How are behavioral expectations conferred to students?
4. What efforts are made within your program to help students establish goals?

Alternative School Culture

1. Are there any targeted efforts in your program to incorporate students into the decision-making process?
2. In your program, what efforts are made to establish relationships between staff and students?
3. In your program, what efforts are made to establish a supportive environment?
4. In your program, how are student schedules determined? Is there flexibility in scheduling? Do students have any choice when they attend school?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTION RELEVANCE

Category	Interview Question	References
Program Approaches	Does your program connect students with the workforce through work study or vocational training?	Bridgeland et al., 2010 Bloom, Thompson, & Ivry , 2010 Tyler & Loftstrom, 2009 Byrne, 2004
	Does your program require or provide opportunities for students to complete community service?	Carswell, 2009 Nelson & Eckstein, 2008 Grobe, 2005 Kruglik, 1991
	Does your program include post-secondary guidance for students?	Gewertz, 2007 Darling & Price, 2004 Lange & Sletten, 2002
	Does your program have a mentoring component?	Carswell, 2009 D'Angelo, 2009 Conner & McKenna, 2008 Hallam et al, 2007 Tobin & Sprague, 2006 Moylan, 2003
Instructional Approaches	What is the instructional delivery model in your program? Is there a mastery-based learning aspect?	Aarons, 2010 Huerta, Gonzalez & d'Entremont, 2006 Aron, 2003 Powell, 2003 Grove & Mullet, 1996
	Does the curriculum in your program include a technology-based component?	Claybaugh, 2005 Podoll & Randle, 2005 Byrne, 2004 Darling & Price, 2004 Cardon & Christenson, 1998 Kruglik, 1991
	Do students work or learn at their own pace? Do students have an individualized learning plan?	Barrat & Berliner, 2009 Gewertz, 2007 Gates & Stuht, 2006 Hughes & Adera, 2006 Darling & Price, 2004
	Are the learning opportunities for students in your program comparable to those of students in the base high schools? Please explain.	Kim & Taylor, 2008 Darling & Price, 2004

Category	Interview Question	References
Disciplinary Approaches	Does your program aim to improve or correct bad behavior? How is inappropriate behavior addressed?	Van Acker, 2007 Olive, 2003 Soleil, 1999 Lloyd, 1997
	Does your program use a point or level system? Are students rewarded for good behavior? Do you use positive reinforcement?	Cortez, 2009 Biniker & Pindiprolu, 2008 Forthun & McCombie, 2007 Tobin & Sprague, 2006
	Does your program incorporate a functional behavior assessment or an individual behavior plan? How are behavioral expectations conferred to students?	Biniker & Pindiprolu, 2008 Hughes & Adera, 2006 Etscheidt, 2006 Aron, 2003
	What efforts are made within your program to help students establish goals?	Mitchell & McCall, 2007 Lloyd, 1997
Alternative School Culture	Are there any targeted efforts in your program to incorporate students into the decision-making process?	Kim & Taylor, 2008 Quinn, et al, 2006 Darling & Price, 2004 Swaminathan, 2004 Howard, 2003 Ellison & Trickett, 1978
	In your program, what efforts are made to establish relationships between staff and students?	Aleem & Moles, 2009 Claybaugh, 2005 Rumberger, 2004
	In your program, what efforts are made to establish a supportive environment?	Vadeboncoeur, 2009 Zapf, 2008 Mitchell, Fitch & Marshall, 2003 Howard, 2003 Lange & Sletten, 2002 Grobe, 2002 Kershaw & Blank, 1993
	In your program, how are student schedules determined? Is there flexibility in scheduling? Do students have any choice when they attend school?	Vadeboncoeur, 2009 Claybaugh, 2005 Aron, 2003 Grobe, 2002

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL

Office for Research

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
RESEARCH

February 24, 2011

Robert W. Brown
ELPTS
College of Education
The University of Alabama

Re: IRB # 11-OR-056 "A Program Evaluation of Seven Nontraditional Education Programs"

Dear Mr. Brown:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on February 23, 2012. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure From. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM
Director of Research Compliance & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
The University of Alabama

152 Rose Administration Building
Box 870117
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0117
(205) 348-8461
FAX (205) 348-8882
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called A Program Evaluation of Seven Nontraditional Education Programs in a Southeastern State. The study is being done by Robert W. Brown, who is a doctoral student at the University of Alabama. Mr. Brown is being supervised by Dr. Rose Mary Newton who is a professor of Educational Administration at the University of Alabama.

What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to examine the various approaches taken within seven nontraditional education programs available in one school district. The purpose of this study is to also explore teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness of each program, and identify the educational outcomes (e.g. on-track percentages) for students completing each program.

Why is this study important or useful?

This study may provide educators with useful information when considering whether to begin or to continue nontraditional education programs. This study is significant because of the possible positive influence offering multiple alternative programs may have on school and system dropout rates. Additionally, this study may provide educators with information that may assist in determining whether to continue allocating resources for the current non-traditional programs.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because of your employment status and connection to the nontraditional education programs available in this school district.

How many people will be in this study?

About 20 other people will be in this study.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2-24-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 2-23-12

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

Participate in a 30 minute audio recorded interview.

Participate in a follow-up interview for clarification, if necessary.

How much time will I spend being this study?

Each interview should take about 30 minutes. The entire study will take about 1 hour of your time over 4 weeks.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you for participating in this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

Can the investigator take me out of this study?

The investigator may take you out of the study if he feels that you are no longer a viable candidate.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

There are no known risks of being in this study.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

There are no known benefits of being in this study.

What are the benefits to science or society?

This study will help educators identify effective nontraditional education programs.

How will my privacy be protected?

You will be interviewed in a private room and your responses will not be linked to your name. Audio recordings of your interviews will be destroyed after they have been transcribed.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and programs. Interview recordings will be safeguarded and accessed only by the researcher, and will be destroyed after transcribing.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (?the IRB?) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator Robert W. Brown at 770-314-1690.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870104, 152 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0104.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it.

I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date

Audio Taping Consent

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only available to the investigator. The investigator will only keep the tapes for no more than four weeks and will destroy them after they have been transcribed.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audio taped and I give permission to the researcher to record the interview.

_____ Yes, my participation in this study can be audio taped.

_____ No, I do not want my participation in this study to be audio taped.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2-24-11
EXPIRATION DATE: 2-23-12