

A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE SUCCESS OF ON-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS OPPOSED TO OFF-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

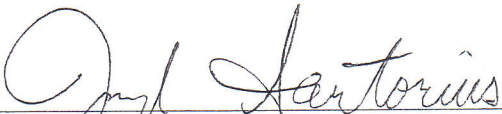
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A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE SUCCESS OF ON-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS OPPOSED TO OFF-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE SUCCESS OF ON-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAMS AS OPPOSED TO OFF-CAMPUS ALTERNATIVE
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ABSTRACT

Dropout rates could have long lasting implications in this ever growing global economy. The at-risk students who dropout fail to receive a proper education, have a difficult time finding work, and can become a drain on our nation's resources. Although there has been a great deal of research on the different types of alternative programs, there has been little research on which types of alternative programs are more successful. The research sought to determine if location of alternative education programs play an important role in their success. The purpose of this quantitative study is two-fold. First, to determine if there is a difference in graduation rates of on-campus programs versus off-campus programs. Second, to determine what elements are found within each location of alternative education programs which may be associated or related to their graduation rates. The National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) created exemplary practices in 2014 to provide standards of quality and program evaluation criteria as a guide for effective alternative education programs. These exemplars were used to create interview questions for directors of the alternative education programs. The study included school districts of Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The results were not definitive, but the effect size suggests environment is an important factor and three exemplars exhibited strong statistical associations. The study will assist school districts and educators in making an informed decision about what type of alternative education program to develop based on the needs of their students. Implications for alternative education program development is discussed along with the need for future research with a larger sample size.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

High schools across the nation have been dealing with an ongoing problem of students dropping out of school. Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morrison (2006) have labeled the problem a silent epidemic. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) stated more than a million students are dropping out of high school. Urban areas are seeing little improvement or even an increase in their dropout rates. With fewer students enrolled, school districts are losing funding based on their attendance and enrollment.

On a broader scale, the dropout rates could have long lasting implications for our nation in this ever growing global economy. The at-risk students who drop out fail to receive a proper education, have a difficult time finding work, and can become a drain on our nation's resources. Robbins (2011) has shown a great deal of people on welfare and in the correctional system have not received a high school diploma. The dropout rates and lasting implications exhibit the importance of alternative education programs.

Educators are trying to find ways to help identify at-risk students to prevent them from dropping out of high school. Students who fall into the at-risk category tend to have some factors in common. Many at-risk students have common characteristics including families from a low socioeconomic status, little academic success, poor attendance, emotional and behavioral issues, and disabilities (Johnson, 2000). These factors are making it difficult for at-risk students to be successful in a traditional school setting.

To meet the needs of at-risk students, school districts are exploring nontraditional education programs. Alternative education programs address the needs of the students which are

categorized by one of three different types of programs. Some schools are employing remedial programs to help students recover credits to graduate with their cohort and in-house General Education Development (GED) option programs (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014). These programs usually have a low teacher-student ratio and operate on an alternative schedule since the normal school day was not effective for the at-risk students.

A great deal of research has been conducted on the success of alternative education programs. Pettus, Tyler, and Lofstrom (2009) have recommended further study on what could be leading to the success of alternative education programs. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) stated there is still a great deal to learn about which dropout prevention programs work best. Michelle Pettus (2008) recommended further research on the characteristics of successful alternative education programs to observe how students’ needs are being met and learning is enhanced. Aron (2003) recommends further research be conducted on the effectiveness of “alternative education programs that operate totally outside of and separate from regular school districts and public schools more effective than alternative education sponsored by school districts” (p. 27). Numerous alternative education studies address teacher and student perceptions. Aron’s recommendation is one area not addressed by research dealing with alternative education. Aron (2003) stated research should be conducted on the location of the alternative schools since it is a topic of strong opinions.

Theoretical Framework

The increase for school accountability has led many educational leaders to adopt alternative education programs to address the ongoing dropout problem that high schools face in America today. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported a 7% dropout rate. This percentage has continued to decline from 1990. The decline in the dropout rate along with

the implementation of alternative education programs may lead educators to believe alternative programs are correlated to the decrease. The success of alternative education programs may be correlated to the teachers and their teaching styles. Alternative education programs are centered on the idea of building trusting teacher-student relationships (Raywid, 1994).

When researching the characteristics of at-risk students, it is apparent that basic needs are not being met for many. Basic needs such as food, shelter, love, and support are not consistent for many of these students (Jensen, 2009). Most would agree that without these basic everyday necessities, many people would not be able to function in everyday life and have motivation to personally develop. Motivation is based on the theory of needs dictating behavior in people. A person's behavior or reaction to satisfying their needs results in motivation to change, regress, or move on to new wants and needs (Maslow, 1943).

Hierarchy of needs theory.

The theoretical framework of Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs speaks to the basic needs driving everyday life for individuals. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs is usually described as a pyramid with different levels of needs. The bottom being the basic necessities building up to higher needs influencing one's behavior. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy is based on two groups. The first group deals with deficiency needs (Burton, 2012). These are the basic necessities humans need to survive. The deficiency group includes physiological, safety, belongingness, and esteem needs (LaSalata, 2006).

First, Maslow (1943) lists physiological needs of a human are the basic necessities we need to live. LaSalata, (2006) and Burton (2012) list food, water, and clothing among the basic necessities. When researching the characteristics of at-risk students, it is alarming to imagine 13.4 million children living in poverty and 47.6% being raised by single mothers (Breslow,

2012). Many of these children are not prepared for school. It would be difficult for any student to focus in school if they were hungry, thirsty, have not showered or washed clothes, tired, or uncomfortable physically. Living in poverty could lead to not enough food at home, appropriate clean clothing, and a comfortable place to sleep. Some students are also embarrassed because they do not have enough clean clothes that fit and might wear the same thing to school for consecutive days. Students, or anyone for that matter, would have a difficult time focusing on schoolwork rather than their next meal and place to sleep.

Maslow (1943) lists safety as the second deficiency need. For children, this would be viewed as having a safe home environment free from danger. Many at-risk students living at or below the poverty line have dealt with living in violent neighborhoods, utility disconnections, evictions, living in shelters, and homelessness (Jensen, 2009). Many at-risk students live in neighborhoods riddled with gang and drug activity. Seeing violence at a young age can result in a lack of trust and security can be seen at school also. These unstable living conditions cause chronic stress in students. It would be difficult to function at school without a stable environment providing protection, security, and order at home.

The third hierarchy of needs is love and belongingness. Having the support and love of family means a great deal. Research has shown an overwhelming amount of at-risk students are being raised by young, single mothers. Due to poverty and young age, many single mothers are not prepared to care for a child (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). There is more to caring for children than providing for their physical needs. Having time to provide for a child's emotional needs is imperative also. Many single parent mothers are working long hours and multiple jobs resulting in little time to build relationships and provide affection for their children (Jensen, 2009). Not

feeling loved or valued would make it difficult to focus at school and feel worthy of an education.

The fourth and last of the deficiency needs is esteem (Burton, 2012; LaSalata, 2006). Many at-risk students have reported a lack of esteem especially involving school. Living in poverty with a lack of basic necessities may lead to a feeling of hopelessness and feeling devalued (Jensen, 2009). In addition, being surrounded by an unsafe environment where life is devalued by many results in a feeling of worthlessness. Couple the above with a lack of love and belongingness, students would have a difficult time seeing their worth in school. Research has shown at-risk students start school unprepared which causes a disadvantage from the beginning (Jensen, 2009) Continued struggles at school combined with struggles at home result in a lack of self-esteem especially at school.

The deficiency needs would also be impacted by school climate, teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, and how students are disciplined by authority figures. Students who are not getting proper care from home, are bullied, do not fit in socially, feel as though their teachers do not care about them, or are unsuccessful academically will have a difficult time learning how to cope in a traditional school environment (Kujawa, 2006). These factors could lead to a student feeling as though their basic needs are not being met by the school resulting in the inability to explore, understand, and realize one's potential.

Abraham Maslow (1943) believed once our deficiency needs were satisfied we could become concerned with our growth needs. Growth needs are motivated by one's desire for personal growth. The growth needs include cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and self-transcendence (LaSalata, 2006). To achieve personal growth one needs to understand and explore (cognitive), while appreciating the order and beauty (aesthetic) (LaSalata, 2006).

Maslow referred to this as self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to the fulfillment one has in realizing their potential and seeking personal growth (Burton, 2012). Once self-actualization has been achieved, self-transcendence can occur in which one can find fulfillment beyond themselves while helping others (LaSalata, 2006).

At-risk students deal with a great number of deficiencies at the basic necessities level. These students are in survival mode. Maslow's theory explains why many at-risk students are in danger of failing or dropping out of school. At-risk students feel helpless, are susceptible to social pressures, lacking self-esteem, and find little enjoyment in ordinary things (Jensen, 2009). Most at-risk students are not able to achieve self-actualization. The above characteristics make it difficult to realize their worth and capability to achieve personal growth. These deficiencies make it difficult to move past survival mode and realize their potential in life.

In addition, Clayton Alderfer (1969) further developed Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs by categorizing human needs into his erg theory. Alderfer's (1969) theory differs from Maslow's based on the idea some needs can occur simultaneously rather than singularly based on a hierarchy. The erg theory took Maslow's hierarchy and condensed it into three categories including existence, relatedness, and growth (Strothers, 2015).

The first level, existence, includes the basic human physiological and safety needs (Alderfer, 1969; Strothers, 2015). These physical needs are among Maslow's (1943) first two deficiency needs. These include physical needs such as water, food, and clothing along with shelter for safety needs. These are basic survival needs for all humans. Most at-risk students are lacking some of these basic existence needs which result in a lack of motivation and concentration at school (Jensen, 2009).

The second level, relatedness, includes Maslow's (1943) social and self-esteem deficiency needs. Relatedness is based on an individual's need to be accepted and feeling of belonging to a group (Alderfer, 1969; Strothers, 2015). This level involves the need to build interpersonal relationships with others. The importance of building relationships is based on sharing thoughts, feelings, and being able to understand others (Alderfer, 1969). Alderfer (1969) stated social needs relate to our self-esteem needs. Basically, if people have healthy interpersonal relationships they will feel good about themselves resulting in high self-esteem (Alderfer, 1969). As previously stated by Jenson (2009), research has shown a connection between the lack of interpersonal skills and low self-esteem resulting in low achievement in school.

The third and last level, growth, includes Maslow's (1943) self-actualization need. The growth level is based on personal growth and development stemming from high self-esteem (Alderfer, 1969). The growth level is centered on the idea of having high self-esteem results in motivation or being compelled to do work of high quality and of greater meaning (Strothers, 2015). If at-risk students lack self-esteem, they may not be motivated to take a risk on trying new things which result in growth from their experiences.

Although Alderfer's (1969) erg theory is similar to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, there are a few differences that make Alderfer's (1969) theory more flexible. First, Alderfer (1969) stated people can be motivated by needs from different levels at the same time unlike Maslow's (1943) idea of progression from one level to the next. Also, Alderfer (1969) recognized everyone's needs are different and valued in their own way leading to different levels of frustration which can happen with everyone and may result in regression on the needs levels. This regression is what happens to many at-risk students due to the frustration of their needs not being met.

Motivational theories.

David McClelland's (1961) acquired needs theory proposed an individual's needs are developed from one's life experiences. McClelland's (1961) work is rooted in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs focusing on three motivators including achievement, affiliation, and power (Bitterman, 2008). McClelland (1961) stated these motivators are learned and one motivator will be dominate based on an individual's life experiences (Bitterman, 2008).

First, the need for achievement is based on the idea of accomplishing a set goal. This dominating motivator is based on an individual's desire to set and accomplish goals (Bitterman, 2008). The need for achievement is based on the desire for a challenge and the need to be engaged (McClelland, 1961). The individual is willing to take risks to achieve their goals (Bitterman, 2008). Since this motivator is based on achieving set goals, the individual is open to feedback about their progress and motivated to change behavior to achieve the set goal.

Second, the need for affiliation is based on the desire to belong to a group. The motivator is centered on forming close interpersonal relationships (McClelland, 1961). Affiliation is not about competition, but the need to collaborate with other individuals and teamwork (Bitterman, 2008). When dealing with individuals who are motivated by affiliation, it is important to be personal when providing feedback.

The last motivator is the need for power. Individuals motivated by power want to have control over others and situations (McClelland, 1961). These individuals thrive in competitive environments and seek out recognition (Bitterman, 2008). The best way to deal with individuals motivated by power is by being direct with them. These individuals are natural leaders.

Understanding what motivates students is important in helping them be successful academically. At-risk students have many challenges and different life experiences shaping what

motivates them or what seems to be a lack of motivation. These life experiences can make it difficult for at-risk students to understand why they feel or behave a certain way (Jensen, 2009). Understanding these motivators could help at-risk students and educators lead, praise, and motivate each other in school.

Most motivational theories have roots in the cognitive evaluation theory. Cognitive evaluation theory is centered on the idea of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. This is the idea there is something within an individual or something outside the individual motivating them to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Those who are intrinsically motivated perform “because it is inherently interesting and or enjoyable” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 55). There is satisfaction from the actual act of performing a task, reaching a goal, or having interest in the task at hand. Those who are extrinsically motivated perform based on “some separable outcomes” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60). This motivation is centered on the idea of a reward involved in the completion of a task.

Since many at-risk students deal with the lack of basic needs being met at home, there is little intrinsic motivation (Kujawa, 2006). It would be difficult to find personal joy in accomplishing schoolwork when you have physical or psychological needs not being fulfilled. This reality results in most at-risk students having extrinsic motivation. The idea of “what am I going to get out of this” is common. It is believed the presence of extrinsic motivation reduces intrinsic motivation resulting in the idea of other individuals having control and the individual showing less “interest, value, and or effort” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 63). The feeling of lack of control and depending on outside rewards perpetuates the devaluing of education among at-risk youth.

Another important concept in understanding motivation is the reinforcement theory. The reinforcement theory is founded in B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning. Within operant conditioning, Skinner introduced positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, punishment, and extinction (Skinner, 2003). This theory is based on extrinsic motivators to influence behavior.

When positive reinforcement is applied, an individual is given a reward for good behavior. Negative reinforcement is used by taking away a stressor or punishment previously applied as a reward for good behavior (Skinner, 2003). Extinction is the idea an individual is given nothing for doing well. Lastly, punishment is the process of giving a person consequences for bad behavior.

Many schools in America are rooted in the reinforcement theory, by example of the growing popularity of the Response to Intervention (RTI) program. Educators reinforce and reward positive behavior while ignoring or punishing negative behavior. For most students this theory is a great source of motivation. On the other hand, at-risk students tend to have difficulty with positive and negative reinforcement. Researchers believe this is a result of negative home environments due to poverty (Jensen, 2009). In addition, critics stated the reinforcement theory is based on extrinsic motivation which reduces an individual's ability to be intrinsically motivated resulting in the individual always wanting a reward instead of self-gratification (Skinner, 2003).

Problem Statement

Dropout rates could have long lasting implications in this ever growing global economy. The at-risk students who dropout fail to receive a proper education, have a difficult time finding work, and can become a drain on our nation's resources. Robbins (2011) has shown a great deal of people on welfare and in the correctional system have not received a high school diploma.

On a smaller scale, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's School Improvement Program has set higher standards for school districts in the state of Missouri. A school's graduation rate is a large part of the review. In order to earn points towards accreditation under Missouri School Improvement Program V Standard 5, districts must ensure all students successfully complete high school. Various districts are failing to meet this standard due to students dropping out of high school. Many of these districts are adopting alternative education programs to alleviate this problem. Although there has been a great deal of research on the different types of alternative programs, there has been little research on which types of alternative programs are more successful. School leaders and educators looking to adopt an alternative education program to reach their at-risk students would benefit from knowing if on-campus or off-campus programs are more successful.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was twofold as represented by the two research questions. First, what was the difference in graduation rates between alternative education programs located on-campus versus the off-campus locations. According to Laudan Aron (2003), the location of alternative education programs can play an important role in the success of the programs. Aron (2003) has also recommended further study to determine if "alternative education programs that operate totally outside of and separate from regular school districts and public schools more effective than alternative education sponsored by school districts" (p. 27). The rationale was to determine if there was a difference between alternative education programs on-campus compared to alternative education programs off-campus.

The second area of research for this study was to determine what elements were found within each location of alternative education programs which may be associated or related to

their graduation rates. The National Alternative Education Association created exemplary practices in 2014 to provide standards of quality and program evaluation criteria as a guide for effective alternative education programs (see Appendix A). These exemplars are related to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Many exemplars focus on the areas of safe school environment, feeling as though they belong, and having resources to help students feel success. These exemplars are associated with Maslow's physiological, safety, belonging, and self-esteem needs. The study will assist school districts and educators in making an informed decision about what type of alternative education program to develop based on the needs of their students. Since the dropout rate is a pertinent issue in America, the study will be a great source of information for school districts to try and reduce their dropout rate. Information of location and the use of NAEA's exemplars can better graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs which are located on-campus and those off-campus?
2. Between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs, what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates?

Null Hypothesis

Research question #1: There will be no difference in the graduation rates based on location.

Research question #2: There is no association between the locations of the programs and the standards they employ and follow.

Hypothesis

This study attempted to determine if graduation rates are different based upon the different locations of the alternative education, programs and which exemplars are more associated with the programs. The NAEA's exemplary practices were used as an indicator for quality programming.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations.

The study was limited to alternative education programs included in school districts of Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. As a result, there may be a limit to the sample size and the diversity of the districts. Another limitation to the study deals with the characteristics of the programs already being set. The programs involved have been established prior to the study.

Delimitations.

The study included alternative education programs that have been in existence for at least five years.

Design Controls

A quantitative research study was conducted to see if there was a difference between the location of alternative education programs and the success of the students enrolled in the alternative education programs in the Greater St. Louis area. Quantitative data were collected of graduation rates of the students enrolled in the alternative education programs for the past five years. In addition, data were collected from descriptive interviews with directors of on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs. For research question #1, the independent variable was the location of the alternative education programs and the dependent variable was

the graduation rates. For research question #2, the independent variable was the interview questions based on the NAEA's exemplary practices and the dependent variable was the answers to the interview questions given by the alternative education programs administrator which was analyzed for any associations to the programs' locations and any possible association to the more successful graduation rates.

Definition of Key Terms

Academic success. Academic success is usually characterized by a few indicators. Among these, indicators would include scoring proficient or advanced on standardized tests, having 90% attendance 90% of the time, and having zero referrals for major offences resulting in suspension. Academic success for an at-risk student involved in an alternative education program would be defined as obtaining a high school diploma (DESE MSIP, 2015).

Alternative education. An education program differing from the traditional education setting. These programs sometimes offer flexible schedules, smaller settings, and modified curriculum. Alternative education is being provided for students who are not academically successful and at risk of dropping out of school (Carver & Tice, 2010).

At-risk student. The term given to students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. At-risk students tend to have poor academic success, attendance, and discipline. Students classified as at-risk might also have outside factors impacting their education. For instance, more responsibility at home due to low socioeconomic status (Crump, 2003).

GED. GED stands for general education development test. The GED is a second chance for high school dropouts to earn a diploma (GED Testing Service, 2015).

Missouri options. A program designed to help at-risk students, 17 or older, who are at least one year behind their cohort. Missouri Options is based on a blended learning model with

technology and small groups with individualize instruction to engage learners to become successful academically. Students are also required to do at least 20 hours of outside work. These students will remain enrolled in school and will not count as dropouts. When the student completes the program, they will receive a diploma from the high school and count as a high school graduate (DESE, 2015).

On-campus alternative education program. An education program housed on school grounds but separate from the traditional setting (Aron, 2003).

Off-campus alternative education program. An education program located off school grounds and separate from the traditional setting (Aron, 2003).

Summary

In Chapter One, the researcher presented the introduction, problem statement, purpose for the study, hypothesis and research questions, limitations and delimitations, design controls, as well as definition of terms associated with at-risk students involved in alternative education programs, and how these programs substantiate graduation rates. The study looked or differences in graduation rates based on the location of the alternative education programs. In addition, the study will look to see if any association exists between the use of the NAEA's exemplars and the graduation rates.

Chapter Two will focus on the review of data and literature that will provide specific details associated with at-risk students and alternative education programs. The literature review will focus on five major themes. The themes include the evolution of education including the historical background to the dropout problem, the importance of alternative education programs, common characteristics of at-risk students, characteristics of alternative high school education programs, and the theoretical frameworks involved.

Chapter Three will speak to the methodology in which this study will be conducted. Details will be provided with regard to the problem and purpose of the study, null hypothesis and hypothesis, sample and population, and research setting. The methodology will also include the interview question development, research design, as well as a data collection and analysis of at-risk students involved in alternative education programs.

Chapter Four will provide a presentation of the findings based upon whether there is a difference between the location of an alternative education program and the success of the students enrolled utilizing the graduation rates. The analysis will contain descriptive data about the participants involved and the interviews of the alternative education directors. In addition, the chapter will analyze whether there is an association between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates.

Chapter Five will summarize the methods and findings of the study conducted. Implications of the research will be stated along with the limitations of the study. Furthermore, recommendations for future research will be included for the betterment of alternative education programs.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Education has been at the forefront of major discussions in the United States since the creation of the nation (Young, 1990). In 1983, President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education reported our nation was at risk of falling behind other nations in a growing global world. The report led to a reform of education in which states adopted higher standards of education. Graham (2013) stated the problems raised were made worse by budget cuts to education over time. Recently, the discussion has played a major role in politics due to the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. The NCLB Act states all students will be proficient in math and language arts by 2014. This has led to an increase of pressure on the education system. Due to this pressure, educators are exhausting all efforts to support students. Evidence has shown that NCLB has actually increased the achievement gap rather than decreasing it (Sennett, n.d.). Van Roekel stated that NCLB has only intensified the problems identified in *A Nation at Risk* more than 30 years later (Graham, 2013).

In addition to NCLB, some states have created a school accountability system to monitor the progress of school districts. The state of Missouri adopted the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) in 1990 to determine which schools should be accredited with distinction. The state is now on the fifth version of the MSIP and has become more stringent on how to achieve distinction. The review focuses on five standards including academic achievement, subgroup achievement, college and career readiness, attendance rate, and graduation rate (DESE MSIP, 2015).

A major concern in the education system deals with students at-risk of dropping out of high school. High school dropouts are not a new phenomenon. Blue and Cook (2004) stated the education system has been dealing with the dropout problem for over thirty years (as cited in Blount, 2012). With dropout numbers reaching more than a million a year, the problem has become the main focus due to the political pressures to fix the problem (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). The pressure to deal with the dropout rate has led school districts to create alternative high school education programs. Aron (2003, p. 2) stated “high school graduation rates have actually declined over the past 10 years, and in a ‘last best chance’ to succeed academically, American children have been turning to alternative education programs in record numbers”. Gilson (2006) stated 39% of public high schools adopted alternative education programs in 2000-2001 to address the dropout rate problem. Reports are showing the number of alternative programs has increased since then. Barr and Parrett estimate there are about 20,000 alternative programs in the United States (Quinn & Poirier, 2007).

To understand the dropout problem plaguing the United States, we need to understand the historical background of alternative education programs. Another important aspect is the impact dropping out of high school has on the individual and the country (Pettus, 2008). Identifying who is at risk of dropping out is imperative to trying to address the problem. Lastly, there needs to be some programs in place to address the at-risk students and their needs. Knowing the theoretical framework of motivation theories like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs will assist schools in developing ways to address the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

Historical Background-Evolution of Alternative Education

The idea of education has evolved over time. Discussions and debates over education stem from social and political upheaval within our nation. For example, due to the American

Revolution, Thomas Jefferson saw the need for a public education system promoting the ideas of freedom, liberty, and democracy to produce responsible citizens who were loyal to the United States (Sass, 2016). Changes within our nation, including industrialization, immigration, slavery, and women's rights have fueled the resistance to bureaucratic public education.

The 1800's brought several changes to education, mostly from Horace Mann, the Secretary of Education for the state of Massachusetts. Horace Mann, an educational visionary, established most of the framework for our education system. Mann was a major proponent for free and universal public education. Horace Mann's educational innovations changed most schools from a one-room schoolhouse to the "age grading" system we use today (Emery, 2000). Another innovation from Mann led to the standardization of public school curriculum. The call for standardization of public education began in the 1840's (Emery, 2000). This initiative was instituted to create uniformity among different schools.

The standardization of public education steered resistance movements. The first major resistance movement started in the 1890's during the Progressive Movement (Emery, 2000). Progressivism describes the response by Americans to try and repair the social and economic problems that occurred from the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the Industrial Revolution. Educators believed the Industrial Revolution had adverse side effects leading to uniformity and compliance instead of diversity and critical thinkers. The Progressive Movement directed the formation of alternative education programs.

One of the first alternative education programs was created by John Dewey who was a philosopher and educator. In 1896, John Dewey's Laboratory School opened. The school tried to create a community in which students had an individualized education based on their experiences. John Dewey used theories of psychology and Darwinism to explain how people

learn best. Dewey believed species survive based on theory of inquiry and natural selection (Garrison, Neubert, & Reich, 2012). These ideas are also referred to as social behaviorism.

The second wave of alternatives to public education in the United States began with the Civil Rights Movement. Freedom Schools were established in 1964 and exemplified alternative education programs emerging to try and address the racial inequalities in the United States (Emery, 2000). Freedom Schools were mostly found in the south and provided summer and afterschool programs to empower African American students to act as the catalysts of social change. Young (1990) believes this is where the modern form of alternative education programs began due to the student-centered teaching and hands-on approach to learning.

The most familiar alternative to public education began after World War II with the emergence of the General Education Development. Education began to see the implications of World War II through declining student enrollment, decreased school personnel, and New Deal school construction paused (Sass, 2016). The patriot fervor felt widespread led to young, American men dropping out of school and enlisting in the military. Women helping with the war effort in defense plants brought about a decrease in school personnel which eventually guided the lowering of teacher certification requirements to fulfill vacancies in schools (Gelbrich, 1999).

When World War II veterans started to return home, the United States now had men who were without high school diplomas. Many young men enlisted or were drafted before earning high school diplomas. The General Education Development (GED) was first released in 1942 to indicate knowledge in math, writing, reading, social studies, and science (Tyler, 2005). At first the GED was used as a placement tool to prove qualification for employment in entry level positions then later to enroll veterans, without high school diplomas, in college (GED Testing Service, 2015). Eventually, the GED test replaced “wartime” diplomas and became a high school

equivalency credentials test due to the warm welcome home and the GI Bill veterans received (Quinn, 2014).

The first GED tests were administered to military veterans in 1943 (Tyler, 2005). In 1947, the test was first offered to civilians in New York to prevent more high school students from dropping out. By 1954, twenty-four states were offering the GED to civilians (Quinn, 2014). The GED test finally gained support by the federal government, for civilians, after President Lyndon B. Johnson gave his State of the Union Address identifying the United States was waging a war on poverty (Quinn, 2014). The federal government began funding GED test instruction through the Office of Economic Opportunity. By the 1970's, the Department of Labor stressed the importance of women receiving welfare to receive GED instruction (Quinn, 2014). Eventually, GED instruction replaced many adult night school programs.

As educators were trying to tackle the demands of the new technological era, it became clear that the funding cuts and decreased requirements for teacher certification from World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II had lasting impacts. The new counterculture of the 1960's and 1970's compounded the problems in education by rejecting conservative views. There was a push for open classrooms with a focus on student-led education. Problems such as the lack of a focused curriculum, expectations, and standardized tests emerged from open classrooms (Cuban, 2004).

During the late 1970's into 1980, the United States was experiencing a recession based on rising inflation and the oil crisis. The unemployment rate rose as our trade deficit increased due to the industries in the United States no longer being able to compete in a global economy. A sense of urgency for the United States education system was felt by all and addressed by the president. President Ronald Reagan established the National Commission on Excellence in

Education on August 26, 1981. The information collected from the study was devastating to the American public. The research showed that the United States was challenged in areas of commerce, industry, science, and technology. The country had fallen from a place of leadership in these areas to being last in seven of the nineteen academic indicators. Statistics showed thirteen percent of seventeen year olds were illiterate and twenty-three million adults were also (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) also reported a drop in SAT scores and the rise in remedial math classes which indicates seventeen year olds in America continue to struggle with the ability to think critically. All of the above finding demonstrated the need for skilled workers which was compounded by the rise in technology.

The findings from the commission confirmed the need for changes in the American education system. The National Commission on Excellence in Education concluded students were sustaining a state of mediocrity. The commission identified the state of mediocrity was a result of lowered expectations, diluted content, too many student choices, less time spent at school and on schoolwork, and weak teaching certification programs (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

A positive impact of *A Nation at Risk* directed the standards movement. States adopted standards increasing rigorous curriculums offered to students (Camera, 2016). In spite of the gains, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012) has shown the United States still lags behind other nations in academic testing. One of the major concerns included a continued educational gap between white and minority students (Camera, 2016). These concerns led to the adoption of No Child Left Behind in 2002 to focus on the deficits in education.

As a result of social and political upheaval, the resistance to bureaucratic education led to the growth of alternative education programs. Many schools now offer the GED Options program where students can earn a high school diploma through alternative education (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). In addition, many districts offer their own alternative education program on-campus or off-campus. Carver and Tice (2010) reported in 2007-2008, 64% of school districts offer at least one alternative education program. Most of these programs are utilized as an intervention or last chance program to prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school.

Importance of Alternative Programs

To begin to meet the diverse needs of students, schools began to offer alternative education programs. These programs were needed to provide an alternative to the traditional educational setting in an effort to meet the diverse needs of at-risk students. Alternative education programs address truancy problems, negative behaviors, and low academic achievement through a variety of techniques to improve attitudes about education and school (Tobin & Sprague, 1999).

Many at-risk students come from low socioeconomic families with adverse experiences negatively affecting their education. Many at-risk students have stated they feel frightened and self-conscious in larger school settings. These negative experiences make it difficult to build trust and positive relationships between students and staff. Alternative education programs, for this reason, emphasize an importance on building a small community within the alternative program. There is an emphasis on small class environment with a maximum of twelve students to one teacher (National Alternative Education Association, 2016). The small class size supports students in feeling more comfortable in their environment and allows for more one-on-one contact with frequent feedback from teachers. Another important aspect of building an

alternative community is to provide a positive and safe environment for students who are lacking this environment outside of school (Raywid, 1994). The message of alternative education programs centers on success rather than failure. These alternative education programs provide students with a sense of belonging creating self-esteem. With self-esteem, at-risk students become at-home students with self-respect and a sense of purpose that was lacking.

Alternative education programs find ways to motivate students differently. The programs are rooted in independent study and are self-paced based on the student's ability. The alternative programs devise an alternative plan for at-risk students with customized options to meet their needs and provide students with an opportunity to personalize the curriculum (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Personalized curriculum with opportunities to accelerate or modify, provide students with ownership of their education. These programs were developed with flexibility as a central component. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) stated at-risk students need the option of flexibility to handle many of their diverse needs. Whether students are dealing with increased responsibility at home to work or tend to younger siblings, teenage parenthood, or mental health related disorders, alternative education programs provide students with flexible schedules and ways to earn credit for courses.

Alternative education programs are important for at-risk students in dealing with more than just their education. Alternative programs provide at-risk student with hands-on real world experiences. Successful programs focus on the future goals of the students. Whether students continue with their education or enter the workforce, alternative education programs provide work-based opportunities, social work, and counseling (National Alternative Education Association, 2016). These additional services assist students with identifying and addressing behavioral factors which may limit future success in the workforce and other opportunities.

Assisting students to develop positive attitudes, coping strategies, social skills, and responsibility will not only help in their education, but will benefit their development into productive citizens who contribute to society (Aron, 2003).

Alternative education programs are not only important when providing students with an education addressing their needs, but also in preventing the cycle of hardships in the future. Students who dropout of high school undoubtedly have a harder and unhealthier lifestyle than those who graduate from high school. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009, p. 87) stated that “social costs include lower tax revenues, greater public spending on public assistance and health care, and higher crime rates”. High school dropouts tend to have a difficult time finding work which can lead to long term unemployment and homelessness (Blount, 2012). The U.S. Bureau of Census reports the unemployment rate of dropouts is almost double that of high school graduates (Morley, 1991). Those who are lucky enough to obtain employment earn less money than high school graduates (Robbins, 2011). Franco and Patel (2011, p. 16) stated “the annual medium income of a male over the age of 24 without a high school diploma is approximately \$27,000, whereas that for a diploma holder nears \$37,000”. Morley (1991) stated over time the differences in wages between high school graduates and high school dropouts would equate to a loss of one-third the potential income. Cameron and Heckman (1991) stated GED holders fare worse in the labor market than high school graduates, but are better off than high school dropouts.

Statistics show the lack of employment or suitable wages leads to many high school dropouts accepting public assistance contributing to an increase in state expenditures while decreasing state revenue. Robbins (2011) noted almost half of welfare recipients are high school dropouts. In addition to the cost of welfare on state budgets, high school dropouts contribute less in tax dollars compared to high school graduates. It is estimated high school dropouts pay only

42% of the taxes high school graduates pay (Robbins, 2011). Not only are dropouts paying less taxes, but they also consume more tax dollars by way of welfare programs (Worley, 2007). Americas' Promise Alliance estimates a loss of \$45 billion in tax revenue (Robbins, 2011). Morley (1991) cited the loss of tax dollars is 2.5 times higher than it would cost districts to implement programs to assist students with meeting graduation requirements. An unintended consequence of high school dropouts is the reduction in funding school districts would have received per pupil.

Another hardship plaguing high school dropouts has to do with becoming parents at a younger age. Statistics show young single mothers are more likely to be high school dropouts (Robbins, 2011). Being a young, single parent can also contribute to the need for public assistance programs. Single mothers working in low income professions have a need for government resources. Nearly half of single mothers needing public assistance are high school dropouts (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2012) reported 63% of teen mothers received welfare and Medicaid.

Lastly, high school dropouts tend to engage in more criminal activity than high school graduates. Veal reports a high school dropout's chance of incarceration is three to nine times higher than a high school graduate (Morley, 1991). A study conducted in 1993 reported that 82% of convicts are high school dropouts (Kujawa, 2006). In 1997, data revealed 36% of the violent criminals in prison did not earn a high school diploma (Franco & Patel, 2011). Studies have been conducted about prisons in the United States to research the causes of imprisonment as well as reduction of imprisonment. Education seems to be a central factor in reducing criminal activity and imprisonment. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported a loss of human growth and potential for high school dropouts which leads to feelings of helplessness and a lack

of self-worth (Morley, 1991). These feelings of lack of control lead to recklessness and risky behavior which can result in imprisonment.

Not only is there a negative impact on the individual lives of high school dropouts, but there is also a negative impact for the United States as a whole. School districts suffer the loss of school funding due to the decrease in student enrollment because of high school dropouts. The loss of school funding impacts all the students who stay enrolled in school by limiting the resources the school can provide. The decrease of resources could lead to more students being at risk of dropping out of high school. America's Promise Alliance estimated \$17 billion could be saved by state governments if students graduated from high school (Robbins, 2011).

Characteristics of At-risk Students

To begin to address the dropout problem in the United States, there has to be an understanding of what it means to be at-risk. The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) defines at-risk students as students who are in jeopardy of failing school. Typically, this would be seen as dropping out of high school before graduating. The overall indicators at-risk students have in common are poor attendance, low achievement, and discipline problems. Robbins (2011) states many at-risk students fall into low socioeconomic groups which include minorities. Low socioeconomic families tend to have many challenges negatively affect the education of their children. In addition to low socioeconomic status, many at-risk students have been labeled with disabilities and behavioral problems. Alternative education programs have reported the three most common referrals were based on social-emotional problems, habitual truancy, and home school referrals.

Low socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status is used to categorize the social standing of an individual or group. The American Psychological Association (2017) measures an individual's socioeconomic status by examining a combination of their education, income, and occupation. Low socioeconomic status can be characterized as obtaining a limited education, living in poverty, and a lack of access to resources.

The federal government has established a guideline to define the poverty line in the United States. A family of four with an income of \$23,050 or less is defined as living in poverty (Breslow, 2012). Based on the poverty line income, the United States Census Bureau has reported that 13.4 million children are living in poverty (Breslow, 2012). Children living in poverty deal with constant hunger, chronic stress, transient living or homelessness, and violent environments.

Many children living in poverty come from single-parent households. Breslow (2012) stated that 47.6% of children living in poverty were raised by single mothers. Studies have exposed shocking data in which most of these single mothers have had children at a young age. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2012) reported that 67% of teen mothers, living on their own, were living below the poverty line.

Since 30% of teenage girls reported pregnancy as the reason for dropping out of high school, many young, single mothers are working low income jobs. Children of young, single mothers bear witness to the struggles and stress of living in poverty. Struggling to survive can lead to chronic stress over time. Chronic stress causes devastating effects impacting "brain development, academic success, and social competence" (Jensen, 2009, p. 7). This chronic stress coupled with a preoccupied, working parent leads to most children not having their basic needs

met and being unprepared for school. Studies have shown impoverished children experience less compassion and interactions with their caregivers due to long working hours (Jensen, 2009). Since many of these mothers are struggling to provide for their families, little emphasis is put on education and 40% of children living in poverty are not prepared to enter school (Save Our Schools, Inc., 2014) In addition to the lack of education, numerous studies reported a lack of positive parenting. The increased usage of physical punishment by impoverished parents is linked to the harsh demands and chronic stress of their environment (Jensen, 2009). The neglect, malnutrition, abuse, and trauma of impoverished children creates a lack of self-esteem and poor social skills making it difficult to adjust to school.

Working in low income professions leads to inconsistent housing for families living below the poverty line. Many impoverished families have dealt with eviction, living in shelters, and homelessness at some time. This migrant and transient lifestyle negatively impacts children. Unstable living environments for children create a lack of security and feelings of helplessness. Jensen (2009, p. 8) stated “more than half of all poor children deal with evictions, utility disconnections, overcrowding, or lack of a stove or refrigerator”. The constant moving also interrupts the education of children pushing them further behind and making it difficult to form relationships at school. Blount (2012) mentions transient students who move at least two times in high school are twice as likely to drop out of high school. Changing schools several times makes it difficult for the transient students to create a bond with the school culture and never quite feel comfortable in the school.

The impoverished families able to afford housing are subject to living in unsafe neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are riddled with drug and gang activity which makes it difficult for children to play socially. Children living in these environments, subjected to

violence at such a young age, establish problems with lack of trust and security. Since children absorb what they experience from their environments, violent neighborhoods impact the way children behave and perceive others around them. Children living in negative environments tend to be in survival mode. Being in survival mode can lead impoverished children to partake in high-risk behavior due to exposure of chronic stress. This high-risk behavior includes drug activity, alcohol abuse, smoking, fighting, and sexual activity. Foley and Pang (2006) reported that 52% of at-risk students used drugs and alcohol, 44% had incidents with weapons, 28% were pregnant in high school, and 38% were involved with juvenile services. In addition, unsafe neighborhoods have little access to stress-relieving and enrichment activities, such as, recreational or cultural facilities (Jensen, 2009).

Low socioeconomic families are subjected to living in substandard housing. Children can be exposed to toxins like lead. These toxins combined with malnutrition and chronic stress can weaken a child's immune system. A weak immune system can diminish the ability to learn and behave appropriately (Jensen, 2009). These factors have been associated with health problems, psychological problems, and disabilities. Combine these problems with the inability to access proper health care or early interventions tends to result in low academic achievements. Jensen (2009) reported low income students have greater incidents of absences, tardiness, and untreated health problems or disabilities.

When studying low socioeconomic status, results have established a correlation between poverty and minority groups. Reports have shown minorities are twice as likely as whites to live in poverty. Breslow (2012) stated 38.2% of African American children and 32.3% of Hispanic children live below the poverty line. The economic disparities between whites and minorities has been used to explain the academic achievement gap. Minority parents with lower incomes and

lower levels of education have an increasingly difficult time providing educational support and educational opportunities for their children. The lack of educational support for minorities living in poverty is apparent when looking at achievement data. It is shocking that the National Assessment for Educational Progress recorded the average African American twelfth grader scored in the nineteenth percentile (Camera, 2016). In addition, graduation rates are lower among minority groups. The United States Department of Education (2015) reported the 2014 graduation rate at 82.3% while 72.5% of African Americans and 76.3% of Hispanics graduate high school. Some states have even reported minority graduation rates to be around 50%.

Chronic academic failure and truancy

Another adverse impact for economically disadvantaged students is chronic academic failure and truancy. The American Psychological Association (2017) has presented research on the link between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. It is believed impoverished students begin school behind in academics due to struggling parents trying to survive by working a great deal and not having the time to prepare their children for school (Worley, 2007). In addition, IQ tests have shown welfare students are 29% behind other students (Jensen, 2009). As stated previously, living in poverty can cause chronic stress due to monetary strains on the family and living in dangerous conditions. Research has shown these factors are “linked to over 50 percent of all absences; impairs attention and concentration; reduces cognition, creativity, and memory; diminishes social skills and social judgement; reduces motivation, determination, and effort; increases the likelihood of depression; and reduces neurogenesis” (Jensen, 2009, p. 10). These behaviors impact students negatively and place them further behind their classmates. Unfortunately, the effects of living in poverty create low expectations. Due to low expectations, students of low socioeconomic status have become passive and adopted learned helplessness

(Jensen, 2009). This is a state in which students have given up in school and results in chronic academic failure. Foley and Pang (2006) cited 50% of at-risk students were chronically failing academics. Most high school students who are at-risk of dropping out have been retained in lower grade levels before. Being retained can lead to students feeling like they will never catch up. Ezarik (2003) detected that students who are retained are ten times more likely to be at-risk of dropping out of high school (Franco & Patel, 2011). This feeling has led students to be disengaged in school.

There are many factors contributing to poor attendance and truancy (Pettus, 2008). For instance, truancy can result from a lack of parental involvement, increased adult responsibilities, and a lack of school engagement (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Many parents of at-risk students are high school dropouts themselves, therefore there is little attention given to the importance of school. Several high school students with economic difficulties have to take on more adult responsibilities by working a great deal of hours to contribute to the family (Blount, 2012). Family environment seems to be the greatest component impacting how students progress in school (Cameron & Heckman, 1991). The family problems countless at-risk students deal with can cause disengagement. Disengagement can also be caused by constant failure at school, feeling as though they do not belong, and being bored with the school curriculum. Foley and Pang (2006) reported 52% of at-risk students were chronically truant to school due to chronic stress from home.

Another factor contributing to poor attendance is the school environment. Wilkins (2008) states the cause of detachment for most at-risk students lies from within the school environment. A school's climate is considered one of the most important aspects of a school. Many at-risk students have poor attendance due to not feeling comfortable in the school and not fitting in

socially. Several at-risk students have also stated they feel as though the teachers do not care about them. Kujawa (2006) cited specific experiences from numerous students who shared personal experiences of feeling socially unaccepted by peers and teachers.

Emotional and behavioral problems

Students with emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems are also at a greater risk of dropping out of high school. Foley and Pang (2006) discovered that 49.89% of alternative education students were classified as having emotional and behavioral disorders. Children living in poverty are also predisposed to emotional and social dysfunction. When a child's basic needs are not met on a daily basis, their brain does not develop normally and impacts their emotional state and behavior. Jensen (2009) reported impoverished children develop psychiatric disturbances and socially maladjusted behavior at a greater rate than affluent children. Living in an environment of chronic stress diminishes a child's self-esteem and creates a feeling of hopelessness leading to school avoidance. The most common emotional dysfunctions resulting from chronic stress include anxiety, detachment disorder, and depression. Research has shown poverty is a major factor of teenage depression (Jensen, 2009). Today, students are also dealing with bullying which can cause students to fear going to school and can impact their attendance. Hodges and Perry stated abuse by peers can leave a negative impact on a child, including depression, low self-esteem, and school avoidance (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). These feelings coupled with bullying and harassment has led to students dropping out of high school and even incidents of suicide.

Anxiety, detachment disorder, and depression often coexist with behaviors defined as socially maladjusted. Socially maladjusted behaviors are described as a) acting out, b) impatient and impulsive, c) impolite, d) limited range of behavioral responses, e) inappropriate emotional

responses, and f) lack of empathy (Jensen, 2009). These behaviors tend to be seen as disrespectful and rude by school officials when the student is actually incapable of finding appropriate responses due to the inability of regulating impulsivity and making sound decisions based on exposure to chronic stress from home. The exposure to a negative environment can cause children to have a less than normal response which can be viewed as indifference toward school. On the other hand, the student can have an over exaggerated response viewed as aggressive. Jensen (2009) stated low income children interact aggressively with peers 40% more than other children. In addition, Foley and Pang (2006) reported that 52% of alternative students had incidents of physical aggression and 45% were verbally disruptive. Since the implementation of no tolerance policies in schools, suspensions and expulsions have increased due to the focus of punishment rather than intervention. These types of responses along with the inability to trust make it difficult for impoverished students to work well in collaborative groups thus compounding their low academic achievement and behavior.

Disabilities

A number of at-risk students have also been diagnosed with a disability. These disabilities include Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism, and Mental Impairment. Due to environmental factors and stress, low income parents are 1.3 times more likely to have children born with disabilities (Currie, 2014). Foley and Pang (2006) stated 12% of at-risk students in alternative education programs were cited as having a disability requiring an Individualized Education Program. Lange and Sletten (2002) reported research from the 1990's showing students with disabilities have about a 20% higher risk of dropping out of high school than non-disabled students. Several of these students have a difficult time abiding by the norms of a traditional high school setting (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Students with disabilities

might feel a great deal of stress due to academic struggles or they might be dealing with social problems.

At-risk students do not become at-risk overnight. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) stated dropping out of high school is not a sudden decision, but an ongoing problem leading to the decision. Many of these factors have led to low self-esteem and a feeling of hopelessness over time (Johnson, 2000). There are other major problems factoring into at-risk students having poor attendance and achievement. Some of these students might be dealing with disabilities, illnesses, emotional problems, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy (Blount, 2012). These problems go beyond just the school system. Schools need resources to help students deal with health related issues, counseling to deal with emotional problems and drug abuse, as well as parenting classes for teenage parents. These individualized programs could assist schools in getting to the root of the problem and supporting students to become successful learners.

Characteristics of Alternative Programs

The dropout crisis has led to school districts creating alternatives to the traditional school setting to meet the needs of at-risk students. Foley and Pang (2006, p. 10) describe alternative education programs as “individualized opportunities designed to meet the educational needs for youth identified as at-risk for school failure”. States have different definitions for alternative programs. The state of Missouri defines “alternative programs are for students having difficulty in academic, disciplinary, social, economic, or other areas relating to their ability to become productive members of the workforce” (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo, 2014, p. 30). They can be for dropouts who wish to re-enroll or students who wish to seek vocational training. The most common criteria for admission to an alternative education program include social-emotional problems, truancy, suspension or expulsion, and risk of dropping out (Foley & Pang, 2006).

Raywid (1993) describes alternative programs as fitting into one of three categories. First, the Type I program is commonly described as a magnet school. Second, the Type II program is a last chance program for students who have severe discipline problems. Third, the Type III program is designed for students with academic, social, and emotional problems. Even though there are distinctively three different types of alternative education programs, most alternative education programs are seen as disciplinary or remedial programs (Aron, 2003).

Type I programs are diverse by nature and many different alternative programs are grouped into this category. These programs can be part-time or full-time schedules offered to students with individualized instruction and self-paced curriculum (Raywid, 1994). Most students in a Type I program, are either a dropout in need of a diploma or a student in need of an individualized education program (Aron, 2003). Students seeking an innovative and challenging curriculum based on creative engaging pedagogies, like a magnet school or a gifted program would also be categorized as a Type I alternative education program. Raywid (1994) believes that Type I programs are more successful due to the individualization based on the student's needs, therefore the focus should be on the needs of the student and not on the characteristics of alternative education students. Programs should focus on the functional level of the students. These programs can be divided into three types based on students who are a little "off track", entering into adulthood early, and students who are extremely "off track" (Aron, 2003). These individualized needs create the structure for the alternative education program. The focus then becomes the needs of the students and not their mistakes or problems.

The Type II program is designed to segregate students with disruptive disciplinary problems (Hosley, 2003). Hosley (2003) reported about 60% of students in alternative education programs were placed there according to misconduct and/or disregard for school authority. Type

Type II programs were designed to be short term with the intention of improving student behavior such as in-school suspension programs (Raywid, 1994). Eventually, Type II programs became known as last chance programs where students are mandated to attend in order to avoid expulsion with the goal of graduation (Emery, 2000). Since the focus is on behavior modification, curriculum is rarely individualized or modified for the students (Foley & Pang, 2006). Students are usually required to complete the classes they were removed from by utilizing an online curriculum. The online programs design their curriculum and instruction based on basic review and drill of skills (Raywid, 1994). In contrast, classroom curriculum and instruction is based on deeper levels of knowledge including analyzing information. Raywid (1994) has shown little benefit from Type II programs since they are designed to be punitive by nature.

Type III alternative programs are designed for students in need of academic remediation or social/emotional rehabilitation (Raywid, 1994). The academic remediation programs allow students, who have been identified as having a slow learner profile, to access a curriculum designed for intensive instruction with additional support. The social/emotional rehabilitation programs might provide individual and small group based counseling to address underlying issues hindering the student's academic progress (Aron, 2003). Type III programs are designed with the intention of students returning to the mainstream classroom once academic progress or social/emotional growth has been achieved (Raywid, 1994). Most students show improvement from Type III programs, but many students tend to revert back to old behaviors once they return to mainstream classrooms (Gilson, 2006).

Alternative education programs can be identified as being one of Raywid's three types, but more programs are showing characteristics of more than one type (Raywid, 1994). For this reason, alternative schools are examined through a different lens today. For example, looking at

the reason for the student's placement in an alternative education program can explain where the focus should lie. When a student chooses an alternative program, there is an assumption that something is wrong with the school or curriculum. When students are mandated or referred to an alternative program, there is an assumption that something is wrong with the student. Since the typology has been skewed over the years, Raywid has developed new categories for alternative programs. The new categories focus on changing the student, changing the school, and changing the education system (Aron, 2003).

Effective alternative education programs operate based on the youth development principles since the needs of the students are at the forefront (National Alternative Education Association, 2016). These include physical and psychological safety, appropriate structures, supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, positive social norms, support for efficacy, skill building, and integration of family and school (Aron, 2003). When these principles are present, adolescents are in an environment that positions them to be successful. Lange and Sletton (2002) have stated effective alternative education programs have clear goals, autonomy, student-centered approach, and training and support for teachers.

Alternative education programs have some elements in common. The programs are designed with four dimensions in mind; including who the students will be, where the program is located, what curriculum is used, and how the program will be structured (Aron, 2003). The programs all tend to have small classroom sizes which allows for individualized instruction and flexible schedules (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). The small class size allows for teachers to build relationships with the at-risk students and address their special circumstances. The small teacher-student ratios coupled with strong teacher-student relationships tend to yield a sense of community among those involved in the alternative education program. This gives the students

an emotional safety many have never felt before (Morrissette, 2011). The flexible schedules also allow at-risk students to have more freedom in the day to work around their schedules for whatever might be an issue for them. Alternative education programs can be located within the existing school (school-within-a-school) or at an off-site location. Some school districts might operate their own alternative programs while other school districts might contract the supervision out to a cohort with other school districts. Regardless of the location of the alternative program, the intent is to have less rigidity and management from administration and more flexibility for students and staff to collaborate.

Many schools are adopting credit recovery programs to assist students who have failed a course to regain credits for graduation requirements. Credit recovery programs are different from alternative schools in which they are designed to only help a student graduate while alternative schools create a different learning environment for the students (Robbins, 2011). Schools districts usually adopt prerequisites for admittance into the credit recovery program. Prerequisites may include poor attendance, number of credits behind grade level, and likelihood of failure to graduate. Credit recovery programs can be on-line courses, a blend of on-line and in-person instruction, or in-person instruction only. Credit recovery programs are usually web-based programs that may be referred to as virtual learning, e-learning, or online learning (Franco & Patel, 2011). These programs are meant to be a temporary placement until the student regains their class status to graduate on time. Several students may perform well in credit recovery programs for different reasons. Some students like the use of computers, working at their own pace, and the small non-traditional classroom setting (Franco & Patel, 2011). There are negatives to credit recovery programs due to a lack of regulation which provides little data about the programs. Many educators are skeptical about the rigor of credit recovery programs and whether

students are learning the required content. Questions have also been raised about how credit recovery students' grades are recorded and the fairness of the practice. Due to the lack of regulation, little information is known about how many students are enrolled and the effectiveness of the programs leading to further study.

Another alternative to traditional education is the General Education Development (GED) first released in 1942 (GED Testing Service, 2015). The GED was developed for young men who enlisted in World War II before earning a high school diploma to indicate knowledge in math, writing, reading, social studies, and science (Tyler, 2005). At first the GED was used as a placement tool for more than 40% of test takers to prove qualification for employment in entry level positions as well as 37% of test takers to enroll in further study such as college (GED Testing Service, 2015). Eventually, the GED test replaced “wartime” diplomas and became a high school equivalency credentials test due to the warm welcome home and the GI Bill veterans received (Quinn, 2014).

Over time, the GED test has been changed to reflect the needs of our nation. As previously stated, half of the states were testing civilians by the 1950's. In the 1970's, the GED test was restructured based on the changes in secondary education curriculum to reflect the test takers ability to apply knowledge and evaluate information (GED Testing Service, 2015). The GED test in the 1980's mirrored the emergence of global awareness in education focusing on writing skills, critical thinking and problem solving, citizenship, and societal changes (Quinn, 2014). Additionally, test takers had different reasons for taking the GED test. Today, over 65% of test takers were taking the test to further their education while 30% of test takers were trying to qualify for employment (GED Testing Service, 2015).

In addition to the GED program, Missouri high schools also have the opportunity to offer at-risk students the Missouri Option GED program. This is another alternative education program for students who are seventeen years old, at least one year behind their cohort, and work at least twenty hours a week (DESE, 2015). Missouri Options is also a small learning community working with an online learning program. At-risk students adopt learning goals, work at their own pace, and prepare for the GED test (DESE, 2015). Students involved in the Missouri Options program have an alternative schedule compared to the traditional school day to accommodate work schedules. The students who successfully complete the program will earn a high school diploma instead of a GED diploma.

School districts who offer alternative education programs tend to have a mixture of the above stated programs. Raywid (1994) has stated many school districts are placing students in alternative programs for various reasons which leads to alternative programs being a mixture of Type I, Type II, and Type III. Students may be attending the alternative program temporarily or as a last chance option to graduate. The alternative programs might offer credit recovery, GED/Missouri Options, or a nontraditional setting for students who struggle in the traditional classroom. Even with the many difference exhibited, there have been efforts to create a systemic approach to alternative education.

In 2002, the NAEA was created through the Safe Schools Coalition and by 2006, the program transitioned to alternative educator leadership to create a systemic approach to alternative education and provide support to alternative educators. (National Alternative Education Association, 2016). The NAEA created exemplary practices in 2014 to provide standards of quality and program evaluation criteria as a guide for effective alternative education

programs. The NAEA provided fifteen exemplary practices along with indicators of quality programming.

The NAEA's exemplary practices begin with vision and mission, policies and procedures, leadership, and climate and culture (National Alternative Education Association, 2016). First, all alternative education programs need to develop a clearly stated vision and mission to provide overall goals and steps to achieve those goals. Policies and procedures are developed as a form of standard operating procedures to support the vision and mission. Next, leaders of alternative programs need to exhibit passion, innovation, and experience with nontraditional settings. Lastly, the climate and culture of an alternative education program needs to operate based on positive behavior management and student discipline to create a trusting atmosphere.

Further key elements of the NAEA's exemplary practices include staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, digital and virtual learning, and student assessment (National Alternative Education Association, 2016). One of the most important key elements deals with staffing and professional development. Alternative education programs need teachers who are innovative, caring, and positive with experience dealing with diverse student populations. The teachers need access to an individualized curriculum that allows hands-on learning. Many alternative education programs utilize digital and virtual learning to create individualized learning opportunities based on national/state standards. Alternative education programs also need reliable student assessments to provide teachers with data to understand the needs of students to create goals and measure achievement.

To further support alternative education students, the NAEA recommends that alternative education programs provide nontraditional education plans, school counseling, transition

planning and support, and social work (National Alternative Education Association, 2016).

Alternative education programs should create a nontraditional education plan when a student first enters the program. The support team will create an individualized plan to meet the student's needs and personal goals. School counselors play an important role in supporting alternative education students with academics as well as interpersonal skills. School counselors will also provide college and career readiness support for transition from high school. School social workers are also imperative when dealing with alternative students who may have barriers to learning. The social worker can provide intervention services to support students and their academic progress.

In addition, the NAEA (2016) recommends parent/guardian involvement, collaboration, and program evaluation. For any educational program to succeed, parent/guardian involvement is vital. There needs to be open communication and support between the school and home to ensure consistency. Collaboration is not only important between the schools and home, but also with partners in the community. Partnerships within the community can lead to additional resources offered to the alternative education program. The NAEA also recommends program evaluations to assess the quality of the program and provide data for continuous school improvement.

Effective alternative education programs exhibit the NAEA's exemplary practices. For example, effective alternative education programs are based on the needs of the students served. The class sizes are extremely small, have alternative schedules, and create a sense of community or family. Teachers are also seen as more than teachers. Sometimes they act as guidance counselors and even parents. Teachers must be willing to be more involved, adapt to situations, and be a visionary (Crump, 2003). The National Dropout Prevention Center has reported alternative education programs have been successful in reducing absenteeism, improving

attitudes about school, helping students earn high school credits, and reducing behavior problems (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2017).

Even though there are similarities among most alternative education programs, some are located within the traditional school and others are separate self-contained facilities (Aron, 2003). Hosley (2003) reported that 37% of alternative education programs are located in a different building from the traditional setting, while 30% are located within the traditional setting building but are self-contained. Foley and Pang (2006) have also reported on the location of alternative education program facilities stating that 80% operate off-campus. There has not been a great deal of research conducted about the success of the two different locations of alternative programs. Since the environment of an alternative education program is crucial to the success of the at-risk students, then the location of the program could also be crucial in contributing to the success of the students enrolled.

Summary

In Chapter Two, the researcher focuses on the review of data and literature that will provide specific details associated with at-risk students and alternative education programs. The literature review focused on five major themes. The themes included the evolution of education including the historical background to the dropout problem, the importance of alternative education programs, common characteristics of at-risk students, characteristics of alternative high school education programs, and the theoretical frameworks involved.

Chapter Three will speak to the methodology in which this study was conducted. Details will be provided with regard to the problem and purpose of the study, null hypothesis and hypothesis, sample and population, and research setting. The methodology will also include the

interview question development, research design, as well as a data collection and analysis of at-risk students involved in alternative education programs.

Chapter Four will provide a presentation of the findings based upon whether there is a difference between the location of an alternative education program and the success of the students enrolled utilizing graduation rates. The analysis will contain descriptive data about participants involved and the interviews of the alternative education directors. In addition, the chapter will analyze whether there is an association between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates.

Chapter Five will summarize the methods and findings of the study conducted. Implications of the research will be stated along with the limitations of the study. Furthermore, recommendations for future research will be included for the betterment of alternative education programs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This quantitative dissertation studied the difference in graduation rates between the locations of alternative education programs and what NAEA's exemplary practices are associated with them. The exemplars include vision and mission, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transition planning and support, family engagement, collaboration, program evaluation, counseling and social work, and digital learning. The quantitative method centers on data from graduation rates of on-campus alternative education programs and off-campus alternative education programs for the past five years, in addition to, descriptive interviews of directors of on-campus alternative programs and off-campus alternative programs. The study included school districts of Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Within Missouri's region eight, thirty-eight school districts were used for this study. The study looked for differences in graduation rates based on the location of the alternative education programs. In addition, the study looked to see if any association exists between the use of the NAEA's exemplars and the graduation rates.

Problem and Purpose of the Study

Dropout rates could have long lasting implications for our nation in this ever growing global economy. As stated in the literature research, the at-risk students who drop out fail to receive a proper education, have a difficult time finding work, and can become a drain on our nation's resources. Robbins (2011) research identified a great deal of people on welfare and in the correctional system have not received a high school diploma.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a difference between the location of alternative education programs and the success of the students enrolled in the alternative education programs. The analysis of the graduation rates and exemplars may have been correlated to the success of the students. The study will assist school districts and educators in making an informed decision about what type of alternative education program to develop based on the needs of their students. Since the dropout rate is a pertinent issue in America, the study will be a great resource of information for school districts to try and reduce their dropout rate.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs which are located on-campus and those off-campus?
2. Between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs, what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates?

Null Hypothesis

Research question #1: There will be no difference in the graduation rates based on location.

Research question #2: There is no association between the locations of the programs and the standards they employ and follow.

Hypothesis

This study attempted to determine if graduation rates are different based upon the different locations of the alternative education programs and which exemplars are more associated with the programs. The NAEA's exemplary practices were used as an indicator for quality programming.

Sample and Population

Participants for this study included directors of alternative education programs in Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as the sample. The region includes school districts from St. Louis County, St. Charles County, and Jefferson County. The region includes thirty-eight school districts.

Graduation rate data were gathered from each school district's alternative education programs. The directors of each school districts' alternative education program were contacted and interviewed based on the location of their programs. The personal interviews were conducted to add insight into why their programs were deemed successful and determine the presence or absence of particular exemplars related to their higher graduation rates. The interviews also provided more detailed information about the difference between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs.

Interview Question Development

The interview questions were created using the NAEA exemplary practices (see Appendix A). The NAEA developed thirteen exemplary practices based on standards of quality and program evaluation in 2014. The thirteen exemplary practices are indicators of which programs are successful. The thirteen exemplars include vision and mission; leadership; climate and culture; staffing and professional development; curriculum and instruction; student assessment; transition planning and support; parent/guardian involvement; collaboration; program evaluation; school counseling; school social work; and digital and virtual learning.

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were asked in an interview conducted by the researcher. The responses were recorded using a chart, listing possible variables (see Appendix

B). The researcher recorded answers by noting a one for responses and a zero if it was not mentioned.

1. How many years has the alternative education program been open?
2. How many students are enrolled in the program and what are the demographics of your student population?
3. Is your program located on or off campus? Are you a Type I, Type II, Type III or mixed program?
4. What is the vision and mission of the alternative education program?
5. How would you describe the alternative education program's teachers/director? What type of training/professional development has the staff been provided for alternative education programs?
6. What makes an alternative education student successful?
7. What type of resources are needed for your program to succeed?
8. How would you describe the climate and culture of the alternative education program?
9. Please describe the curriculum and instruction used in the alternative education program.
10. Does the alternative education program use virtual learning? How was the program selected?
11. How are the alternative education students being assessed?
12. What type of transition planning is provided for alternative education students?

13. Does the alternative education program have access to school counselors and social workers that target nontraditional students?
14. What type of collaboration/partnerships have been made with outside resources?
15. How is the alternative education program being evaluated?
16. How does the alternative education program involve parents/guardians?
17. What is the alternative education program's survey process for parents/students to evaluate the program?
18. What are the areas in need of improvement as the program moves forward?

Research Designs

This quantitative dissertation studied the difference between the success of alternative education programs and their location to school campus. Quantitative data were collected on the graduation rates of on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs for the past five years. In addition, data were collected by personally interviewing select school district's alternative education program directors with open-ended questions to gain insight into why they believe their programs are successful. The descriptive interview responses were gathered together in groups based on types of programs and location to see if there was an association to success among the programs involved. The interview questions were grouped into different intermediate variables based on NAEA's exemplary practices which include vision and mission, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transition planning and support, family engagement, collaboration, program evaluation, counseling and social work, and digital learning. These variables included demographics, program environment, staffing and professional development, instruction and

curriculum, transition planning, community involvement, evaluation, and counselor/social worker.

Data Collection

The study was based on two types of data. The first set of data was quantitative. School districts were given a request for graduation rates from their alternative education programs for the past five years. This was collected by email from the school districts of Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The second set of data were quantitative. The directors of selected school district's alternative education programs were interviewed with open-ended questions in person or by phone. The names of the directors were not included in the study. The answers to the questions, during the interview, were grouped into categories for the purpose of organizing and analyzing trends and included in the study for association (see Appendix B) based on the NAEA's exemplary practices which include vision and mission, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transition planning and support, family engagement, collaboration, program evaluation, counseling and social work, and digital learning. The school's demographic data, such as enrollment and student demographics were included.

Data Analysis

The graduation rate and interviews of the on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs were statistically evaluated. The group with the higher percentage of graduation rates were viewed as more successful. The study also compared the differences and similarities from the interviews to see if there was an association between the location of the alternative education program and the success of the students.

For research question #1, an independent samples *t*-test was utilized to see if a difference existed between on-campus versus off-campus alternative education programs and their graduation rates. An independent samples *t*-test was used because there were two groups to analyze the difference in graduation rates over five years. The research question #1 hypothesis tested at the α (alpha) = .05 as the level of significance in a two tailed test.

There were assumptions to using the independent samples *t*-test. First, the data collected from the sample was independent meaning the schools were listed once and data was not repeated. Second, the dependent variable was a scale measure for the graduation rates are at the ratio level of measurement. Third, the distribution of data used as the dependent variable for on-campus versus off-campus programs was homogeneous in which the spread of their curves were similar.

For research question #2, a chi-square and *Cramer's V* statistic was used to determine how significant the exemplars were related to the location of the alternative education programs. These two variables were compared based upon the interview answers with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS) program. The chi-square was tested at the α (alpha) = .05 to determine if there was an association and the *Cramer's V* was used to exhibit how much of an association existed.

There were assumptions to using chi-square and *Cramer's V*. First, the data collected from the sample was independent meaning the schools were listed once and data was not repeated. Second, the independent and dependent variables were categorical based on the location of the programs and the association between the exemplars exhibited with the graduation rates. Third, the number in the cells for calculation of this statistic was five or more.

This process utilized the open-ended interview answers to see if a pattern existed to determine which type of alternative education program and location was the best environment for student success. The interview questions were grouped into different intermediate variables. The responses were recorded using a chart, listing these possible variables (see Appendix B). The researcher recorded answers by noting a one for responses and a zero if it was not mentioned. These variables included demographics, program environment, staffing and professional development, instruction and curriculum, transition planning, community involvement, evaluation, and counselor/social worker. The variables included the following interview questions.

Table 1

Intermediate Variables Based on Interviews

Variables	Question Number
Demographics	1, 2, 3
Program Environment	4, 6, 7, 8
Staffing/Professional Development	5
Instruction and Curriculum	9, 10, 11
Transition	12, 18
Counselor/Social Worker	13
Community Involvement	14, 16
Evaluation	15, 17

Note. This demonstrates the variable topics included in each interview question.

For the study, the interview data was used to see if the interview responses of the interviewees correlated with the graduation rates. In addition, the data was utilized to see if one environment had an association to the success of students graduating.

Summary

In Chapter Three, the researcher stated graduation rates were an important indicator of which alternative education program was more successful. This study could provide school districts with data to help them decide whether an on-campus or off-campus alternative program would be beneficial for their at-risk students. The interview data could also provide greater insight into what characteristics make an alternative education program successful.

Another important aspect of the study were the interviews. The interviews provided information beyond the graduation rates. The interviews provided the study with more details into how school districts operate their alternative education programs and their perceptions about the success of the alternative education programs. The NAEA's exemplary practices were used to guide the interview questions. The exemplars provide standards for all alternative education programs. The questions could be used by other alternative education programs to evaluate the structure of their alternative education program.

Chapter Four will provide a presentation of the findings based upon whether there is a difference between the location of an alternative education program and the success of the students enrolled utilizing the graduation rates. The analysis will contain descriptive data about the participants involved and the interviews of the alternative education directors. In addition, the chapter will analyze whether there is an association between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates.

Chapter Five will summarize the methods and findings of the study conducted. Implications of the research will be stated along with the limitations of the study. Furthermore,

recommendations for future research will be included for the betterment of alternative education programs.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

A quantitative study was utilized to analyze the location of alternative education programs and their graduation rates then to see which exemplary practices were highly correlated to the higher graduation rates. The quantitative method concentrated on the graduation rates of the on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs for the past five years, as well as, the descriptive interviews of the directors of the alternative education programs. The study analyzed the graduation rate data, along with the interview responses, to determine if a difference existed between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs.

Participants

A quantitative study was utilized to analyze the location of alternative education programs and their graduation rates then to see which exemplary practices were highly correlated to the higher graduation rates. Participants for the study included program directors/administrators from alternative education programs in Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The region included school districts from St. Louis County, St. Charles County, and Jefferson County. The region included thirty-eight school districts. Of the thirty-eight school districts contacted, twenty-nine responded. Four of the twenty-nine schools did not have current alternative education programs in place. In addition, another four school districts declined to participate in the study for various reasons. Seventeen alternative education programs were included in the study, representing nineteen school districts including those involved in collaborations together, resulting in a completion rate of 50%. Since there was a small sample size, a chi-square was

applied because of the advantage of being a non-parametric test. Only nine of the schools interviewed disclosed the alternative education programs' graduation rates. Even though this did not meet the researchers desired sample size, the schools involved represented many different demographics across the region to provide moderate associations.

Table 2

Sample and Population Demographics

Schools	Location	Type	Size	Minority	Free/Reduced Lunch
1	On	Mixed (2,3)	30	23%	100%
2	Off	Mixed	160	30%	29%
3	On	Mixed (2,3)	64	0%	44%
4	Off	Mixed (1,2,3)	90	43%	61%
5	On	Mixed (1,2,3)	80	44%	50%
6	Off	Mixed	70	70%	21%
7	Off	Mixed (2,3)	98	26%	52%
8	Off	3	135	23%	35%
9	On	Mixed (2,3)	45	12%	100%
10	Off	Mixed (1,3)	111	51%	51%
11	On	3	59	40%	60%
12	On	Mixed (2,3)	18	61%	50%
13	On	3	69	22%	23%
14	Off	Mixed (2,3)	105	98%	92%
15	On	3	150	1%	0%
16	Off	Mixed	200	27%	60%
17	On	Mixed	30	24%	48%

Note. This table demonstrates the specific sample and population demographics of each school that participated in the study. The table exhibits whether the programs were located on or off campus, what type of program based on Mary Ann Raywid's research, the number of students enrolled, the diversity of the program, and what percent of the students enrolled received free/reduced lunch.

Interview answers were grouped together to analyze an association, in relation to graduation data, to answer the following research questions that sought to determine the success of alternative education programs. The research questions include:

1. What is the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs which are located on-campus and those off-campus?
2. Between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs, what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates?

Null Hypothesis

Research question #1: There will be no difference in the graduation rates based on location.

Research question #2: There is no association between the locations of the programs and the standards they employ and follow.

Descriptive Interviews of Alternative Education Programs

Each alternative education program director/administrator was asked a series of eighteen open-ended questions involving topics of demographics, climate, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, transition planning, school counseling and social work, collaboration, evaluation process, and parental involvement. The descriptive interview responses were gathered together in groups based on the NAEA's exemplary practices which include vision and mission, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transition planning and support, family engagement, collaboration, program evaluation, counseling and social work, and digital learning. The interview questions were grouped into different intermediate variables by the researcher (see Appendix B). The researcher noted a one for responses to questions and a zero for those not mentioned during the interview. These variables included demographics, program environment, staffing and professional development, instruction and curriculum, transition planning, community involvement, evaluation, and counselor/social worker.

Research Question #1

The first research question was analyzed to see if a difference existed between on-campus versus off-campus alternative education programs and their graduation rates. An independent samples *t*-test was used because there were two groups to analyze the difference in graduation rates over five years. Five independent samples *t*-tests was utilized to see if a difference existed between on-campus versus off-campus alternative education programs and their graduation rates for the five years between 2013-2018 outlined in Table 3. The research question #1 hypothesis was tested at the α (alpha) = .05 as the level of significance in a two tailed test. In doing so, two of the years showed a statistical difference for the academic years of 2014 and 2015.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-test Groups Statistics

Years	Location	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
2013-1014	off-campus	3	70.4000	19.83633
	on-campus	4	90.6250	6.26332
2014-2015	off-campus	3	68.7000	23.50255
	on-campus	5	92.7200	7.02794
2015-2016	off-campus	4	73.4375	22.15323
	on-campus	5	95.7400	6.37871
2016-2017	off-campus	4	78.8250	22.74619
	on-campus	5	95.4600	6.55729
2017-2018	off-campus	4	79.8500	18.87741
	on-campus	4	94.7000	6.13949

Note. This table demonstrates independent samples *t*-test groups statistics to analyze the difference in graduation rates for the two separate locations of on and off campus programs.

There were assumptions to using the independent samples *t*-test. The first two assumptions were met by collecting data from an independent sample, meaning the schools were listed once and data was not repeated, and the dependent variable was a scale measure for the

graduation rates at the ratio level of measurement. The third assumption was not met concerning the distribution of data being used as the dependent variable for on-campus versus off-campus programs being homogeneous in which the spread of their curves would be similar. The wide standard deviation of the off-campus alternative education programs made this difficult to meet.

Table 4 outlines the independent samples *t*-test results for the on-campus versus off-campus alternative education programs' and their graduation rates over five years. While nothing significant was noted between the on-campus location and the off-campus location, there were two years close to the α (alpha) level of .05. For the academic year of 2014-2015 the on-campus programs had higher graduation rates ($M=92.7200$, $SD=7.02794$) compared to the off-campus programs ($M=68.7000$, $SD=23.50255$) by a statistically significant difference of -24.02000 (95% *CI*, -50.34686 to 2.30685) $t(6) = -2.233$, $p = .067$. A small effect size existed with a Cohen's $d = -1.302$. In addition, for the academic year of 2015-2016, the on-campus programs had higher graduation rates again ($M=95.7400$, $SD=6.37871$) compared to the off-campus programs ($M=73.4375$, $SD=22.15323$) by a statistical significant difference of -22.30250 (95% *CI*, -46.54541 to 1.94041) $t(7) = -2.175$, $p = .066$. A small effect size existed with a Cohen's $d = -1.205$. Such results close to the level of significance suggested a possible difference, but the small sample size may not have contributed to any detection of significance. In addition to the small sample size, another factor could be due to the fact that not all programs provided graduation rates for five years. Even though the researcher did not reject the null hypothesis, the Cohen's d showed a great effect size which allows for future recommendations for research based upon the standards of a .7 being of great effect size.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-test of On-campus versus Off-campus Alternative Education Programs' Graduation Rates

Years	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	df	Significance (2-tailed)
2013-2014	-20.22500	-1.969	5	.106
2014-2015	-24.02000	-2.233	6	.067
2015-2016	-22.30250	-2.175	7	.066
2016-2017	-16.63500	-1.580	7	.158
2017-2018	-14.85000	-1.496	6	.185

Note. This table demonstrates the independent samples *t*-test results for comparing the graduation rates of on and off campus alternative education programs.

Research Question #2

The second research question was analyzed to see if an association existed between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and what exemplary standards were associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates. A chi-square and *Cramer's V* statistic was used to determine how significant the exemplars were related to the location of the alternative education programs. The chi-square was tested at the α (alpha) = .05 to determine if there was an association and the *Cramer's V* was used to exhibit how much of an association existed.

There were assumptions to using chi-square and *Cramer's V*. First, the data collected from the sample was independent meaning the schools were listed once and data was not repeated. Second, the independent and dependent variables were categorical based on the location of the programs and the association between the exemplars exhibited with the

graduation rates. Third, the number in the cells for calculation of this statistic was five or more. All three assumptions were met in the process.

Table 5 outlines the chi-square association and *Cramer's V* correlational results for on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and the association that may occur with the three exemplary standards that were deemed statistically significant. The chi-square was conducted on all interview questions individually, but when looking for associations between the location and exemplars only three were significant. While three exemplars were considered statistically significant and showed different associations with on and off campus environments, the research does not appear to show any measureable difference between the graduation rates of the on and off campus programs.

First, a chi-square test for association was conducted between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and the need for technology/virtual learning as a resource. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five. There was a statistically significant association between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and the need for technology/virtual learning as a resource, $\chi^2(1) = .789, p = .001$. When interviewing the alternative education programs' directors, seven of the nine on-campus programs indicated the need for technology/virtual learning while none of the eight off-campus programs indicated this as a needed resource. This was a moderate association between technology/virtual learning and on-campus alternative education programs.

Second, a chi-square test for association was conducted between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and professional development focused on differentiated instruction. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five. There was a statistically significant association between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and

professional development focused on differentiated instruction, $\chi^2(1) = .588, p = .015$. When interviewing the alternative education programs' directors, none of the nine on-campus programs indicated the need for professional development on differentiated instruction while four of the eight off-campus programs indicated this as a needed professional development. This was a moderate association between professional development based on differentiated instruction needed for off-campus programs.

Third, a chi-square test for association was conducted between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs with the variable of teachers being certified core teachers. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five. There was a statistically significant association between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs and having certified core teachers, $\chi^2(1) = .588, p = .015$. When interviewing the alternative education programs' directors, none of the nine on-campus programs described their teachers as certified in a core area of instruction while four of the eight off-campus directors specifically described their teachers as having core certification. This was a moderate association between the off-campus programs specifically emphasizing their teachers as having core certifications.

Table 5

Chi-Square and Cramer's V Results for On-campus versus Off-campus Alternative Education Programs Association with Exemplary Standards

Number of Schools and the Location	Standard	Chi-Square	Significance	Cramer's V
7/9 On 0/8 Off	Resources- Technology/Virtual Program	.789	.001	.789
0/9 On 4/8 Off	Training- Differentiated Instruction	.588	.015	.588
0/9 On 4/8 Off	Teachers- Certified Core	.588	.015	.588

Note. This table demonstrates how many of the on-campus and off-campus programs out of the total number mentioned the standards of resources, training, and teachers.

Even though the researcher did not observe associations between the location of the alternative education programs and all the exemplary standards, there were three exemplars that did exhibit a significance. The exemplary standards dealing with resources (technology/virtual learning), training (differentiated instruction), and teachers (certified core) were deemed moderately significant. These findings allowed the researcher to reject the null hypothesis for three of the exemplary standards.

Correlational Study

During the interview process, the researcher noticed a trend in responses correlating to the literature research of alternative education. Based upon the responses, the researcher needed to alter the groupings of intermediate variables in association with the NAEA's Exemplars (Table 1). The demographics variable was focused to exhibit the programs on or off campus. The program environment variable indicated the responses related to the vision/mission and climate description of the program. The staffing and professional development variable was narrowed down to display the programs that offered staff professional development associated with alternative education. The curriculum and instruction variable indicated the programs that use online curriculums. The transition variable shows the programs that offered any type of transition planning. The counselor and social worker variable indicates the program that offered scheduled counseling sessions for alternative education students. The community involvement variable denotes the programs who have established community and outside partnerships. Lastly, the evaluation variable displays the programs who had an evaluation process in place.

Cramer's V was utilized to calculate statistical significance between the two variables of types of alternative education programs and the location of the programs. These two variables were then compared to the interview questions and responses. The variables and interview responses were submitted and analyzed with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS) program.

Research Questions

The interview responses and graduation data provided sufficient data to answer the research questions. The first research question sought to discover if the location of an alternative education program impacted graduation rates. The second research question sought to discover if there was a difference between on and off campus programs and what the differences were attributed to.

The first research question sought to discover the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs located on-campus and those off-campus. The results of the interviews, in correspondence to graduation data, did not provide a significant association. Schools 1, 3, 7, 8, 11, and 13 seemed to be successful due to interview responses and high graduation rates. Among these programs, schools 3 and 8 were located off campus while the others were on campus. On the other hand, schools 2, 10, and 12 did not have high graduation rates. Among these programs, schools 2 and 10 were located off campus and 12 was located on campus. If the researcher was not limited to access of graduation data, there may have been a greater association found.

The second research question sought to discover if there were exemplary standards associated with on-campus programs versus off-campus programs which may impact graduation rates. Based upon the interview responses and graduation data provided there was not a

difference significant association. The most significant associations included professional development, transition planning, and the program's evaluation process.

Summary

Chapter Four discussed the total number of programs who participated in the interview process and provided program graduation data seeking to discover the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs located on-campus and those off-campus and what exemplary standards are associated with impacting graduation rates. The interview questions were based on the NAEA's Exemplary Standards of Quality and Program Evaluation. The responses were grouped into intermediate variables to examine a difference between location of the program to success of the students.

When analyzing the location of the alternative programs and the success of students involved, graduation rates did not appear to be statistically different between the locations resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis for the first research question. However, a small sample size was utilized and the data did show that two of the five years of graduation rates were close the level of statistical difference. The association between the on and off alternative programs depends on the vision/mission, staffing, and resources available. These differences in programs impacted the success of students involved resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis for those three exemplars for the second research question.

Chapter Five will summarize the methods and findings of the study conducted. Implications of the research will be stated along with the limitations of the study. Furthermore, recommendations for future research will be included for the betterment of alternative education programs.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research, first, focused on identifying whether there is a difference in graduation rates between alternative education programs located on-campus versus off-campus. Further study had been recommended by Laudan Aron (2003) to determine if “alternative education programs that operate totally outside of and separate from regular school districts and public schools more effective than alternative education sponsored by school districts” (p. 27). Aron (2003) indicated that location played an important role in the success of an alternative education program. Mary Anne Raywid (1994) and Abraham Maslow (1943) also put an emphasis on the importance of a positive and safe environment. The rationale was to determine if there was a difference between the graduation rates of on-campus alternative education programs compared to off-campus.

Secondly, this research focused on determining what elements were found within each location of alternative education programs and were associated or related to their graduation rates. The NAEA created exemplary practices in 2014 to provide standards of quality and program evaluation criteria as a guide for effective alternative education programs (see Appendix A). These exemplars are related to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Many exemplars focus on the areas of safe school environment, feeling as though they belong, and having resources to help students feel success. These exemplars are associated with Maslow’s physiological, safety, belonging, and self-esteem needs.

Research was necessary to assist school districts and educators in making informed decisions about what type of alternative education program to develop based on the needs of

their students. Since the dropout rate is an important factor in determining the success of school districts, more programs are being developed. The information based on the NAEA's exemplars can also help improve programs already in existence. Information of location and the use of NAEA's exemplars can better graduation rates and reduce dropout rates.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs which are located on-campus and those off-campus?
2. Between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs, what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates?

Null Hypothesis

Research question #1: There will be no difference in the graduation rates based on location.

Research question #2: There is no association between the locations of the programs and the standards they employ and follow.

Summary of Methods

A quantitative research was completed to study the difference in graduation rates between the locations of alternative education programs and what NAEA's exemplary practices are associated with them. Quantitative data were collected on the graduation rates of on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs for the past five years. An independent samples *t*-test was utilized to see if a difference existed between on-campus versus off-campus alternative education programs and their graduation rates. An independent samples *t*-test was used because there were two groups to analyze the difference in graduation rates over five years. Quantitative data were additionally collected by personally interviewing select school district's alternative

education program directors with open-ended questions to gain insight into why they believe their programs are successful. The descriptive interview responses were gathered together in groups based on location to see if there was an association to success among the programs involved. The exemplars include vision and mission, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transition planning and support, family engagement, collaboration, program evaluation, counseling and social work, and digital learning. A chi-square and *Cramer's V* statistic was used to determine how significant the exemplars were related to the location of the alternative education programs. These two variables were compared based upon the interview answers with the assistance of the Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS) program.

The study included school districts of Missouri's region eight, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Within Missouri's region eight, thirty-eight school districts were contacted for this study. Of the thirty-eight school districts, only twenty-nine responded. In addition, four districts did not have an alternative education program and another four declined to participate in the study. The seventeen school districts that participated gave the researcher a 50% completion rate. As noted earlier, this did not meet the researchers desired sample size, but the schools involved represented many different demographics across the region to provide moderate associations.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: What is the difference in the graduation rates between alternative education programs which are located on-campus and those off-campus? Based on the analysis of the five years of graduation rate data provided, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis stating there would be no difference in the graduation rates based on location. There

were limitations due to only nine of the seventeen alternative education programs providing graduation rates. Reasons for not sharing graduation data included that they did not individually analyze the programs graduation rates and for the off-campus programs. Many stated the graduation rates fed back into their home schools.

Due to the small sample size, a Cohen's *d* was used to determine what the effective sample size might be in pursuit of a statistical significance. For instance, some programs had a graduation rate in the 70% range while other programs noted graduation rates in the 85-90% range. When looking closely at the location of programs and the graduation rates, effect size suggests environment is key. This data corresponds with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory and Alderfer's (1969) erg theory in which both state the need for students to feel safe in their environment. The school climate and trusting relationships with teachers help students feel safe and welcome in the school environment.

An interpretation of the data noted that most of the higher graduation rates occurred in the on-campus alternative education programs. However, as stated previously, due to the small sample size a statistical significance could not be detected as to whether location of an alternative education program was an indication of success. This did not contradict the literature, but lends to the need for more precise data to arrange alternative education programs to be more successful.

Research Question 2: Between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs, what exemplary standards are associated with these programs which may impact graduation rates? Based on the analysis of the interviews of seventeen alternative education programs' directors, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis for all but three exemplars, stating there is no statistically significant association between the locations of the programs and

the standards they employ and follow. As previously stated, the small sample size created a limitation on analyzing a measurable difference for all but three of the exemplars. Although the results show trustworthiness, the data would be more significant with a larger sample.

A strong association was noticed in three of the NAEA's exemplary practices. First, when directors were asked about what resources were required for the programs to operate, seven of the nine on-campus alternative education programs indicated technology/virtual learning was vital. On the other hand, none of the off-campus programs specified the need for technology/virtual learning as crucial. An interpretation of this data corresponds with McClelland's motivational theory (1961) based on a person's need for goals, affiliation, and power. The alternative education programs are flexible to meet students' needs relating to their personal goals which in turn gives the students power over their education. To achieve this flexibility, alternative education programs tend to utilize technology/virtual learning programs.

Secondly, when directors were asked about what professional development was needed to assist the teachers in alternative education, four of the eight off-campus programs designated training in differentiated instruction as essential. Alternatively, none of the on-campus programs indicated the need for professional development dealing with differentiated instruction. As stated above, differentiated instruction corresponds with McClelland's motivational theory (1961) based on a person's need for goals, affiliation, and power. Differentiated instruction allows teachers to recognize the different learning styles of their students to help them achieve their goals. This flexibility allows students to reach their personal goals which in turn gives the students power over their education.

Third, when the directors were asked to provide characteristics describing the alternative education teachers, four of the eight off-campus programs specifically stated their teachers were

certified in core subject areas. In contrast, none of the on-campus programs noted their teachers were certified in core subject areas. All campuses noted teachers as an important resource. This data corresponded with Raywid's (1994) emphasis on creating trusting teacher-student relationship in the alternative education program.

Even though these three variables indicated a strong association existed, a measureable difference cannot be determined due to the small sample size. The data also does not contradict the literature on alternative education programs. Since there were three exemplars resulting in strong associations, further research for more precise data to arrange alternative education programs to be more successful is needed.

Implications

The implications of this research are specific to the location of the alternative education programs. In an effort to determine which program, on-campus versus off-campus, were more successful based upon the graduation rates. The findings were significant for teachers and administrators to determine how to establish their alternative education programs. The effect size suggests that environment was key based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), but it would be difficult to rule out which location was best. However, there are other practices that should be considered based on the findings.

The first research question tried to determine if there was a difference in graduation rates between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs. Even though there was a small sample size, the Cohen' *d* indicated a large effect between the academic years of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. When analyzing the location, a difference appeared to be noted between on-campus and off-campus programs. Of the five programs who provided data, they noted an 85%-100% graduation rate. On the other hand, two of the four off-campus programs had

graduation rates ranging from 45%-60%. Conclusions can be drawn based on the interviews of the alternative education programs' directors. For example, directors were asked to describe their teachers and seven out of nine on-campus directors used the adjective flexible. Conversely, three out of eight off-campus directors stated their teachers were flexible. The assumption could be drawn that on-campus programs have more flexibility or control over the alternative education program's curriculum and data, which would impact the students' success and graduation rate.

The second research question tried to determine what NAEA's exemplary practices were associated with on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs. An association was also analyzed between those practices and how they impacted graduation rates. The chi square results indicated a strong association and this appeared to be validated by the use of the Cramer's V statistic in three exemplar practices.

First, seven out of the nine on-campus alternative education directors indicated technology/virtual learning as a necessary resource. All of the on-campus programs used a virtual learning program for all or most of their alternative education instruction. Virtual learning is an on-line curriculum program that requires one person to assign classes to students. All instruction, resources, activities, and assessments are presented through the web-based program. The use of virtual learning could be based on budgetary constraints to save money on personnel. None of the off-campus directors specified technology as an important resource, even two off-campus programs did not have virtual learning at all.

Second, none of the on-campus alternative education programs' directors designated the need for professional development on differentiated instruction. An assumption could be made that if on-campus programs are using virtual learning curriculum then the teachers would not need training on differentiated instruction since direct instruction is not taking place. This would

also explain why more off-campus programs would specify the need for training in differentiated instruction if they are not using virtual learning.

Third, none of the on-campus alternative education programs' directors specifically described their teachers as being certified in core curriculum areas. An assumption could be made that if on-campus programs are using virtual learning curriculum then it would not be necessary to have certified core teachers. On the other hand, if off-campus programs are not solely relying on virtual learning curriculum and direct instruction or blended learning is taking place then it would be vital to have certified core curriculum teachers.

Based on the NAEA's exemplars associated with successful programs, there were three variables with strong statistical significance found. First, data supported the need for administrators to create new practices when hiring teachers for alternative education positions. Administrators need to consider a teacher who is able to create trusting relationships with students consistent with Mary Anne Raywid's School Within a School Movement (1994). Second, administrators need to examine the use of technology/virtual learning programs to provide flexibility for students consistent with McClelland's motivational theory (1961). Third, administrators need to provide professional development on differentiated instruction or hire teachers with the experience. Even with a small sample size, a few strong associations were identified between graduation rates and exemplars in association with the location of the alternative education programs to require future research. Creating a larger sample size would allow future researchers to make stronger associations between the success of an alternative education program and the location.

One could draw the following possible conclusions based on the graduation rate and the interview exemplar variables associated with the on-campus and off-campus alternative

education programs. For instance, one could say that on-campus programs have higher graduation rates due to their flexibility and individualized instruction based on the use of virtual learning that can be personalized for each student. On the other hand, the on-campus programs could be utilizing a different professional development focus that is having a greater impact on alternative education students than the off campus programs and their focus on differentiated instruction. In addition, on-campus programs have greater control over their programs and the data being analyzed. Although, without a larger sample size we can't draw this conclusion for certain.

The research study provides documentation on what a successful program needs. At the organizational level, districts could utilize the findings to consider the needs for staffing, resources, and professional development when creating an alternative education program. Districts could be informed about the research's findings in multiple ways. The findings could be delivered through professional development, professional articles, by way of the NAEA, and/or professional learning communities centered around alternative education.

Limitations

Limitations to this research may have impacted the overall outcome. While the researcher expected to study Missouri's Region 8, classified by Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Of the thirty-eight school districts contacted, twenty-nine responded. Four of the twenty-nine schools did not have current alternative education programs in place. In addition, another four school districts declined to participate in the study for various reasons. Seventeen alternative education programs were included in the study, representing nineteen school districts including those involved in collaborations together, resulting in a completion rate of 50%. There was also another limitation that may have impacted the overall outcome of the

research. Of the seventeen school districts who participated in the study, only nine provided the researcher with graduation data. Out of the nine programs who provided data, only five presented five consecutive years. The speculation was that school districts might not have wanted to provide their alternative education program's data for various reasons including poor record keeping, changes in the reporting staff, or only reporting the good years.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research offered outcomes specific to alternative education programs to analyze whether there was a difference between on-campus and off-campus locations, in addition to whether the NAEA's exemplary practices impact graduation rates of the programs. There is still much research needed in the area of alternative education. The need for research stems from the perception that alternative education is a fairly new model. It would appear from this study, that a larger sample size would be able to affirm some of the possible conclusions alluded to in this dissertation. Some effect size was demonstrated, however, by increasing the sample size or obtaining a full reporting of graduation rates may have led to a statistical significance.

Since alternative education is a fairly new model in the terms of credit recovery, Missouri Options, and other individualized programs schools are offering, it was difficult to obtain a large sample size to analyze a measurable difference between on-campus and off-campus programs. The study may not have answered the research questions, but did fill in some gaps in the area of alternative education. In addition, the study may have raised a few more questions related to environmental impact of how these programs are structured, what resources are available, and how these programs are staffed to achieve successful graduation rates. A better method for data collection on graduation rates is recommended for future research in this area. It is recommended that a larger sample size with at least five years of graduation data would strengthen the research

and assist in finding which programs are successful in improving their graduation rates and decreasing the dropout rate. This would determine if a significant difference between on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs exists.

Additional details regarding the NAEA's exemplary practices should be implemented by current alternative education programs. The research was hindered due to the fact that many alternative education programs' directors stated that they did not analyze the graduation rates of their programs. It seems that graduation rates should be the most important measure of success for an alternative program whose purpose is to help students succeed and graduate from school. In addition, a systematic approach needs to be made to create an evaluation or survey instrument for all alternative education programs based on the exemplary practices. It is recommended that policy changes need to be made to reflect the NAEA's exemplary practices to provide adequate staffing, instruction, and resources along with better recording of program graduation rates. The perception is that if the alternative education programs have a strong association to the exemplars then the graduation rates of the programs will naturally increase.

Summary

This chapter took a closer look at the methodology, findings and implications of the graduation data and interviews of directors from on-campus and off-campus alternative education programs to answer the research questions. The findings provided insights into the possible differences between on-campus versus off-campus alternative education programs and the possible associations that exist with the NAEA's exemplary practices. The researcher also explained the limitations of the study and how they impacted the outcome. General recommendations were also offered to study a larger sample size of alternative education programs for at least five years.

The research attempted to support Laudan Aron's (2003) claim that location of an alternative education program can play an important role in the success of the program. Even though the study failed to reject the null hypothesis, the effect size suggests environment is an important factor in the success of the program. In addition, the three exemplars that suggest a strong statistical association further strengthen the importance of the literature from Mary Anne Raywid (1994), Abraham Maslow (1943), Clayton Alderfer (1969), and David McClellan (1961) on alternative education programs. The exemplary practices associated with resources, teachers and professional development confirm the literature stating the need for technology/virtual learning, strong teacher-student relationships, and professional development on differentiated instruction. Furthermore, the research suggested alternative education programs may not be utilizing the NAEA's systematic approach to alternative education through their exemplary standards of quality and program evaluation criteria. This outcome has narrowed the gaps in the literature on alternative education and supports the need for further research.

While reflecting on the research specific to alternative education programs there were two specific areas recommended for further study. It would be beneficial to evaluate the graduation rates of an alternative education program whose purpose is to help students become academically successful. The graduation rates would be beneficial for alternative programs to evaluate whether the program is successful. Even though alternative education programs were designed to be flexible and individualized, there needs to be some systematic process in place to evaluate the programs. Looking at the NAEA's exemplary practices would be a great resource to create an evaluation system. This systematic approach might provide a best practices model for school district to implement and improve their programs along with their students' graduation

rates. Finally, future research in the area of a longitudinal study of alternative education students would be helpful in analyzing the long term impact of alternative education on the future.

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Appendix A

National Alternative Education Association's Exemplary Practices

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 1.0: VISION AND MISSION

- An exemplary nontraditional or alternative education school develops a guiding vision and mission that drives the overall operation of the program.
- All stakeholders (i.e., administrators, community representatives, parents/guardians, staff, and students) share in developing, implementing, directing and maintaining the vision and mission for the school.
- The vision and mission of the school includes the identification of the target student population and promotes the success of all students.
- Additionally, the vision and mission embody high expectations for academic achievement, and the nurturing of positive social interactions between staff and students.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

- 1.1 The vision clearly articulates goals to the stakeholders.
- 1.2 The mission is documented, published and visible to students, parents/guardians, staff, and the community stakeholders.
- 1.3 All stakeholders are involved in developing the vision, mission, goals, and projected outcomes for the school.
- 1.4 The mission includes the identification of the student population for whom the nontraditional or alternative education school is designed to serve.
- 1.5 The vision and mission of the school has a unifying theme that evokes high levels of student and stakeholder support.
- 1.6 The driving vision and mission of the nontraditional or alternative school is consistent with the district's strategic goals while aligning with specific state standard(s).
- 1.7 Student success is central to the vision and mission of the school, which includes the development of effective and affective skills, social competencies, and career readiness skills.
- 1.8 The vision and mission of the school promotes a safe and secure environment while developing the emotional and physical wellness of all students.
- 1.9 The development of school culture and student ownership of their school is facilitated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, celebrations, and the development of traditions.
- 1.10 Resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the vision and mission.
- 1.11 Barriers to achieving the vision and mission are identified, clarified, and addressed through the school's strategic plan.

1.12 The vision and mission shape the educational plans and activities undertaken by the nontraditional or alternative school.

1.13 The vision and mission are monitored, evaluated, and revised (as needed) on a yearly basis.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 2.0: LEADERSHIP

- An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school employs passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership.
- School leadership purposely engages in opportunities to promote program success and strategically includes community, business, and media in celebrations.
- All stakeholders including administrators, teachers, and staff must be committed to full implementation of the mission and core values of the school.
- On-site leadership utilizes and engages in a collaborative approach that ensures shared decision-making, high expectations and continuous monitoring of program quality.
- The superintendent sustains the independence of the school and allocates sufficient resources (i.e., financial or other necessary resources) to protect the integrity of the program.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

2.1 The Superintendent provides sufficient oversight to ensure quality programming while protecting the autonomy of the nontraditional or alternative school's operation.

2.2 The Superintendent provides adequate financial support and other needed resources for implementation of quality alternative education services (i.e., teaching and non-teaching staff, equipment, technology, supplies, curriculum, etc.).

2.3 School administrators are experienced and competent, enabling them to be engaged in all aspects of the program's operation and management.

2.4 The shared vision of the nontraditional or alternative school is communicated by leadership through the program's mission.

2.5 School leadership engages stakeholders in a collaborative process when making program decisions (i.e., Advisory Board and other opportunities that promote stakeholder participation in the decision-making process).

2.6 School leadership ensures decisions regarding operations align with state legislation and local policies and procedures.

2.7 School leadership recruits, hires and trains highly qualified teachers and support personnel.

2.8 School administrators ensure appropriate student to teacher ratios exist, that ratios reflect the needs of the student population, and that the student to teacher ratio never exceeds 12 to 1.

2.9 Leadership promotes collaboration among the school of origin, community, and home, thereby fostering an effective learning environment for the student.

2.10 Administration ensures that reliable data and student performance measures guide the instructional practices of the program.

2.11 School and district leaders work to offer transportation, food services and appropriate health services to students.

2.12 Consistent and constructive performance evaluations of administrative, teaching, and support personnel are conducted by leadership in a timely manner.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 3.0: CLIMATE AND CULTURE

- A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture that promotes collegial relationships among students, parents/guardians, and staff is maintained in an exemplary nontraditional or alternative school.
- The school culture and climate are characterized by a positive rather than punitive atmosphere for behavioral management and student discipline.
- School staff establish clear expectations for learning and conduct.
- The staff actively models and rewards appropriate student behavior.
- Proven practices to foster healthy communities are implemented at the school.
- Connections among all stakeholders that are positive and encourage academic, behavioral, and social success are actively promoted at the school.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

3.1 Services are efficiently organized into effective delivery systems whether the entity is a nontraditional or alternative school, program, or classroom.

3.2 The program is housed in a safe, well maintained, aesthetically pleasing, and physically accessible environment that supports optimal student learning.

3.3 Rules and behavioral expectations are clearly written (i.e., code of conduct and comprehensive student discipline action plan), understood and accepted by staff, students, and parents/guardians.

3.4 The program has a designated team of representatives (i.e., administrative, teaching and support personnel, parents/guardians, and, if possible, student representatives) that strategically plan, monitor, and implement prevention and intervention strategies that reflect the culture and climate of the nontraditional or alternative school.

3.5 The school actively promotes student engagement and affords students with the opportunity to have a role in shaping the learning environment to facilitate feelings of connectedness.

3.6 The nontraditional or alternative school communicates high expectations for student and staff performance and celebrates success on a regular basis.

3.7 Student, parent, and staff survey feedback are presented at staff meetings and used to make appropriate programming changes.

3.8 The school demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to academic, behavioral, cultural, developmental, gender, and societal needs of students, parents/guardians and the community.

3.9 Short and long-term goals address the needs of the students, parents/guardians, and staff.

3.10 School growth plans are measurable and built upon student performance in the effective and affective domains, attendance, matriculation, and graduation.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 4.0: STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school is staffed with effective, innovative, and qualified individuals trained in current research based teaching methods that facilitate active learning, promote creativity, and encourage self-evaluation.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

4.1 Enthusiastic, energetic, and innovative teachers who demonstrate multiple teaching styles are employed at the school.

4.2 The staff understands and practices the concept of facilitative learning.

4.3 The diversity of the staff mirrors the diversity of the student body and the experience of the alternative education faculty mirrors the faculty experience of the school district.

4.4 The teacher to student ratio of the nontraditional or alternative school promotes individualized instruction. The recommended student to teacher ratio is 12 to 1.

4.5 Staff members create written professional development plans that facilitate personal and professional growth, identify the professional development needs of the individual, establish short and long term SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results Focused, Time Bound) goals, and align professional development training to address the individual's overall plan.

4.6 Staff members create a professional learning community (PLC), that encourages the sharing of successes and growth areas to cultivate an attitude of continuous improvement and lifelong learning.

4.7 The focus of professional development is on student achievement, effective and affective skills development, social skills, and college and career readiness.

4.8 A variety of professional development approaches, including technology, to accomplish the goals of improving instruction and increasing student achievement are used at the school.

4.9 Professional development opportunities include information related to effective collaboration with community agencies and services to support the student in the home and workplace.

4.10 Increasing staff capacity through training to ensure the use of research based strategies that align with the needs of the program population is used strategically at the school.

4.11 Sufficient fiscal and capital resources are allotted to allow all staff to participate in workshops, conferences, and seminars.

4.12 Administration ensures ongoing professional development is geared towards the specific needs of teachers and support personnel as it relates to their role in the nontraditional or alternative school.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 5.0: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- Instructional practices and curriculum are rigorous and inclusive, support the needs of second language and disabled students, and are individualized to meet the needs of all learners.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

5.1 Access to the academic core curriculum is ensured at the nontraditional or alternative schools.

5.2 Teachers are highly qualified in the content area based on individual state standards.

5.3 All faculty are competent in research based teaching techniques and behavior management strategies appropriate for the target student population.

5.4 The school is operated in full compliance with local, state, and federal laws governing students.

5.5 Curricular options reflect, but are not limited to, those offered in the traditional educational setting.

5.6 Credit by proficiency, as allowed by the local education agency and/or state, to increase probability of student graduation with his or her age cohort is investigated and applied.

5.7 Teachers identify and provide appropriate instruction designed to close gaps in student learning.

5.8 Differentiated instructional strategies are employed to accommodate for students with different backgrounds, individual learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners), and multiple intelligences.

5.9 Students have opportunities to learn and/or participate in non-core content areas to include, but not limited to, the following: fine and practical arts, leadership, health/physical education, music, service learning, and technical/vocational courses.

5.10 Community involvement using service learning as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction, teaches civic responsibility, and strengthens the student's role in his or her community through self-reflection is promoted at the school.

5.11 Instruction integrates life skills (e.g., career preparation, citizenship, conflict resolution, decision making skills, problem solving, public speaking, self-management, social skills, teamwork, time management, work-based learning, etc.) into the curricula and affords the student with opportunities to put the acquired skills into action.

5.12 Using interest inventories and vocational investigation, opportunities for career exploration (e.g., job shadowing and training, mentorships, work-based learning, career fairs, etc.) related to the student's interests and postsecondary goals are provided at secondary programs.

5.13 Small group lessons in concert with project based learning are used to build social relationships by supporting collaboration and teamwork.

5.14 Researched based dropout prevention strategies for students at-risk of dropping out of school are used at the nontraditional or alternative school.

5.15 Technology is blended into the instructional delivery process across all content areas.

5.16 The curriculum is supported by access to a balance of up-to-date, well-maintained collection of textbooks, library media, technology, software, and other instructional materials that are age and grade appropriate for all learners.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 6.0: STUDENT ASSESSMENT

- An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school includes screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic and outcome-based measurements and procedures to improve short and long term results at the student level.
- Student assessments are used to measure achievement and identify specific learner needs. The school uses reliable measures to monitor student progress and adjust program services.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

6.1 School administrators promote assessment as a means to identify individual and group learner needs.

6.2 School administrators enforce data-driven accountability as required by state and local authorities.

6.3 The purpose of assessments is clearly defined and communicated to students, parents/guardians, and staff which include program accountability for quality instruction and student qualification for matriculation or graduation.

6.4 Data collection procedures are clearly outlined to ensure reliable and valid student assessment results.

6.5 Teachers use reliable formative and summative assessment tools that align with curriculum and instruction to track student performance and progress.

6.6 The program utilizes multiple measures to monitor student achievement, effective and affective performance, and preparation for matriculation or graduation with an emphasis on both informal and formal assessments.

6.7 Quantitative and qualitative data are used to identify student progress as prescribed by the district and state.

6.8 Assessments are directly linked to identifying appropriate curriculum and instructional methods to accommodate a variety of individual learning needs.

6.9 Results of assessments are used to adjust instructional practices, provided to students and parents/guardians in a timely manner, and used to update student academic/graduation plans.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 7.0: TRANSITION PLANNING AND SUPPORT

- Clear transition criteria and procedures are in place to address student enrollment, transfers, and reintegration, if applicable, to a traditional setting at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools.
- Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students.
- School counselors or transition specialists are specifically trained to address student transitions.
- The transition process ensures the nontraditional or alternative school is the most appropriate placement based on the student's effective and affective needs, academic requirements, and post-baccalaureate goals.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

7.1 A screening committee to ensure the placement is most appropriate for the student's specific effective and affective needs, academic requirements, and post-baccalaureate goals is in place at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools.

7.2 A formal transition process for students from entry to exit which includes the following elements: an orientation which consists of rapport building, assessment of the student, IEP review, information and record sharing regarding the student, short and long-term goal setting, development of an individualized student plan, and other mechanisms designed to orient the student to the alternative education setting is in place at exemplary schools.

7.3 Transition planning and the student plan afford students the opportunity to maintain and accelerate their current progress toward matriculation or graduation.

7.4 A Student Support Team (SST) is established that consists of educators from the school of origin, educators from the nontraditional or alternative school, the student, parents/guardians and other trained transitional personnel. The team is directly involved in all aspects of the transition process including assessment, planning, and implementation of the student's transition plan.

7.5 Transition planning includes referral and timely access to community agencies, and support services such as: mental health, public health, family support, housing, physical fitness activities, and other youth services.

7.6 When appropriate, students are provided with opportunities to develop and maintain supportive links to the school of origin.

7.7 Student areas of strength and growth are addressed as part of transition in, throughout, and upon exit of the nontraditional or alternative school.

7.8 Prior to a student's entrance and exit from the school, transition services are coordinated by the SST with all appropriate entities to ensure successful entry into the student's next educational setting or workforce.

7.9 Within the bounds of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), information sharing (availability of pertinent records) takes place between the school of origin, the

nontraditional or alternative school, and other social service organizations. Copies of the student cumulative academic file should be sent to the nontraditional or alternative school to ensure adherence to second language, special needs, or medical plans, to establish accurate student schedules, and to ensure the student's areas of academic strength and growth are known and used by the nontraditional or alternative school to develop the individual student plan.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 8.0: PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

- An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school actively involves parents/guardians beyond parent/guardian-teacher meetings.
- Non-judgmental, solution based approaches that incorporate parents/guardians as respected partners throughout the student's length of stay at the school are emphasized in nontraditional and alternative programs.
- The school works with parents/guardians to provide proper training and support to advance the learning and personal success of each student in the program.

Indicators of Quality Programming

8.1 Parental/guardian involvement is welcomed and actively recruited by the nontraditional or alternative program.

8.2 Effective communication and interaction takes place between parents/guardians and school staff to include consistent notification of student progress (regular progress reports or as needed).

8.3 Parents/guardians are recognized as equal partners and involved in the decision-making process for the student and the program, including the following: to serve on the Student Support Team (SST), to help develop the individualized student plan, to help guide and direct the mission and purpose of the program via an Advisory Council, and to help evaluate the overall effectiveness of the nontraditional and alternative program.

8.4 Parents/guardians participate as partners to create solution based strategies to support the effect and affect growth of their student.

8.5 Consultation regarding strategies to support the learning and personal success of students is made readily available to all parents/guardians.

8.6 Parents/guardians have access to parent education programs sponsored by the nontraditional or alternative school and other community agencies.

8.7 Procedures are in place to address all parent/guardian grievances in a timely manner with an emphasis on flexibility, accountability, and consistency.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 9.0: COLLABORATION

- Partnerships with community agencies, businesses and groups based on trust, open communication, clearly defined goals, and shared responsibility at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools.
- Collaborative efforts enhance the student's performance in the school, home, and community.

- Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning and career exploration for all students.
- Community representatives have a role in the planning and resource development of the nontraditional or alternative school.

Indicators of Quality Programming

9.1 Partnerships with community resources are secured and established to help the nontraditional or alternative school solve problems and achieve goals as outlined in the program’s vision and mission.

9.2 Partnerships are designed to support and enrich the school by including the community as a resource for education, advocacy and volunteerism.

9.3 A comprehensive outreach program utilizing the parent advisory council is established by the nontraditional or alternative school.

9.4 Interagency and community partnerships exist to support the physical and mental health of students enrolled in the program.

9.5 A student assistance program which allows for referrals to community agencies when appropriate is provided at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools.

9.6 Community representatives are drawn upon as resources during the planning phase of the individualized student plan that involves student planning for the following: community participation, employment, independent living and postsecondary education.

9.7 Community partners are utilized when integrating life skills, soft skills, college and career readiness and service learning into the nontraditional or alternative school.

9.8 Community representatives serve on the Advisory Board and assist in planning, resource development, and decision-making for the nontraditional or alternative school.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 10.0: PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Systematic program evaluations for continuous school improvement are conducted at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools.
- Data triangulation is employed with three different sources of data:
 - program implementation ratings
 - student achievement data
 - and student/parent surveys
- All sources of data are gathered and used to assess quality, provide a course for improvement, and direct future activities of the school.

Indicators of Quality Programming

10.1 Routine, yearly evaluations to determine progress toward meeting the vision and mission of the program and plans for continuous school improvement are conducted at nontraditional or alternative schools.

10.2 Evaluation measures include a review of program implementation ratings (based on observable and measurable data). Ratings are given based on alignment with state specific standards and the NAEA Evaluation Rubric.

10.3 Student outcome data (graduation rates, credits earned, grades, attendance, disciplinary data, and dropout statistics) is gathered as a means to evaluate the success of the nontraditional or alternative school.

10.4 On a yearly basis, student, parent/guardian, staff and community surveys are administered by the nontraditional or alternative school to assess school improvement.

10.5 Staff surveys are administered to assess attitudes and opinions about school culture and climate, the learning environment, staff-administrator/staff-staff relations, perceptions of program effectiveness and success relative to students' academic, behavioral, and social progress.

10.6 Transition services are routinely evaluated to determine the program's effectiveness in preparing the student for the next educational setting or workforce.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 11.0: School Counseling

- An exemplary professional school counseling program that serves nontraditional or alternative students targets academic performance, is grounded in research based practices, and addresses the current and future needs of students.
- Effective and affective strategies to enhance student achievement are integrated in exemplary school programs.
- Professional school counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

11.1 Improvement of academic self-concept is promoted at the school.

11.2 Students acquire affective skills to become self-directed and independent learners.

11.3 Students develop interests and abilities to achieve school success.

11.4 An environment for academic preparation which promotes a wide range of post-secondary options including trade/technical school, the armed services, and college is created at the program.

11.5 Students work with professional counselors to establish challenging effective and affective academic goals.

11.6 Students understand the relationship between success in school and transition to the world of work.

11.7 Opportunities for students to engage in service learning are created at the program.

11.8 Students investigate the world of work as it relates to their interests, skills, and goals.

11.9 Students develop an awareness of self, others, and the importance of working effectively in teams.

11.10 Helping students establish job readiness skills is a goal of the program.

11.11 Students develop research and critical thinking skills which include the use of technology to explore and prepare for future employment.

11.12 Students acquire interpersonal skills to recognize, respect, and appreciate the differences in others.

11.13 Students develop a clear understanding of consequences of decisions and choices.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 12.0 SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

- A social work program that is proactive, promotes educational equity, and removes barriers to learning is a characteristic of an exemplary nontraditional or alternative school.
- Practices are consistent with local, state, and federal mandates.
- The program promotes the academic mission of the nontraditional or alternative school fostering policies that are responsive, rigorous, and emphasize intervention and prevention services.
- To maintain sustainability, the program is receptive to growth producing feedback from community stakeholders.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

12.1 Social justice is emphasized by the program.

12.2 Social workers demonstrate knowledge of local, state and federal mandates related to informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality.

12.3 Social workers have a graduate degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited social work program and licensed by their state board of social work.

12.4 Continuous assessment of students and families with the goal of improving social/emotional outcomes in school and community is conducted by the social work program.

12.5 The program conducts annual needs assessments targeting the interactions of students, families, and school personnel.

12.6 School-based intervention, research and evidence, and informed practices are utilized in social work services.

12.7 Intervention strategies use a multi-tier framework with an emphasis on salient ecologies (school, home, or community) to address a student's social/emotional growth.

12.8 Yearly data related to practices are collected and analyzed.

12.9 Accurate and confidential records that demonstrate outcome and ensure service accountability are maintained.

12.10 The program is organized with an emphasis on student and program needs, professional skills of the social worker, and availability of resources.

12.11 Social workers participate in ongoing professional development activities that target nontraditional, alternative, and at-risk populations.

12.12 Social workers develop and demonstrate specialized knowledge of nontraditional and alternative populations and are culturally responsive to stakeholders needs.

12.13 Social workers take a proactive role in the development of positive school climate and culture.

12.14 Social workers provide stakeholders with training and engage the community with an emphasis on developing equal access of service for all students.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 13.0 DIGITAL AND VIRTUAL LEARNING

- An exemplary digital or virtual learning program implemented in a nontraditional or alternative school is accessible via the World Wide Web and in secure facilities.
- Digital or Virtual courses are aligned to state/national standards and meet local education agency course content guidelines.
- Digital and Virtual courses are rigorous, prescriptive, and standard and assessment based.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

13.1 The course content is characterized by rigor, is aligned to state and local standards, and includes an overview, syllabus, and scope of sequence for delivery.

13.2 The course content incorporates literacy and communication skills, reflects multicultural education, and research based.

13.3 The course design is clear, incorporates multiple ways to engage in learning, and organized in lessons and units that are organized and sequential.

13.4 The course design provides students the opportunity to engage in critical thinking, readability is grade level appropriate, and assignments are aligned to course content.

13.5 Course assessments are aligned with objectives, reliable and valid, and provide for timely and frequent feedback to inform teaching and learning.

13.6 Grading tools and materials provide the student and teacher with immediate feedback, provide flexibility in assessment, and are easy to understand and manage.

13.7 The course construction allows instructors to add content and activities, provides clear navigation parameters for students, and includes rich and varied multimedia.

13.8 The course construction supports multiple schedules and pacing guides, clearly identifies technology requirements, notes prerequisite technology skills, and includes content specific tools.

13.9 Course materials provide appropriate access for all students and student information remains confidential as required by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

13.10 The course is updated regularly noting changes in state and national standards and is facilitated by a highly qualified teacher.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 14.0 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- A current policies and procedures manual that is consistent with the vision and mission of the nontraditional or alternative school, approved by the local board of education, and articulated to all stakeholders in the form of standard operating procedures (SOPs) is maintained.
- The manual is reviewed and updated on a yearly basis.
- The manual is made available in an electronic and hardcopy format.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

14.1 Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all teaching and support personnel are written and fully explained to nontraditional or alternative school staff.

14.2 Referral, screening, and intake procedures are outlined and promote timely, user-friendly access to program services for students.

14.3 Procedures to collect, share, and store individual student records are developed for participants that ensure student confidentiality.

14.4 Processes are established that coordinate effective placements, assess student needs to match appropriate program services and interventions, and formalize the transition of students from one learning environment to the next.

14.5 Reliable assessments are identified and inform procedures for developing an individualized student plan that addresses student achievement, effective and affective growth, and college and career readiness skills.

14.6 Schools have established a thorough written code of conduct and a comprehensive student discipline action plan that outlines rules and behavioral expectations, appropriate interventions, and consequences for infractions.

14.7 Program policies encourage the active engagement of parents/guardians as equal partners in the planning, implementation, and development of the nontraditional or alternative school.

14.8 Policies for developing collaborative partnerships with public and private agencies are established and formalized by school/division leadership (i.e., memoranda of understanding or MOU's) and outline the roles and responsibilities of partnered social service organizations in accordance with local education agency guidelines.

14.9 A formal Crisis Management Plan is developed and managed by school leadership to include strategies that sustain a safe, well-maintained, caring, and orderly program environment that is in compliance with state and local policies, standards, procedures, and legislation.

14.10 Lists and procedures for conducting emergency drills (fire/tornado drills, shelter in place, lock down) are included in both the school manual and Crisis Management Plan.

14.11 Procedures to collect, store, and share program data ensure that students, parents/guardians, and staff are protected and identities are preserved.

14.12 Procurement procedures, time and leave policies, professional development requirements, and professional responsibilities are outlined in a systematic, clear, and concise manner.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 15.0 NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION PLAN

- Individualized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools.
- The individual student plan targets student achievement, effective and affective growth, social skill development, and college and career readiness skills.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

15.1 A Student Support Team (SST) is established and involved in forming and monitoring the student's progress on the nontraditional education plan while further providing the reinforcement necessary for achievement.

15.2 Parents/guardians are on the SST and involved in drafting, developing, and implementing the student's plan.

15.3 Plans are developed based on the student's differentiated (accelerated or remedial) needs.

15.4 Processes for the nontraditional education plan include reviewing current credit accrual and ensuring the student is making adequate progress toward graduation.

15.5 Three strands are embedded into the nontraditional education plan that engages the student in post-secondary planning for the following: effective citizenship, independent living, and college and career readiness.

15.6 Teachers and school counselors utilize individual student data in making instructional decisions and developing the nontraditional education plan.

15.7 Plans incorporate goals for developing healthy behaviors and effective social skills.

15.8 The nontraditional education plan addresses required services to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities and second language learners.

15.9 Student plans are updated on a bi-yearly basis based on informal and formal assessment data, student feedback, and interest inventory results.

15.10 The students maintain a copy of the plan and reference it during school counseling sessions, teacher conferences, and administrative meetings.

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Appendix B

Possible Interview Variables

1. How many years has the alternative education program been open?

0-5	6-11	11-15	16-+

2. How many students are enrolled in the program?

0-25	26-55	56-80	81-+

2. What is the demographics of the student population? Free/Reduced Lunch

0-25%	26-55%	56-80%	81%-+

2. What are the demographics of the student population? Minority (non-white)

0-25%	26-55%	56-80%	81%-+

3. Is your program located on or off campus? Are you a Type I, Type II, Type III or mixed program?

Location	Type

4. What is the vision and mission of the alternative education program?

Student Support	Student Success- Graduation	Safe Environment	Culture

5. How would you describe the alternative education program's teachers/director?

Innovative	Enthusiastic & Energetic	Diverse	Student-Centered

5. What type of training/professional development has the staff been provided for alternative education programs?

Social/Emotional/ Behavioral	Differentiated Instruction	Student Achievement	Dropout Prevention

6. What makes an alternative education student successful?

Motivated/Driven	Self-Advocating	Goal-Setting	Supported

7. What type of resources are needed for your program to succeed?

Social Workers/ Counselors	High Quality Teachers	Community Support	Connected to General Education

8. How would you describe the climate and culture of the alternative education program?

Feeling Connected	Celebrate Success	Safe	Long Term Growth

9. Please describe the curriculum and instruction used in the alternative education program

Differentiated	State Standards/Core Curriculum	Community Service Learning	Vocational Training

10. Does the alternative education program use virtual learning?

Yes	No

10. How was the program selected?

Administration	Teacher Input	Recommended	No Virtual- Teachers Teach the Content

11. How are the alternative education students being assessed?

Quantitative Data- Driven by State	Formative/Summative- Curriculum	Identify Individual Needs	Qualitative Data

12. What type of transition planning is provided for alternative education students?

Goal Setting	Referral to Communities Agencies	Continuing Education	Workforce

13. Does the alternative education program have access to school counselors and social workers that target nontraditional students?

Yes-As Needed	Yes- Scheduled Sessions	No	How do you address the need?

14. What type of collaboration/partnerships have been made with outside resources?

Medical	Businesses	Mental Health	Higher Education

15. How is the alternative education program being evaluated?

Parents	Staff	Administration	State

16. How does the alternative education program involve parents/guardians?

Emails	Parent Teacher Conferences/Meetings	Parent Organization	Phone Calls

17. What is the alternative education program's survey process for parents/students to evaluate the program?

No	In the Process of Creating	Yes-Survey	Yes-Exit Interview

18. What are the areas in need of improvement as the program moves forward?

Resources	Parent Involvement	Transition Planning	Attendance