

ABSTRACT

Cherié N. Graham, PERCEPTIONS OF HOW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IMPACTS STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN A SOUTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL. (Under the direction of Dr. William Grobe) Department of Educational Leadership, April, 2015.

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina. The following research question was investigated: To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

Both quantitative and qualitative research designs were used to gain insight into academic structures that serve at-risk or non-traditional students. The intent of the research was to define key components of alternative learning program standards that should be implemented with fidelity within the alternative school's organizational structure to increase student performance, academic achievement, and graduation rates of at-risk students. Qualitative research encompassed both descriptive surveys and open-ended structured questionnaires that were utilized to conduct this study. Quantitative research included descriptive statistics and a compilation of the data collected from the survey results. Students, parents, faculty, administrators, and a community member participated in the study.

According to Green and Cypress (2009), "the structure of the organization has to facilitate the change initiative. When an appropriate structure is in place, everyone is aware of who does what, when it is to be done, and who is accountable for the results." Organizational structure involves leadership, culture and climate, resource allocation, programs, physical structure, and support systems of an organization (Baldy et al., 2014). NCDPI implemented standards that should be implemented with fidelity in all alternative schools—clear mission,

leadership, culture and climate, professional development, parent/community involvement, curriculum and instruction, and monitoring and assessment (NCDPI, 2006). These standards are the foundation upon which alternative school's organizational structure should be governed. The Academy of focus in this study had some components of the alternative learning program standards in operation; however, the student achievement data and graduation rates of those enrolled in the Academy suggests that the implementation strategies currently in place need to be revisited. While participants in the study felt that the Academy was meeting the needs of its students, the current model of the organizational structure has proven that the holistic needs of the students are not being met due to the lack of a clear mission and community/parental involvement, the curriculum and instruction currently offered to students, and the monitoring and assessment of students—particularly with regard to the support system currently in place.

PERCEPTIONS OF HOW ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IMPACTS STUDENT
PERFORMANCE IN A SOUTHEASTERN NORTH CAROLINA ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

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The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

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by

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Chapters 1-3 were written in cooperation with my colleagues:
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Logan Demetrius and Nia Nicole Graham. I am so grateful that God gave me two of the best blessings Heaven had to offer. I want you to achieve more in your lifetimes than Mommy and Daddy ever will. It is my prayer that you to love God, love people, love education, and live lives of integrity.

To my husband, “Graham,” thank you for allowing me to be me and loving every minute of it. Your heart is amazing. To my parents, especially my mother, Angela, thank you for instilling discipline and a strong work ethic in me from an early age. Grandma and Granddaddy, Willie Mae and Glen Lee Majette, Jr., you’ve been great cheerleaders from Heaven. Granny, Arlethia Hairston, you’ve been a great cheerleader and prayer warrior from Ohio!

Live, Laugh, Love, Dream!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, also referred to as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, changed the focus of education. This act increased the level of accountability for schools and placed a more profound emphasis on the educational practices affecting at-risk students. According to the National Center for School Engagement, at-risk students are primarily characterized as students who possess one or more of the following characteristics (www.schoolengagement.org, 2013):

1. Homeless or transient
2. Involved in drugs or alcohol
3. Abused sexually, physically, or emotionally
4. Mentally ill
5. Neglected at home or live in stressful family environments
6. Lacking social or emotional supports
7. Involved with delinquent peers such as street gangs

Based upon the fact that all the above are contributing factors to school failure; North Carolina requires that Personal Education Plans (PEPs) be written for all students who are at risk of failure. The purpose of this statute is to prevent at-risk students from falling further behind (www.dpi.state.us/alp, 2000). While this law is in place, the interpretation of the fidelity of implementation is left up to individual schools. Personal Education Plans should be implemented with allegiance for all students, but this is ever more important for students in an alternative learning setting (www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp, 2000). The school district of the rural county in southeastern NC in this study has specific board policies (Policy Code: 3405 Students

At-Risk of Academic Failure, 2013) as it relates to students at risk of academic failure. The board's desire is to ensure students acquire academic information and skills for success in secondary education as well as career success. To support this endeavor, structures have been identified and established to provide the needed support for students who are at risk of academic failure and not being promoted or graduating. The school principal has the responsibility of identifying at-risk students and providing the necessary support for academic success (North Carolina G.S. 115C-105.41):

1. Personalized Educational Plan (PEP): These are individual plans based on student need to address academics and/or behavior beginning in Kindergarten. Principals are responsible to notify parents that their student has a PEP and must provide the parent and/or guardian with a copy. Parents are an integral part in the creation of this plan.
2. Transition Plan: Allows students to have social, academic, and emotional success as they transition school environments. This plan is in place for at-risk students to provide continued support and encouragement as the student transitions from elementary to middle and from middle to high. Included in this plan is an on-going evaluation of the process to include actions and goals that are being accomplished and updated as needed.

The North Carolina State Board of Education approved guidelines for schools to follow when implementing and modifying alternative learning programs in 1999 in an effort to provide opportunities for the growing at-risk population of students. The guidelines were necessary to ensure safe and orderly learning environments for students in need of an alternative setting. According to the requirements set, all programs created would have to be flexible and effective in providing the elements necessary to help students overcome the challenges that could

possibly place them at risk of inappropriate behavior and academic failure
(www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp, 2000).

The county in southeastern North Carolina has used the guidelines established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and has established specific board policies as it relates to alternative education (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013). The purpose of the board is to set standards which provide a safe and orderly environment at each school using a Behavioral Management Plan, Parental Involvement Plan, and Conflict Resolution Plan.

The alternative learning program has been implemented as an additional option for students that continue to have challenges with behavior management and/or academics in the regular educational setting. The following have been identified by the school district as purposes of an alternative education setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting,
2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,
3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and
4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.
5. Students are typically referred to schools based on their attendance area. Based on law, the board may decide to assign a student to a school outside of their district in an

effort for a student to attend a theme/specialized school or for any other reason that the board deems necessary.

Students attending an alternative school may be referred to school on a voluntary or involuntary basis.

The following is the transfer process for students according to www.NCpublicschools.org:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:
 - a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,
 - b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and
 - c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.
2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative Learning Program or School:

If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.
3. Voluntary Referral: This type of referral is encouraged whenever possible and a parent/guardian should be a part of this process. Once the transfer is approved the sending and receiving principal must arrange the transfer process. The sending principal must notify superintendent or designee of this transfer.
4. Involuntary Referral:

- a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel;
- b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational
- c. environment in the regular educational setting,
- d. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue,
- e. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains, or
- f. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Before an involuntary transfer is extended, the referring school must document all academic, social and/or behavioral problems a student is experiencing. Once those areas have been identified, the actions, steps, or consequences that have been enforced to correct behavior and/or academic performance within the regular education setting must be documented. Once the principal identifies that the steps, and/or actions that have been put in place do not correct the academic/behavior needs of the student, the principal must recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred to the alternative school.

The principal must provide the following to support the request for alternative placement: (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue, (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable, and (3) documentation of the circumstances

that support an involuntary transfer (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

In many instances, traditional educational settings do not meet the academic, social, and/or emotional needs of at-risk students. Many at-risk students are suspended or choose to drop out before completing the requirements needed to achieve graduation. Research suggests that students who experience a disconnect from mainstream learning environments tend to suffer adverse effects in their adult lives. Many students find the opportunity to reconnect to the educational environment through alternative education settings (Zweig, 2003). Students who are suspended from the traditional education setting are often disciplinary referrals assigned to non-traditional schools, also known as alternative schools. These schools must be equipped to meet the academic, social, behavioral, and emotional needs of students in order to increase the likelihood of success for the student—a decrease in deviant behavior and/or graduation.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has determined that each alternative learning program must have seven standards in operation. In May 2005, *House Bill 1076* ordered the North Carolina State Board of Education to adopt standards, rather than policies and standards, for alternative learning programs. These standards serve as the foundation for successful educational programs and were developed based on research and historical data gleaned from functioning alternative programs throughout the country. The seven standards are:

1. Clear mission
2. Leadership
3. Culture and Climate
4. Professional Development
5. Parent/Community Involvement

6. Curriculum and Instruction

7. Monitoring and Assessment

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has taken the seven standards and aligned them with legislation adopted in 1999 (see Appendix A).

An effective alternative program design has specific components that should prove beneficial in meeting the needs of at-risk students. First and foremost, leaders who are visionaries, supportive in nature, and strong in their leadership practices, should govern alternative programs. These leaders should hire and retain staff members who have a genuine concern for the well-being and success of all students. All teachers and staff should demonstrate high expectations for themselves, as well as the students, and should maintain a highly engaging relationship with the students.

There should be a holistic approach to teaching and the dispensation of services to students. The student-teacher ratio should be kept to a minimum to provide for a more individualized and flexible delivery of instruction. There should also be a comprehensive counseling program that encompasses a wide range of services provided for students with varying issues affecting their academic performance. The school should be safe and orderly, maintaining a family-like atmosphere. School leaders should indeed hold students accountable for their actions, while being fair and equitable in the execution of consequences and interventions for inappropriate behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

What is the “Silent Epidemic?” Who does it impact? Why should America be concerned with the “Silent Epidemic?” These questions concerning the dropout rate may not evoke thought by many Americans because of the terminology of “Silent Epidemic.” However, according to

the Gates Foundation, if one were to change the term to dropout, it would gain more attention and strike up a great deal of conversation (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). One of the factors used when calculating the “Silent Epidemic” and the effectiveness of schools is the graduation rate. America did not recognize the severity of the issue due to the skewed data that was prevalent in the United States as it relates to dropouts. Until recently, the dropout rate data were an underestimation of dropout rates and an overestimation of graduation rates, which has led us to the “Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The term “dropout” as we know it simply refers to a student in education that does not complete the course of action of graduating with a high school diploma. This study shall qualify dropout to refer only to high school students in America. The following are some interesting facts about dropout rates in America: 1.2 million fail to graduate from high school, on average 71% of high school students graduate, 40-50% disparity exists between Caucasian and minority groups, and 50% of African Americans graduate (Bridgeland et al., 2006). This issue affects every state in America to one degree or another. In North Carolina, there were 19,184 dropouts in 2008-2009, males drop out more frequently than females (59% and 41% respectively), minority groups have a larger percentage of dropouts than non-minority groups, the dropout rate in 2008-2009 was 3.7%, the dropout count in 2008-2009 was 638 and the dropout rate of the county in this study was 4.27%. According to the most recent data available for the 2012-2013 school year the state dropout rate dropped to 2.45 % and the southeastern school district being studied was 4.22%. Even though state rates are being reported as declining, the southeastern school district rates are remaining constant and significantly below the state rate. Dropout rates by race/ethnicity and gender vary in North Carolina High Schools for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014

(Retrieved from

[http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf)

[13/consolidated-report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf)) (see Figure 1). The dropout totals by race/ethnicity and gender in the southeastern district in North Carolina for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014 is high; this district had one of the ten highest dropout rates in the state for 2012-13 (Retrieved from

[http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf)

[13/consolidated-report.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf)) (see Figure 2).

School systems in North Carolina are required to report dropout data in grades one and higher to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) annually (NCDPI, 2013).

Each school should maintain a School Leaver Roster (SLR). A copy of the official roster should be located in the school and in the central office. The purpose of the SLR is to:

1. establish the total enrollment pool from the previous year and
2. document the status of leavers who are not in membership on the twentieth school day of the current year.

Maintaining, updating, and checking this record should be a primary ongoing responsibility.

Keeping an updated roster of school leavers can reduce substantially the number of transfers who are erroneously classified as dropouts (NCDPI, 2013).

Students whose whereabouts are unknown must be included in the total count of dropouts for the reporting year for each LEA. The dropouts by student count from 2003 to 2013 vary for the district in southeastern North Carolina (see Figure 3). Each LEA is required to report dropouts by the grade level of their last membership in the reporting year. “For example, an eighth grader who fails to return to school in the fall as a ninth grader is reported at the eighth

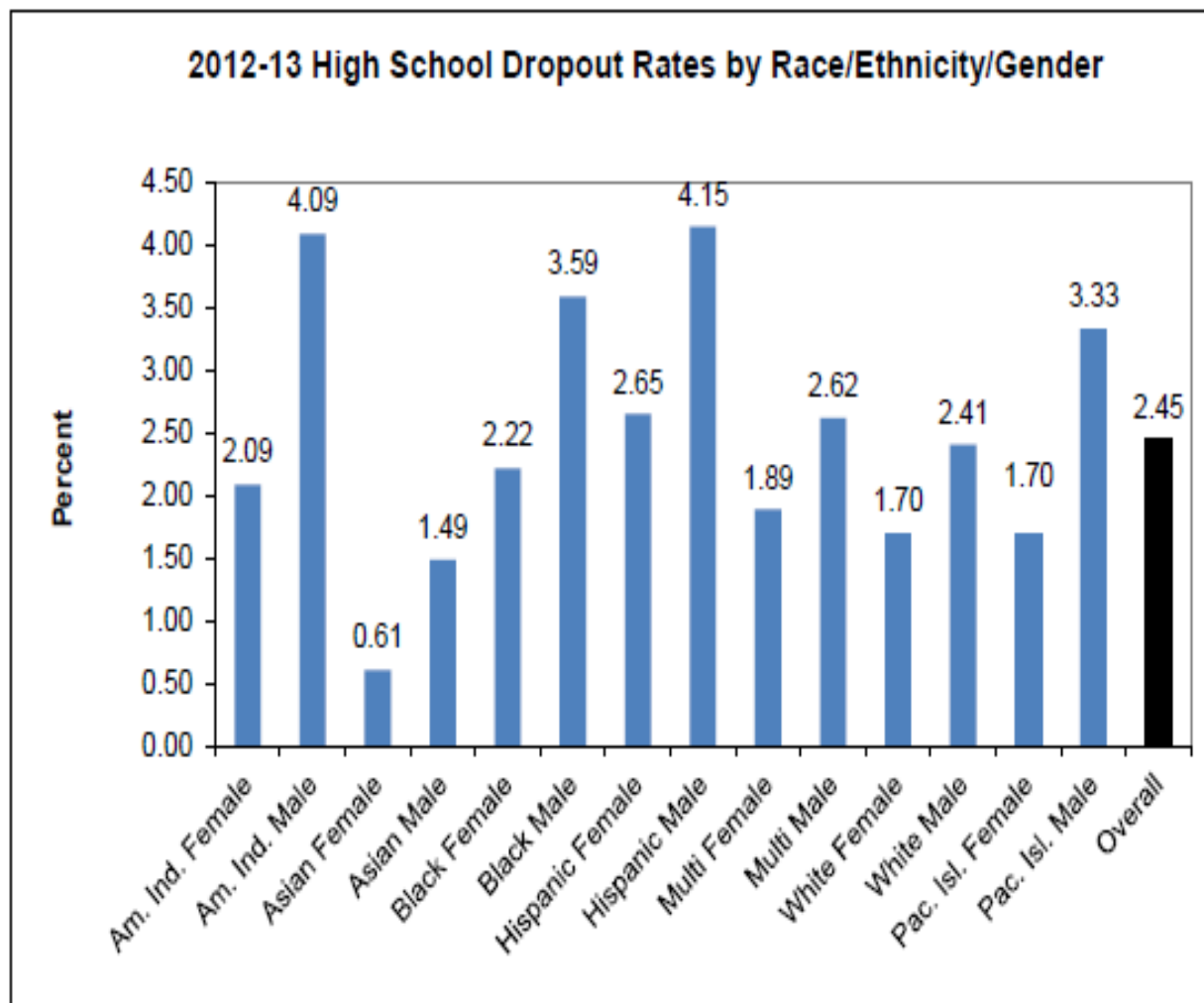


Figure 1. North Carolina high school dropout rates by race/ethnicity/gender for 2012-13.

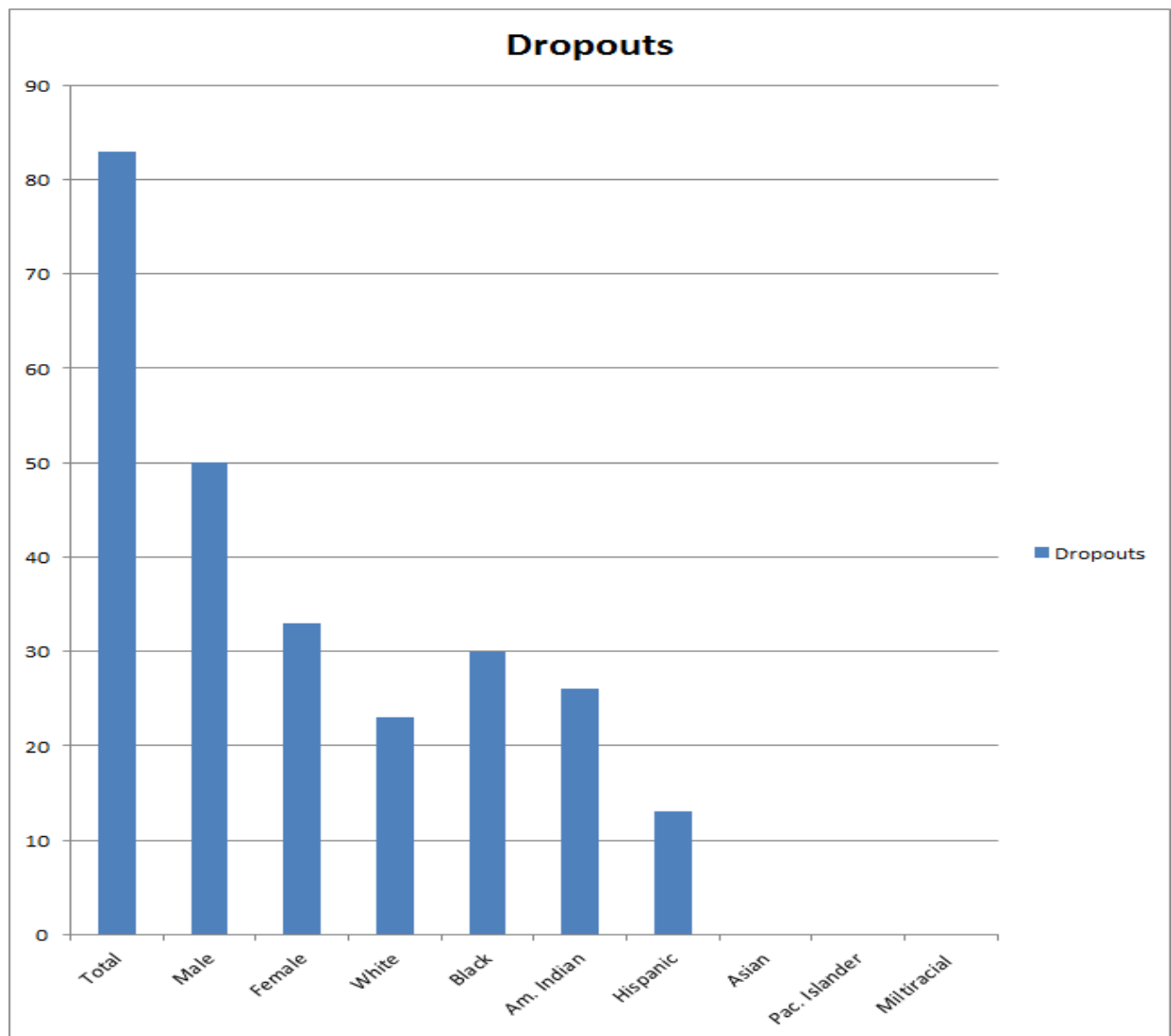


Figure 2. District in southeastern NC school dropout totals by race/ethnicity/gender for 2012-13.

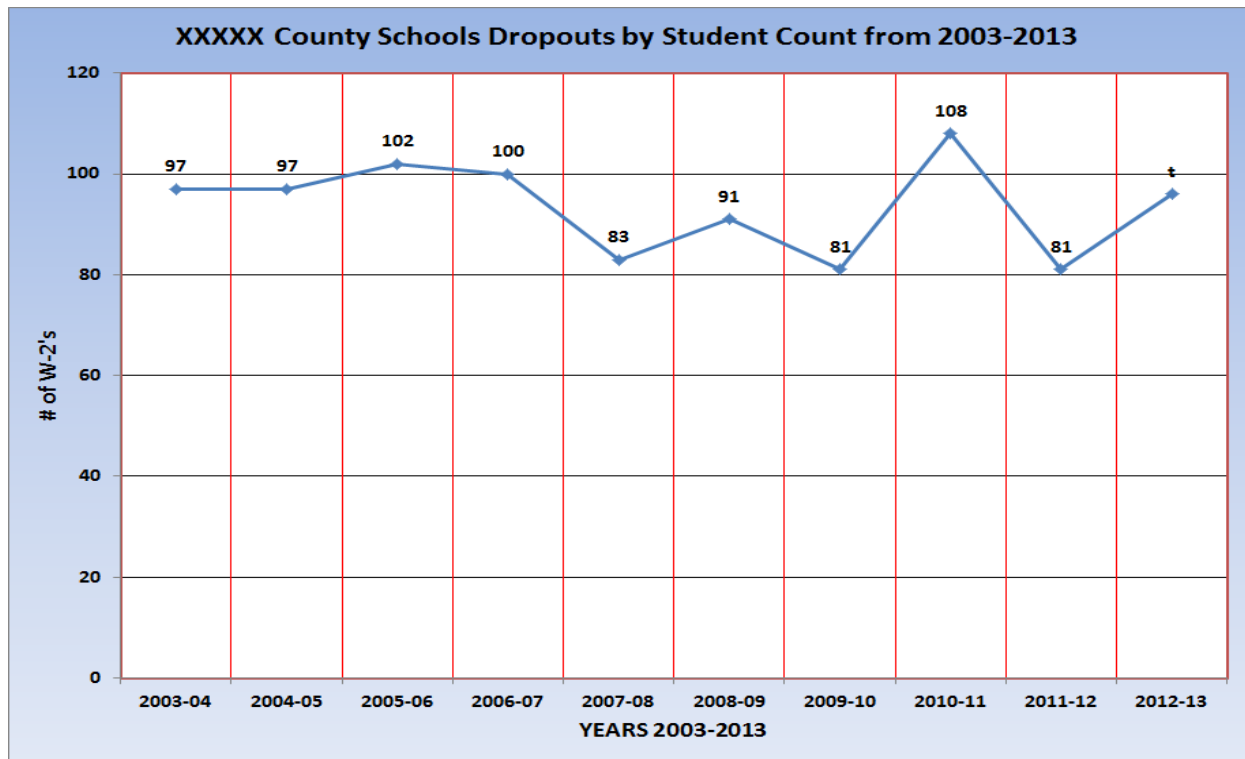


Figure 3. Dropouts by student count from 2003-2013 for the school district in southeast, NC.

grade level, not the ninth grade. For this reason, all sending and receiving schools should share information on the status of school leavers during the first twenty-day period and for the remainder of the school year” (NCDPI, 2013). North Carolina has a very specific definition for dropouts and a method for calculation. A definition for “dropout” (see Appendix B) was also established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2013).

The ten-year dropout rate for the school district in southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and has increased substantially since that year (see Figure 4). Based on the data, it is obvious that something needs to change in order to meet the needs of all students and prevent them from dropping out of school. In April 2014, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that the district in southeastern North Carolina has one of the top ten highest dropout rates out of the 115 school districts in the state (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>). Assessing and strengthening the strategies used in the alternative learning model may certainly help change these data for the positive in the future. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports the following key terms as it relates to dropouts (NCDPI, 2013):

1. Dropout Referral Law: A state law that requires school systems to refer dropouts to appropriate education alternatives including community colleges (Refer to G.S. 115C-47).
2. Initial Enrollee: A special status for students who enroll in a school system for the first time and remain in membership for twenty days or less. Students with this status are not included in the dropout count.

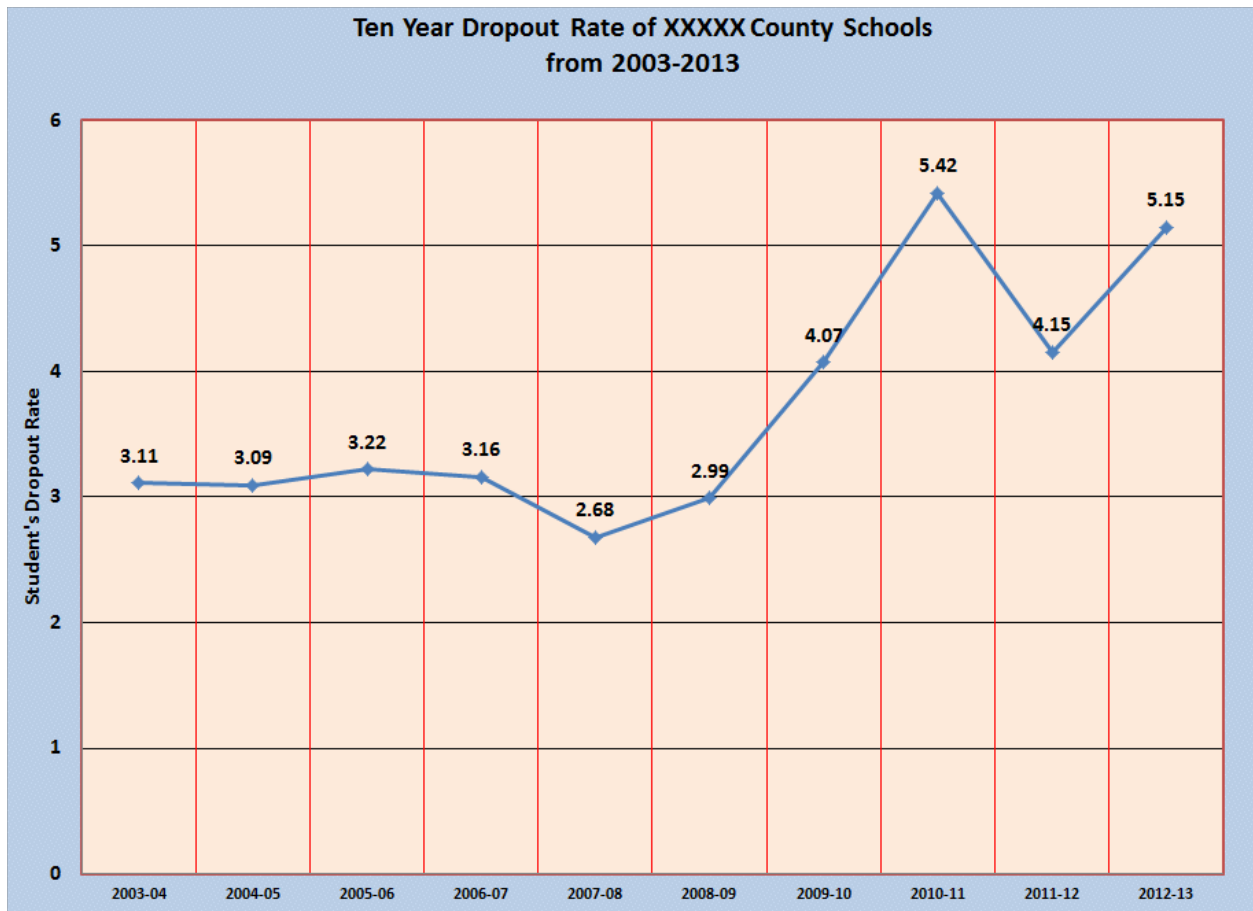


Figure 4. Ten-year dropout rate from 2003-2013 for the school district in southeast, NC.

3. No Show: Term used to designate a student who is expected to return in the fall, but on day 20 of the new year is not in membership at the assigned school or in any other approved program. (Students whose whereabouts cannot be determined must be reported as dropouts.)
4. Receiving School: Any school in the LEA to which a student is normally promoted or assigned during or at the end of a school year.
5. Reporting Exemption: Any reason, as stated in the Uniform Dropout Definition, which excludes a student from being reported as a dropout.
6. Reporting Year: A twelve-month period in which data are collected on dropouts. In North Carolina, the reporting year begins on the first day of the school year and runs through the last day of summer vacation.
7. Sending School: The school from which students are transferred or promoted during or at the end of the school year.

Alternative schools and programs (ALPs), reported to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 14,090 student placements in 2011-2012, almost identical to the 14,093 reported in 2010-2011. There were 12,874 individual students placed in ALPs during the 2011-2012 school year. High schools in North Carolina reported 13,488 dropouts in 2011-2012. The grades 9-13 dropout rate in 2011-2012 was 3.01%, down from the 3.43% reported for 2010-2011. The decrease in dropout rate was 12.2%. The dropout rates for these school years for the county in this study were 5.37% and 4.15% respectively (www.ncpublicschools.org, 2013).

Students drop out of school for a number of reasons and the decisions are typically not made at the spur of the moment. It is a process that students go through over time that ultimately leads them to making the decision to drop out. One may summarize that the root of the issue for

students is a lack of hope. Without hope students lose determination, discipline, dedication, and diligence; this eventually stifles their potential of being successful. The following are some reasons why students drop out of school: chronically late or absent, lack of interest in school and learning, demonstration of poor academic achievement, and non-academic challenges (poverty, health, and pregnancy). Data released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April of 2014 details the coded reasons for students dropping out of school in 2012-13 (see Table 1).

Kerby (2012) states that students of color are given harsher punishments in school discipline compared to their counterparts, representing approximately 70% of the school initiated arrests or referrals to law enforcement. In the same report by Kerby (2012) based upon the *Sentencing Project*, the students that are referred eventually end up in the juvenile justice system, resulting in 58% of these black youth being sentenced to adult prisons. Another contributing factor to school success is poverty levels. Research conducted by Macartney, Bishaw, and Fontenot (2013) for the United States Census Bureau indicate African Americans are three times more likely to be in poverty than Caucasians.

The long lasting impact of habitual suspensions from school not only affects the life of the student and the family, it also has negative substantial effects on all of society. Consequently, the problem is not just one for individual families or schools to scrutinize, but all of the general public. Businesses, civic organizations, community leaders, mental health officials, and justice systems would be well advised and would benefit from reviewing the research and use the findings as the basis for banning together to take action to assist in addressing this alarming issue. Many school districts are currently investigating and implementing strategies to reduce suspensions, but this is disproportionately low based upon the

Table 1

North Carolina High School Dropout Reason Codes Reported in 2012-13

Reason	Code	County	%
Attendance	ATTD	5,068	45.9
Enrollment in a community college	COMM	1,941	17.6
Lack of engagement with school and/or peers	ENGA	674	6.1
Unknown	UNKN	570	5.2
Academic problems	ACAD	420	3.8
Moved, school status unknown	MOVE	419	3.8
Choice of work over school	WORK	350	3.2
Incarcerated in adult facility	INCR	265	2.4
Unstable home environment	HOME	242	2.2
Failure to return after a long-term suspension	LTSU	205	1.9
Discipline problem	DISC	194	1.8
Need to care for children	CHLD	158	1.4
Pregnancy	PREG	121	1.1
Health problems	HEAL	120	1.1
Employment necessary	EMPL	114	1.0
Runaway	RNAW	90	0.8
Expectations of culture, family, or peers	EXPC	39	0.4
Suspected substance abuse	ABUS	38	0.3
Marriage	MARR	13	0.1
Difficulties with English language	LANG	8	0.1
Total		11,049	100.0

research that demonstrates that suspension does not address its intent. The majority of school districts are still using suspensions regularly for offenses that are nonviolent. Research provided offers alternatives to this approach.

Purpose of the Study

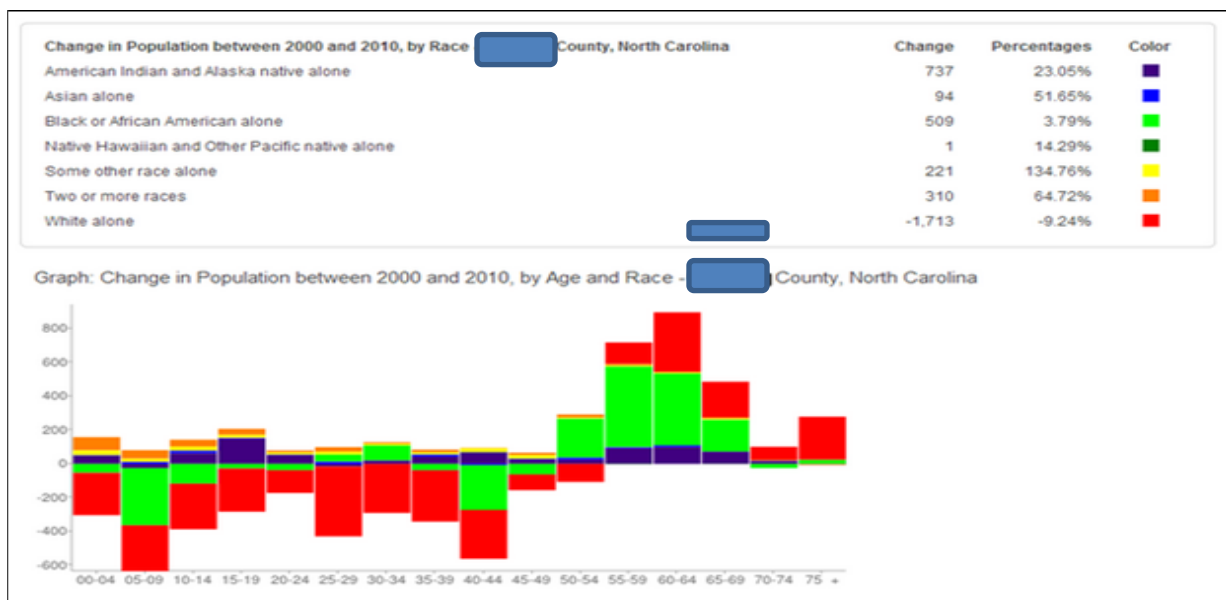
The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina.

The county being researched in this program evaluation is located in southeastern North Carolina east of Interstate 95 and has a very unique history in the fact that from colonization to post-reconstruction, three distinct populations were established and well represented throughout the county: Native American, Black, and Caucasian. The alternative learning school that was studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools; this school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least restrictive environment (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning school was moved to its present location which had previously been one of the segregated high schools, next a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014).

Since United States Civil War post-reconstruction, the county in southeastern North Carolina thrived on agriculture and would later thrive on textile mills during the Industrial Revolution until the passage of the *North American Free Trade Alliance (NAFTA)* (Myers, 2000). The county saw growth over the years resulting in attracting other industries in fields such as pharmaceuticals, golf supplies, soap, and glass (H. E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). This economic surge would have a positive impact on the socio-economic

status of many residents and create a slight population shift in the county (H. E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). However, this economic enjoyment halted as county taxes continued to climb, industries were annexed into the city, and some industries were moved overseas (H. E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). Resulting from this was a slight exodus of residents who were in the higher socio-economic status category; the unemployment rate would see a significant increase and the housing market would decline with the exception of government subsidized housing (H. E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). Therefore, the county has experienced a significant change in population, mainly socioeconomic, once again and these population shifts among the races (see Figures 5 and 6).

Numerous county agencies, including the school district, were reluctant to accept these changes and act proactively in addressing them; many of the actions now are reactionary to the changes that have occurred in the county mainly due to economic circumstances (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). This is evident in the sheriff and police departments not beginning to formally acknowledge and address street gang activity until 2013 (McAuley, 2013). The issues within the county and society as a whole are reflected within the school system and create greater challenges than existed as recently as fifteen years ago (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The “at-risk” population has grown and just as with post-reconstruction, three races still remain to be served (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The need to study and address the needs of at-risk students, especially how their needs can be met by the school district’s alternative learning school is long overdue, but has been identified as a necessity by the school district (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013).



Note. (Retrieved from <http://censusviewer.com/county/NC/>).

Figure 5. Change in population between 2000 and 2010 by race for the county.

Income		Percent Growth or Total
2011 Est Median Family Income	\$37,700	(3.3%)
2000 Census Median Family Income	\$38,971	
2017 Proj Median Household Income	\$32,713	14.3%
2012 Proj Median Household Income	\$28,630	(7.7%)
2000 Census Median Household Income	\$31,024	
2011 Est Median Worker Earnings	\$23,089	
2017 Proj Per Capita Income	\$18,907	1.9%
2012 Proj Per Capita Income	\$17,189	9.5%
2000 Census Per Capita Income	\$15,693	
Est Total Pop with Income Below Poverty Level, Last 12 months	10,296	0.3%

Note. (Retrieved from <http://accessnc.commerce.state.nc.us/docs/countyProfile/NC/37165.pdf> and Prepared by North Carolina Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division, April 2013).

Figure 6. The income shifts in the county.

Significance of the Study

First, as with many alternative schools, there is a negative connotation associated with the alternative school in southeastern, North Carolina that serves the county's middle and high school students. The community's opinion of this school is that it is where students are sent to drop out; this opinion seemingly holds true to a certain extent when assessing the graduation rate comparisons of the alternative school with the only high school in the county. Furthermore, the fact that it is a separate alternative school could add to the stereotype that exists.

Secondly, the discipline data for students enrolled in the school district, especially the data for minority students, has a direct impact on placement of students at the alternative school, the dropout rate, and the graduation rate. There has been a major population shift in the county during the past ten years, subsequently causing a substantial increase in the minority population; however, there has not been a change in the philosophy of the school system in terms of professional development on how to facilitate instruction for diverse populations or use of effective discipline models. Many of these students are involved in gang activity, but the county is still in denial about this, which is evident because the county is not a member of the North Carolina Gang Net Database. Professional development on how to work with gang populations and how to keep such students in school (increasing the graduation rate and decreasing the dropout rate) needs to occur as well.

Finally, these data are clear for many districts across the state--they are increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates through the use of virtual learning, which directly correlates with seat time. They are also achieving this through reduced credit diplomas, which also have a direct correlation to seat time. Therefore, an extensive virtual plan, a reduced

elective plan, and appropriate counseling practices for students must be constructed and implemented within the alternative setting in order for these data to improve.

The standards, suggestions, and implementation strategies provided in this document should be considered requirements for new program development or for modification of existing programs. The information that follows may be used to create and/or modify programs that are flexible and effective in assisting students with overcoming challenges which may place them “at-risk” of academic failure and disruptive behavior, so they can learn, graduate, and become productive members of society.

North Carolina Accountability Data

North Carolina's school districts, public schools, and charter schools receive web-based reporting through the *Education Value-Added Assessment System* (EVAAS) that offers an objective way to measure student growth and the impact on student learning (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/>, 2013). EVAAS is a statistical analysis of North Carolina high stakes state assessment data, and the system provides schools with growth data to consider, in addition to achievement data (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/>, 2013). “Educators are able to make data-informed instructional decisions to ensure academic growth and achievement of all students by using EVAAS” (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/>, 2013). Student learning, performance, and growth data for the alternative school for the 2012-2013 School Year according to the SAS Institute Inc. were released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in November 2013 and additional detailed information may be found at: <http://www.ncaccountabilitymodel.org/SASPortal/mainUnchallenged.do?unchallenged=yes>.

The following are the “Rules for Effectiveness Level Determination” as determined by SAS (SAS Institute Inc., 2012) (see Figure 7):

1. Exceeds Expected Growth: Schools whose students are making substantially more progress than the state growth standard/state average (the school's index is 2 or greater).
2. Meets Expected Growth: Schools whose students are making the same amount of progress as the state growth standard/state average (the school's index is equal to or greater than -2 but less than 2).
3. Does Not Meet Expected Growth: Schools whose students are making substantially less progress than the state growth standard/state average (the school's index is less than -2).

The data clearly indicates that there are failures within the current model, methods, strategies, and practices that have been in place at the school in southeastern North Carolina (see Figures 8 through 20). All tested areas are significantly low and while there is no significant achievement gap between any of the subgroups at the school, this is due to the fact that all subgroups are performing poorly at the school. Not only is this evident, but this school did not meet expected growth. In fact, the school had a significant negative impact on student learning, - 6.24. In short, this indicates that students fell behind in academic growth.

This study addressed the perceived effectiveness of various components of an alternative school in southeastern North Carolina, including the perceptions of students and adults of suspensions, seat-time, and climate as it relates to at-risk students. Based on the data obtained, the researcher made recommendations to develop or modify specific strategies and/or programs

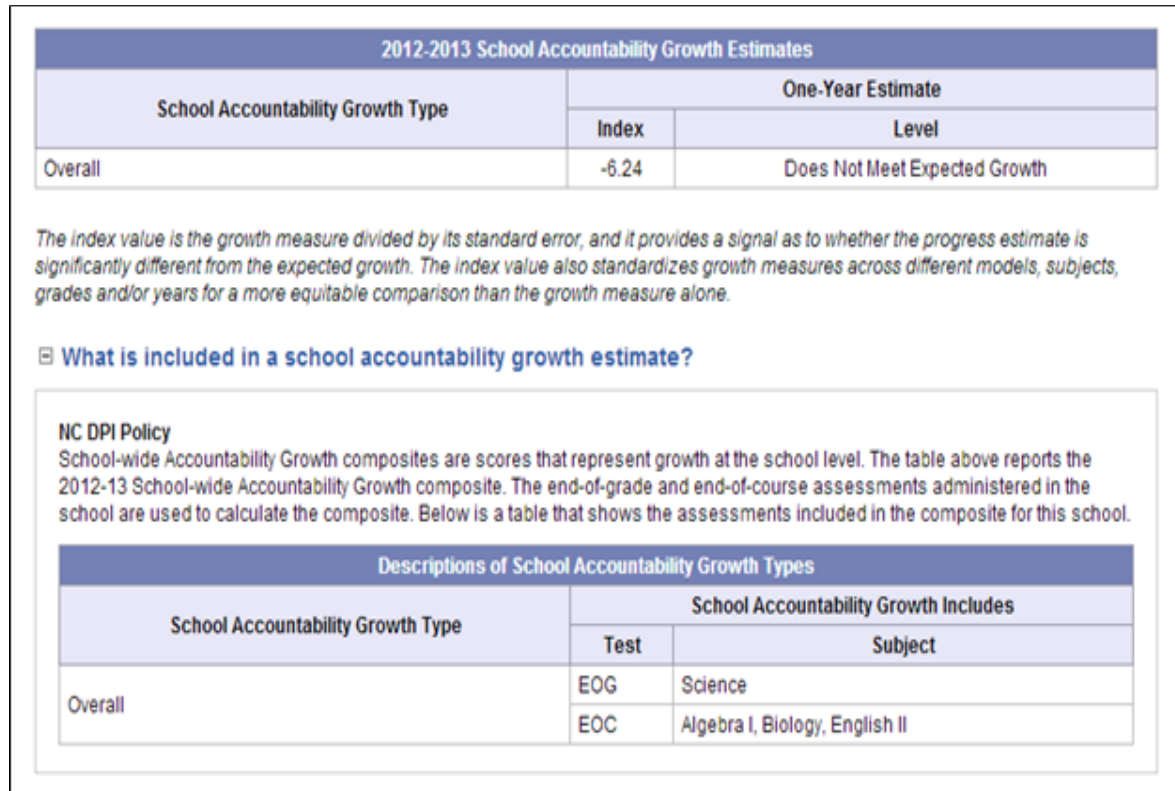


Figure 7. School accountability growth for alternative school in southeastern, NC.

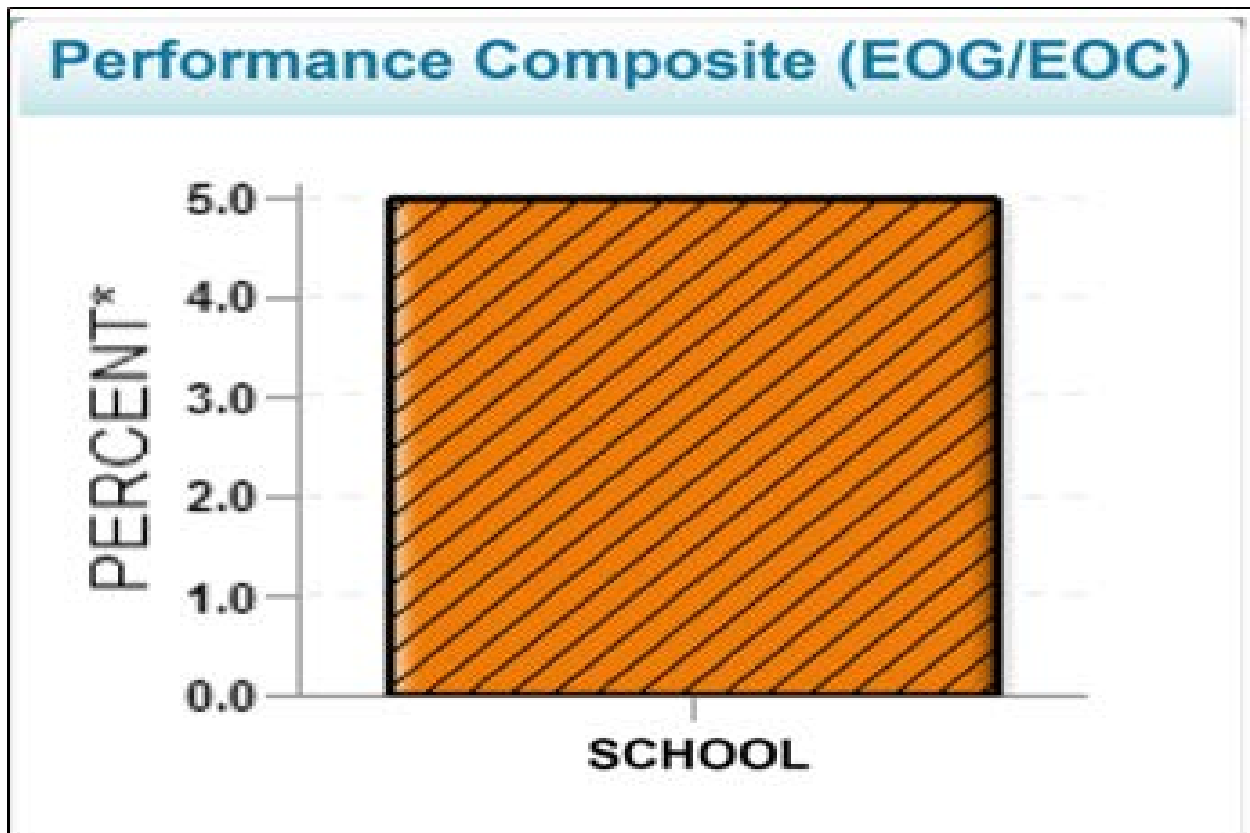
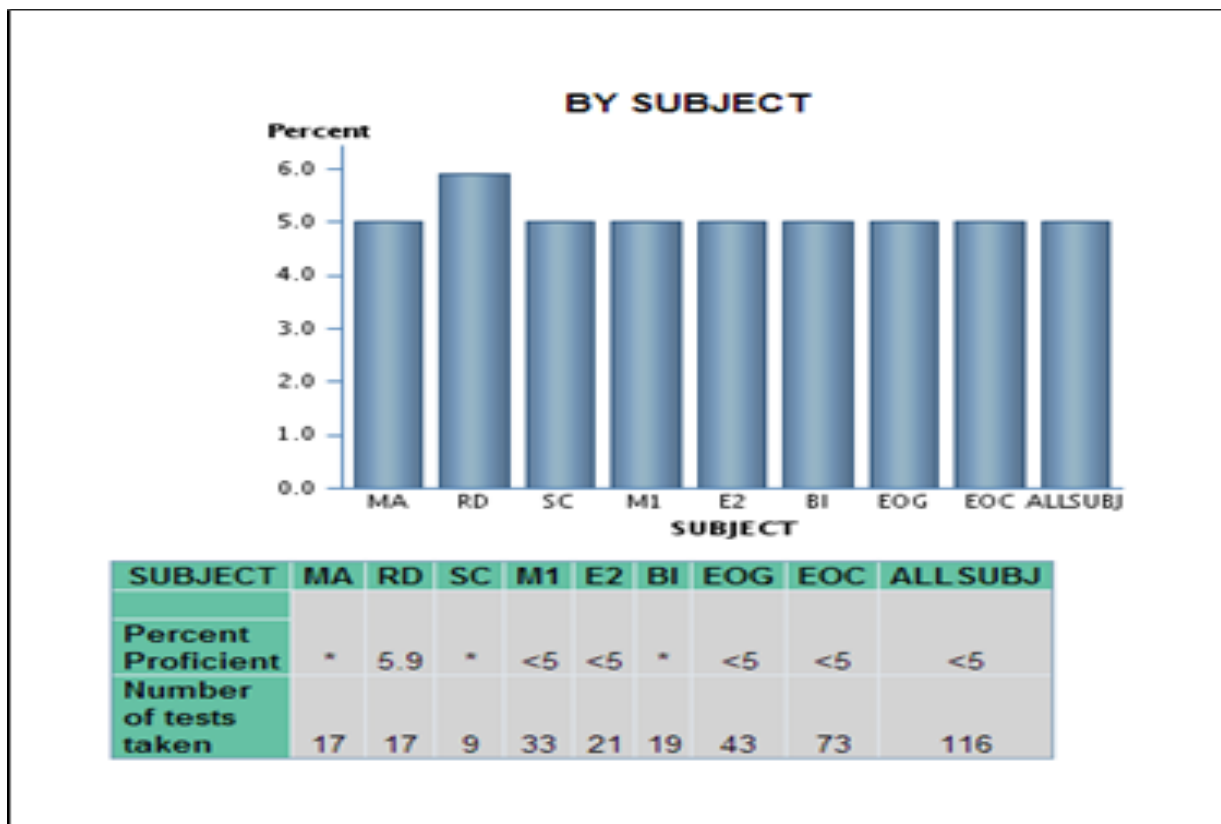
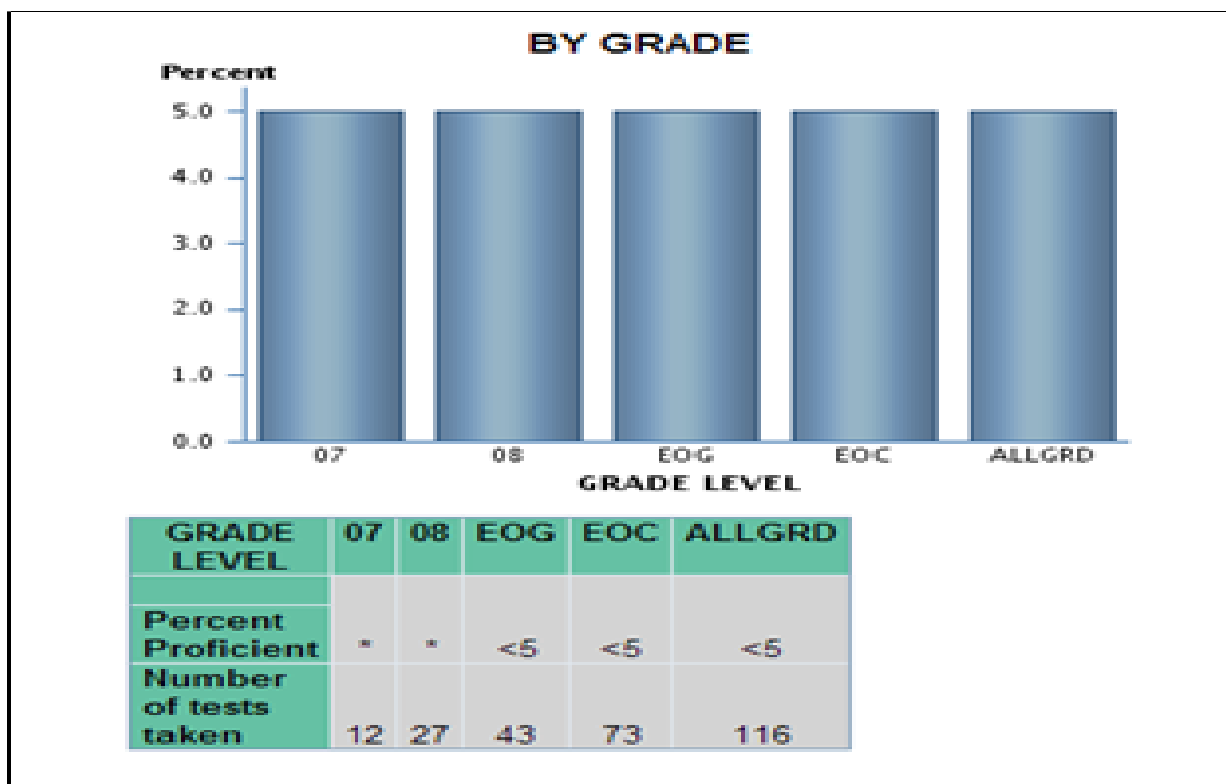


Figure 8. Performance composite for end of grade/course tests.



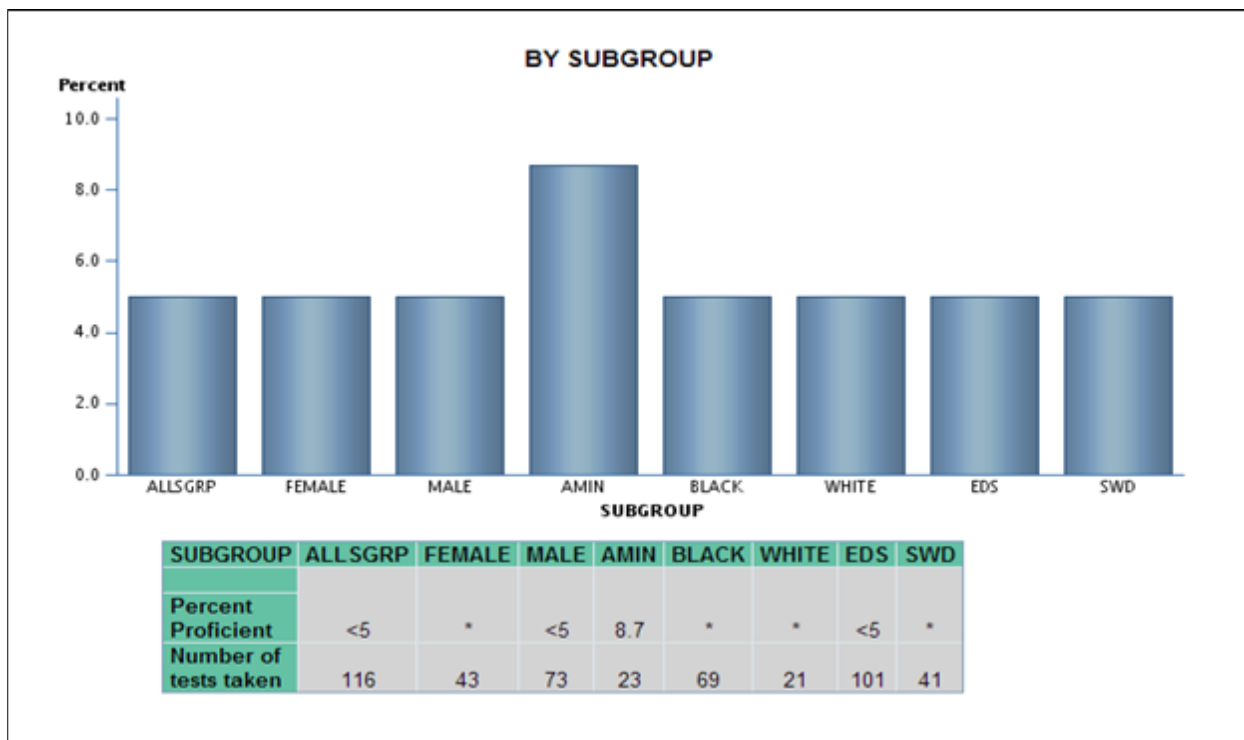
Note. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subject is calculated by dividing the number of students who scored proficient (level 3 or 4) by the total number of students tested in that subject.

Figure 9. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subject.



Note. EOG/EOC percent proficient by grade is calculated by dividing the number of students who scored proficient (Level 3 or 4) by the total number of students tested in that grade.

Figure 10. EOG/EOC percent proficient by grade.



Note. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subgroup is calculated by dividing the number of students who scored proficient (level 3 or 4) by the total number of students tested in that subgroup.

Figure 11. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subgroup.

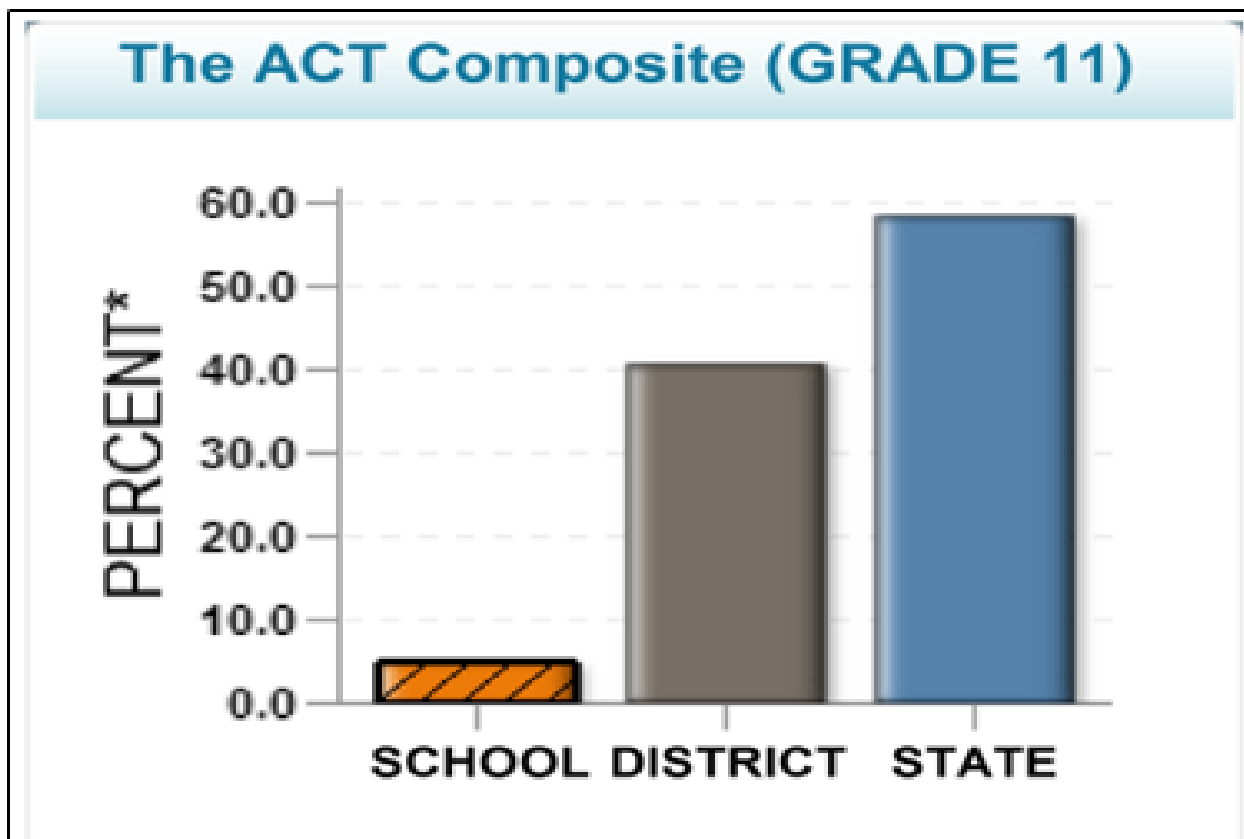


Figure 12. The ACT composite scores.

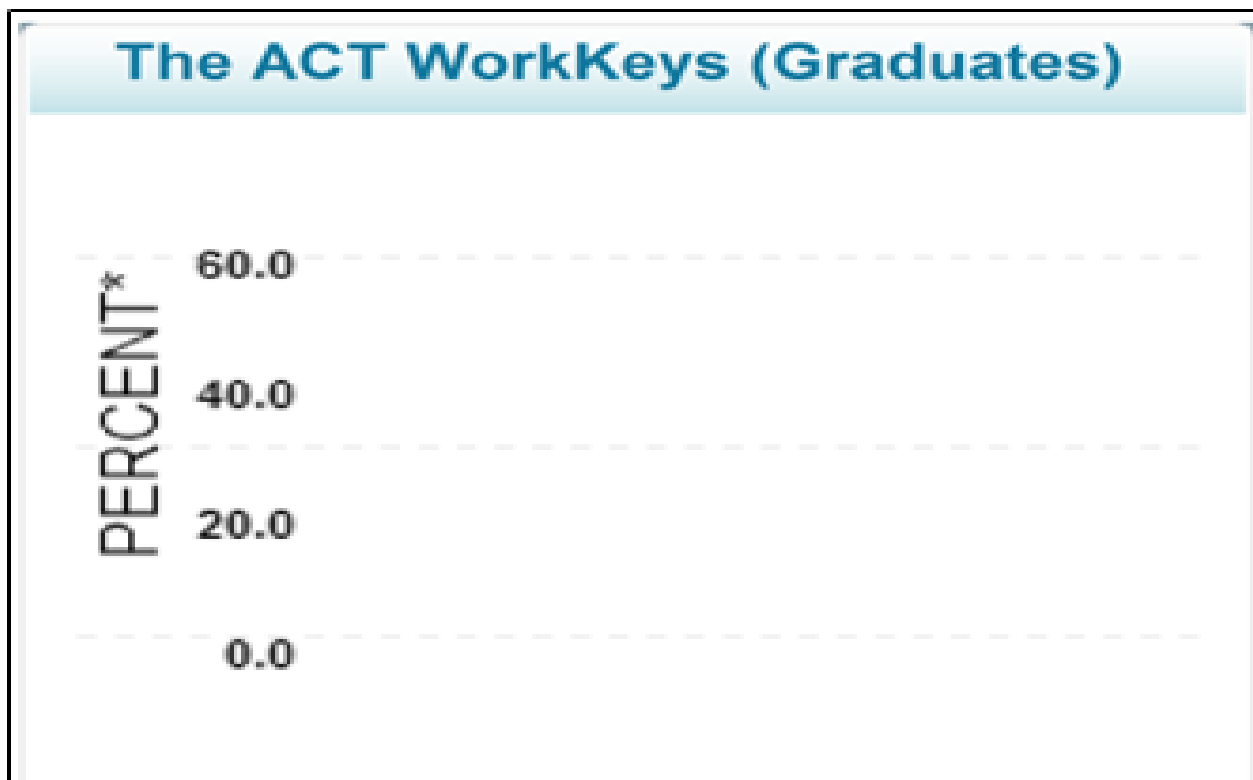


Figure 13. The ACT WorkKeys; Indicates that no students were tested with the assessment.

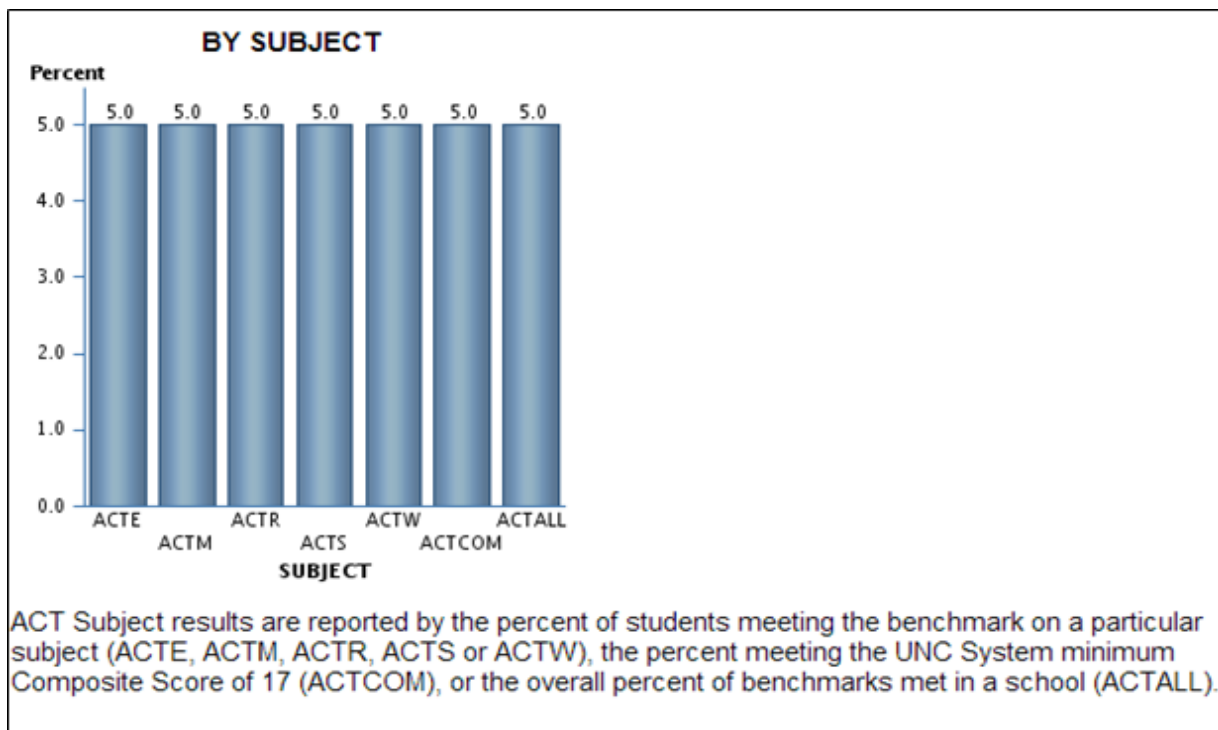


Figure 14. The ACT percent proficient by subject.

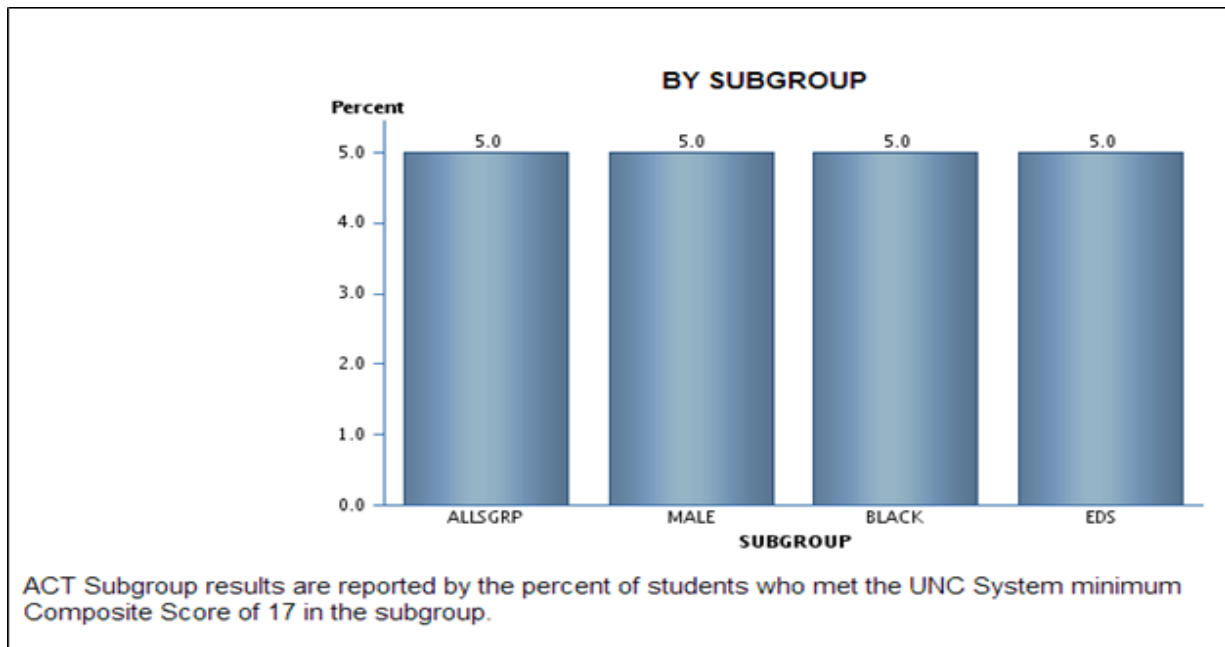


Figure 15. The ACT subgroup results.

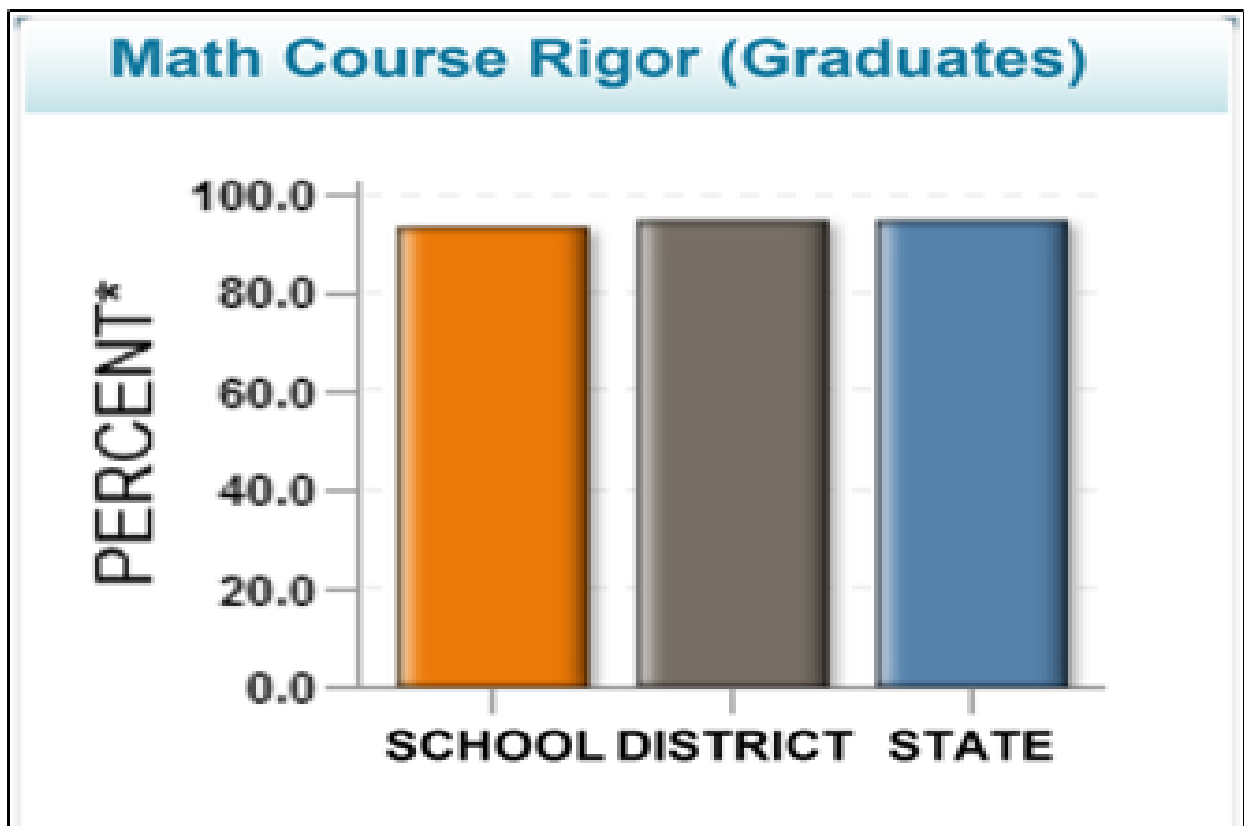


Figure 16. Math course rigor.

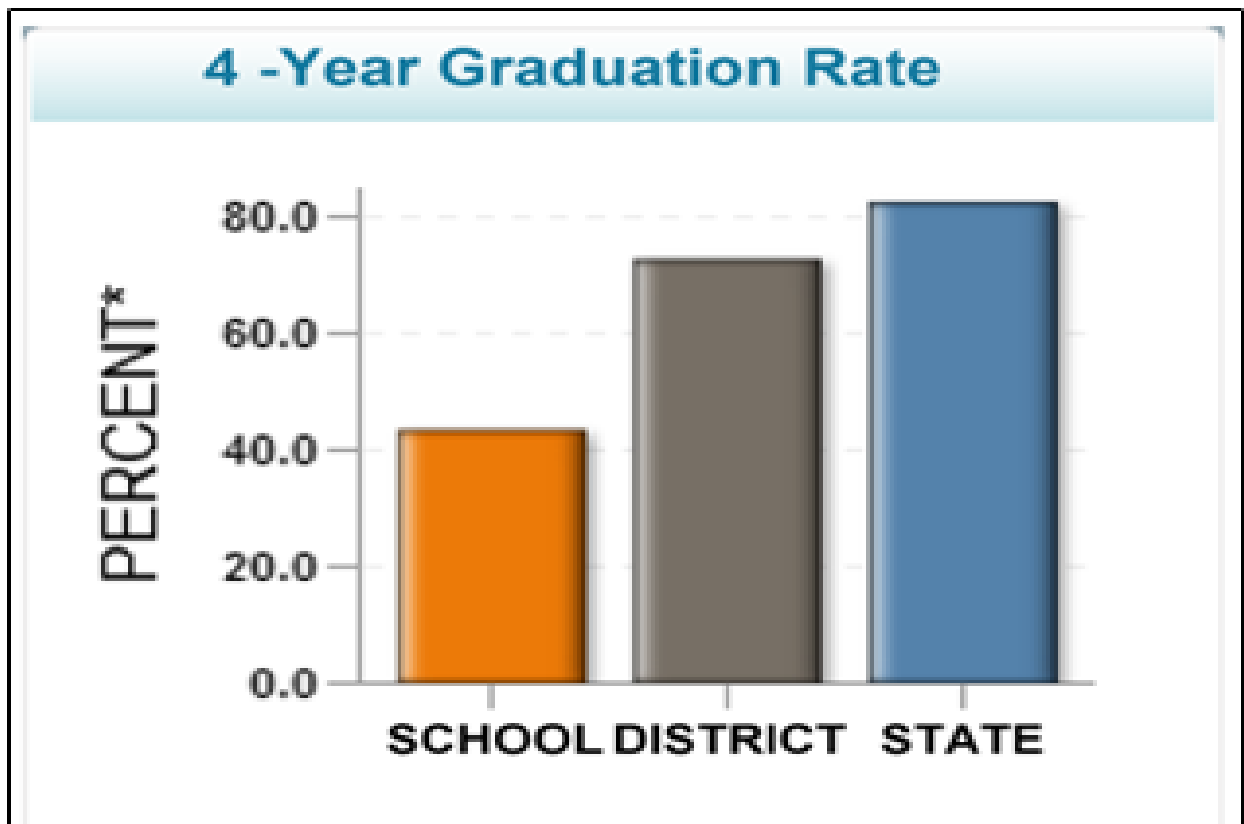


Figure 17. 4-Year graduation rate.

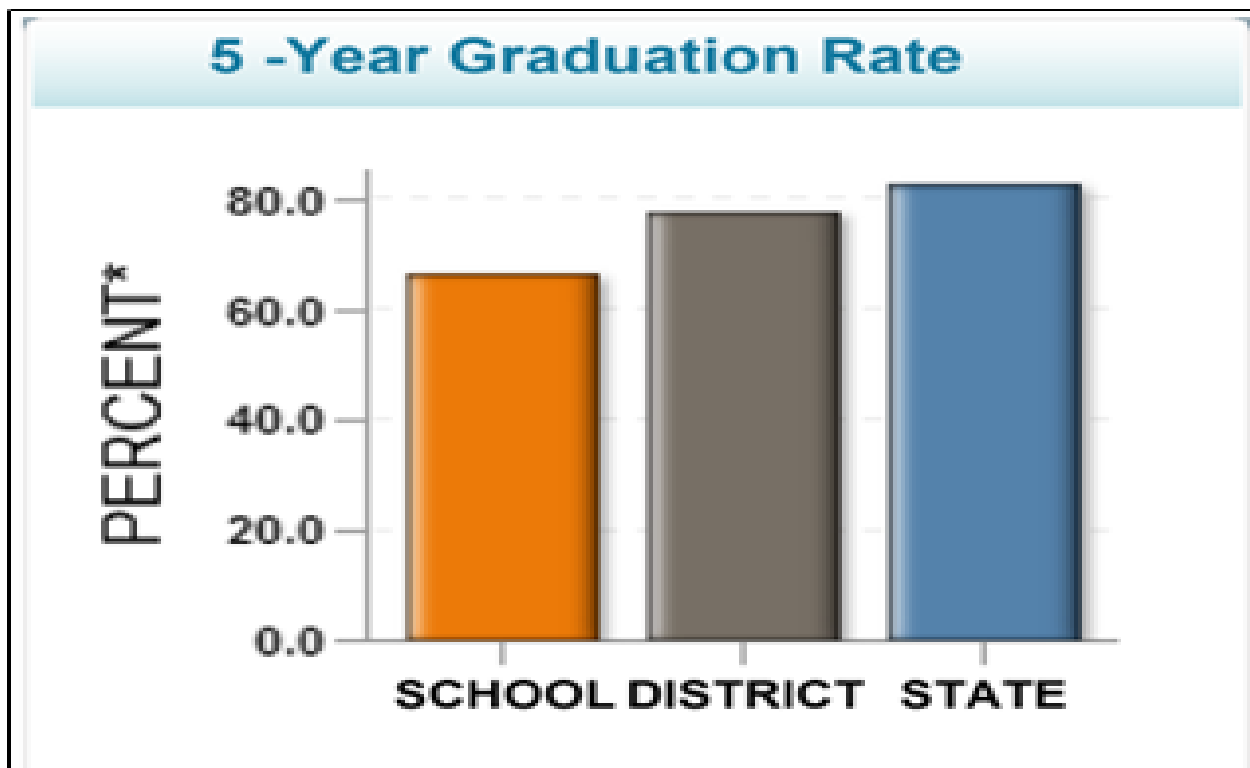


Figure 18. 5-Year graduation rate.

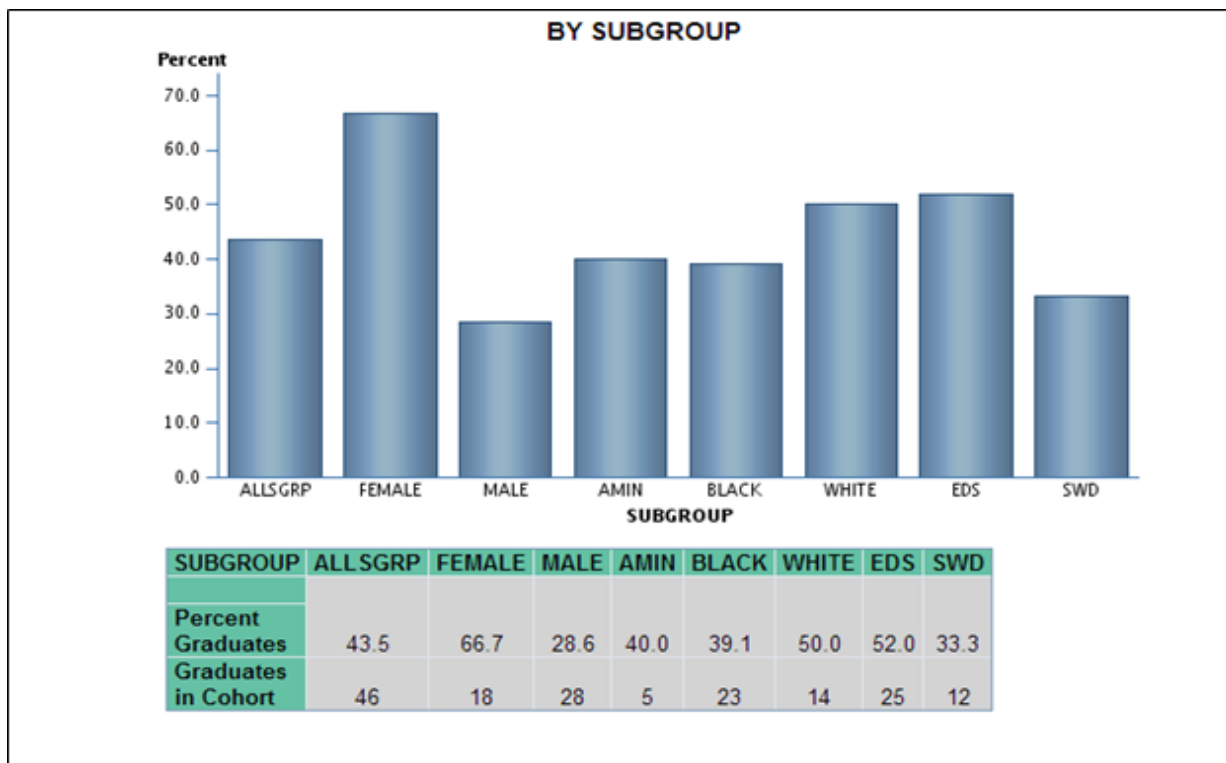


Figure 19. 4-Year graduation rate by subgroup.

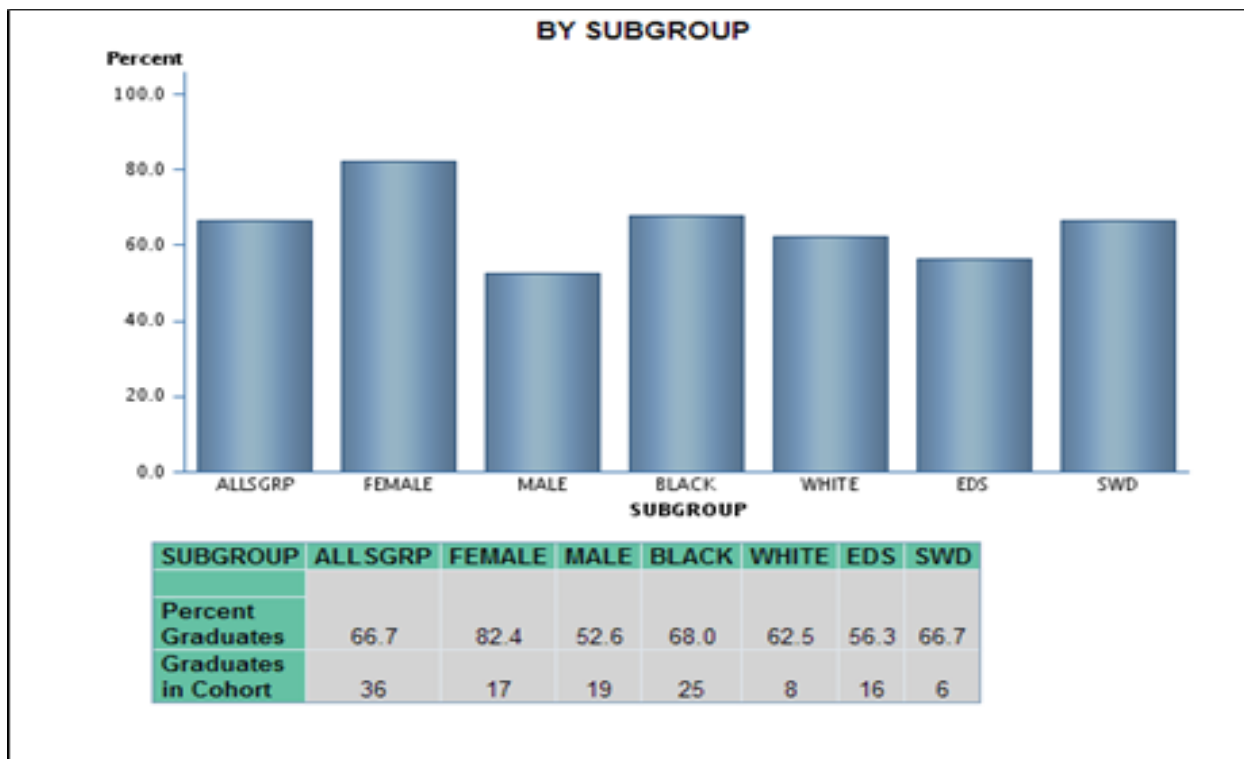


Figure 20. 5-Year graduation rate by subgroup.

that will help at-risk students be successful in a non-traditional school and competitive in a global society.

The study complied with school board policy as it relates to student surveys:

Survey of Students Policy ensures that the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment is met with regard to the appropriate legal requirements. Prior to any student taking part in a survey, the school system must receive prior approval from the parent and/or guardian of student taking survey. The following are the limitations outlined by this policy (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. political affiliations
2. mental or psychological problems
3. sex behavior and attitudes
4. illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating
5. critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships
6. legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians and ministers
7. religious practices, affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student's parents; or
8. income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program).

Research Question

1. To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

Overview of Methodology

This problem of practice study consists of four chapters. The components of Chapter 1 include the following: an introduction, purpose of the problem of practice study, research question, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations, assumptions, and an overview of the study.

Steps were taken to attempt to maintain credibility and dependability in this research study. The group of candidates surveyed demonstrated an identified set of characteristics that met the criteria of the intended group to be studied making them purposive. Convenience was another criterion utilized when choosing who participated in the research for this study. Intent was to present research for interested parties to be able to extrapolate and transfer the research findings and the conclusions presented. Participants for the study varied to include school administration, teachers, support staff, district administration, students, and parents.

The review of literature is detailed in Chapter 2. Research methods and procedures for data analysis are detailed in Chapter 3. The findings of the problem of practice study are explained via graphs, charts, tables, and discussion in Chapter 4, along with the program evaluation, providing implications for the problem of practice study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Definition of Terms

The following terms, unless otherwise noted, are taken in part or in their entirety from *Dropout Prevention: Strategies for improving high school graduation rates* (Center for Child and Family Policy Duke University, http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/s_ncfis04report.pdf, 2013). Not all of these terms are directly cited in this study but they will help in understanding the complexity of issues that impact dropout and graduation rates.

Age of compulsory attendance: Age until which minors are legally mandated to attend school. North Carolina and twenty-six other states require school attendance until age 16. Eight states require attendance until age 17, and 16 states require school attendance until 18.

Alternative learning center: A short-term intervention program for disruptive students who are unable to adjust to regular or traditional school setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Alternative learning program (ALP): Term used in North Carolina to refer to various kinds of alternative learning environments. North Carolina law requires that every school system have at least one alternative learning program. However, each school can define the target or targets for that program. ALPs serve different populations in different school systems.

Alternative education setting: Student's placement change that usually translates to homebound instruction provided by a certified teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Alternative schools: Most states have alternative schools to serve students whose needs cannot be met in a regular education, special education, or vocational school. They can take various forms, but generally provide non-traditional education and may serve as an adjunct to a regular school. Although these schools fall outside the categories of regular, special education, and vocational education, they may provide similar services or curriculum. Some examples of alternative schools are schools for children with severe disabilities, schools for older students who want to complete their education in the evening, education provided in residential treatment centers for substance abuse, schools for chronic truants, and schools for students with behavioral problems. About 6% of schools in the North Carolina Common Core of Data files are alternative schools.

At-risk: In the context of dropping out of school, being “at-risk” means a student has one or more factors that have been found to predict a high rate of school failure at some time in the future. This “failure” generally refers to dropping out of high school before graduating, but also can mean being retained within a grade from one year to the next. The risk factors include extreme poverty, having a parent who never finished high school, living in foster care and living in a household where the primary language spoken is not English.

Average daily attendance (ADA): Attendance is the presence of a student on days when school is in session. A student is counted as present only when he/she is actually at school, present at another activity sponsored by the school as part of the school’s program, or personally supervised by a member of the staff. The total number of days of attendance for all students divided by the total number of school days in a given period gives the average daily attendance (ADA).

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP): A functional behavior assessment (FBA) must be completed as the basis for this behavioral intervention plan (BIP). It describes the behavior and/or incident that prompted both plans. It also describes the behavior that was identified on the functional behavior assessment (FBA) to be targeted for interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

Cohort graduation rate (as currently defined in North Carolina): The percentage of ninth graders who graduate from high school four years later. This rate does not account for students graduating in more than four years or those who drop out of school prior to grade nine. The federal rate (also referred to as the averaged freshman graduation rate) focuses on public high school students, as opposed to all high school students or the general population, and is designed to provide an estimate of on-time graduation from high school. Thus, it provides a

measure of the extent to which public high schools are graduating students within the expected period of four years.

Completion rate (high school): The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds who have left high school and earned a high school diploma or the equivalent, including a General Education Development credential.

Drop out (verb): The event of leaving school before graduating. Transferring from a public school to a private school, for example, is not regarded as a dropout event.

Dropout (noun): An individual who is not in school and who is not a graduate. A person who drops out of school may later return and graduate, but is called a “dropout” at the time he/she left school. At the time the person returns to school, he/she is called a “stopout.” Measures to describe these often-complicated behaviors include the event dropout rate (or the closely related school persistence rate), the status dropout rate, and the high school completion rate.

Dropout prevention programs: Interventions designed to increase high school completion rates. These interventions can include techniques such as the use of incentives, counseling or monitoring as the prevention/intervention of choice.

Dropout rate: The percentage of students who drop out of school in a given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act: A U.S. federal statute enacted April 11, 1965, that funds primary and secondary education and mandates professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs and parental involvement promotion. The Act was originally authorized through 1970; however, Congress has reauthorized the Act every five years since its enactment. This act contains “Title One,” which

distributes funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): A functional behavior assessment (FBA) must be completed as the basis for this behavioral intervention plan (BIP). It describes the behavior and/or incident that prompted both plans. It also describes the behavior that was identified on the functional behavior assessment (FBA) to be targeted for interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

General Education Development (GED) credential: A comprehensive test used primarily to appraise the educational development of students who have not completed their formal high school education and who may earn a high school equivalency certificate through achieving satisfactory scores. The test is developed and distributed by the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education. In North Carolina, the NC Community College System administers it.

High school completion: An individual has completed high school if he/she has been awarded a high school diploma; in some states, an equivalent credential, such as the General Education Development (GED), counts.

High school diploma: A formal document regulated by each state certifying the successful completion of a prescribed secondary school program of studies. In some states or school districts, high school diplomas are differentiated by type, such as an academic diploma, a general diploma, or a vocational diploma.

High school dropout rate: Event, status, and cohort dropout rates each provide a different perspective on the student dropout population.

High school equivalency certificate: A formal document certifying that an individual has met the state requirements for high school graduation equivalency by obtaining satisfactory scores on an approved examination and meeting other performance requirements (if any) set by a state education agency or other appropriate body.

Home school: The traditional or regular school setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Individual Education Plan (IEP): A written statement for a child with a disability developed and implemented according to federal and state regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Criteria listed on a student's individualized education plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001: A federal law that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts and schools, as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend. This law requires states to recruit and maintain "highly qualified" teachers. The progress of all public school students is measured annually for math and reading in grades three through eight and at least once during high school.

Non-traditional student: A public school student with any of the following characteristics: is old for grade, attends school part time, works full time while enrolled, has dependents or is a single parent.

Public school: A public institution that provides educational services. The age ranges are defined by state law, but may start as early as age 3 and, for certain populations, last as long

as the early 20s. Public schools include regular, special education, vocational/technical, and alternative public charter schools. They also include schools in juvenile detention centers, schools located on military bases and operated by the United States Department of Defense, and the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs- funded schools operated by local public school districts. Federal and state statutes generally require that all U.S. residents are entitled to an opportunity for a free and appropriate public education.

Recidivism: The tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior and/or the returning rate of student to the alternative program (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Retention: Repeating an academic year of school. Students are retained in grade if they are judged not to have the academic or social skills to advance to the next grade. Retention is known as “grade retention,” “being held back” or “repeating a grade.”

School district: An education agency at the local level that exists primarily to operate public schools or to contract for public school services. Synonyms are “local basic administrative unit” and “local education agency (LEA).”

Social promotion: The practice of promoting students to the next grade, despite low achievement.

Socioeconomic Status (SES): A measure of an individual’s or family’s economic and social ranking relative to other families. For students, SE typically takes into account the father’s education level, mother’s education level, father’s occupation, mother’s occupation and family income.

Student perception: How the student feels about their home school and/or alternative school based on survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Transition: Movement from alternative school back to home school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Limitations

There were limitations to this study that occurred due to the transient nature of the school's student population. Subject participation fluctuated based on exit criteria being met and other factors. In addition, participant responses may have been swayed based upon whether participants entered the alternative placement voluntarily or involuntarily. Surveys and open-ended structured questionnaires were administered to the research participants based upon identified relevant characteristics such as being teachers, administrators, students, and/or parents involved with the school in southeastern North Carolina. Other significant documents were utilized including suspension data, dropout rate data, attendance data, disproportionality data, assessment data, programs that exist within the school district, demographics of the school, and the school district. This study focused on data from the 2010-2011 to 2012-2013 school years. A limitation to the assessment data was the implementation of the newly adopted Common Core/Essential Standards curriculum. At the time of the study, the assessment data from DPI was, "All the documents will be analyzed, compiled, and reported."

The following limitations applied to this study:

1. Students enrolled in the alternative school were the only students surveyed for this study; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all alternative learning programs because the total number of students in the school's population is limited.
2. The survey was administered at the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

Assumptions

The following assumptions applied to this study:

1. All participants in the survey responded truthfully to the questions.
2. All participants understood the verbiage used in the questions.

All students truly believed that they would not receive adverse repercussions for answers given in the survey because of the anonymity guaranteed by the researcher.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina. There are many topics that address graduation rates and academic proficiency, however, in this literature review are the following subtopics are discussed: at-risk students, alternative learning programs, alternative schools, school climate, school leaders, high school graduation, seat time, different approaches to course credit, school suspension background (causes and effects), in-school suspension, alternatives to suspensions, disparities of punishment regarding minorities and genders, classroom management, absences, poverty, dropout rates, gang data specific to North Carolina, case study of a dropout, developing leadership within schools to empower youths, and program structures associated with student success.

At-Risk Students

In January 2000, the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCPDI, 2009) defined an at-risk student as:

a young person who, because of a wide range of individual, personal, financial, familial, social, behavioral or academic circumstances, may experience school failure or other unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk factors. Circumstances which often place students at risk may include but are not limited to:

1. not meeting state/local proficiency standards
2. grade retention
3. unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs
4. alienation from school life

5. unchallenging curricula and/or instruction
6. tardiness and/or poor school attendance
7. negative peer influence
8. unmanageable behavior
9. substance abuse and other health risk behaviors
10. abuse and neglect
11. inadequate parental, family, and/or school support, and
12. limited English proficiency (NCPDI, 2009)

The School Board for the county in southeastern North Carolina has followed up on this general statute with specific board policy (Policy Code: 3405 Students At-Risk of Academic Failure) as it relates to students at risk of academic failure. The aim of the board is to ensure students in all subgroups acquire academic information and skills for secondary education and career success. Lehr (2004) states, “the magnitude of the problem for student subgroups (including students of Hispanic and Native-American descent) points to the need for concerted efforts to design and implement programs and strategies that will keep youth in school and facilitate successful completion.” To support this endeavor, structures have been identified and put in place to provide the needed support for students who are at risk of academic failure, lack of promotion, or not graduating. According to statute, the school principal has the responsibility of identifying at-risk students and providing the necessary support for academic success (G.S. 115C-105.41).

The actions of Dorman Jackson, a superintendent in a low performing school district in Sabine Parish, Louisiana, exemplify the manner in which the needs of at-risk students should be addressed. Upon being hired, Jackson implemented a remedial program designed to identify learning challenges students had early on and to put strategies in place to provide the necessary

support and assistance. Initially, this program provided the needed results but eventually reached a plateau in performance. According to Jackson, “We discovered we had carried our kids about as far as we could” (DeAngelis, 2012).

Recognizing their limits in terms of providing the necessary support for at-risk students, the district realized that many students identified as at risk faced various personal roadblocks. Areas of concern identified were overworked parents, student emotional problems, and student drug and alcohol abuse. These risk factors spurred the district to enlist the support of psychologists Howard Adelman, PhD, and Linda Taylor, PhD, co-directors of the mental health department at the University of California. They created a model referred to as the “enabling component” (DeAngelis, 2012). That enabling component focused on the educational and psychosocial barriers to student achievement.

The successful implementation of this model provided an increase in student achievement for Sabine Parish from 2007 to 2010, with an increase in graduation rate from 73% to 81.2% (DeAngelis, 2012). Louisiana is comprised of 60 districts and Sabine Parish started at 37th in 2003 and improved to 14th by 2012 based on student achievement (DeAngelis, 2012).

“The enabling component is designed around six areas of focus (DeAngelis, 2012):

1. Making innovative changes to classroom instruction: These changes include bringing support personnel into the classroom rather than taking children out of class when their behavior or inattention may have gotten out of control. It also calls for revamping teaching and intervention methods to help teachers handle problems more easily and effectively.
2. Supporting children through transitions: Not only are children moving back and forth

- from school to home and from one school level to the next, many are also coping with family disruptions, such as a divorce.
3. Connecting families to schools and school activities: This includes offering basic parenting classes, fostering more meetings between parents and teachers and involving families in homework projects, field trips and other activities.
 4. Maximizing use of community resources: Developing and maintaining strong connections with community resources can greatly enhance schools' capacity to support these youngsters. Entities to tap include public and private agencies, colleges and universities, businesses, artists and cultural institutions, faith-based organizations and volunteer groups.
 5. Reorganizing crisis assistance and prevention: Schools need systems that can respond quickly and effectively in the wake of any crisis, whether it is a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, or students acting in a way that endangers others. Schools must also create safe and caring learning environments that deal preemptively with disruptive and potentially dangerous behavior such as bullying and harassment.
 6. Improving links to external mental health and behavioral services: When internal resources are not enough, schools should be able to refer students and families to mental health and financial assistance services in a timely fashion.

These factors identified by DeAngelis work well, but it is important to note that these are not the only strategies to help at-risk students. Maurice Elias identified successful strategies for helping at-risk youth that may be combined with the work of DeAngelis to provide even greater support.

Additionally, in an article entitled “The Four Keys to Helping At-Risk Kids,” Maurice Elias (2009), professor at Rutgers University, identified strategies that provide support and positively impact at-risk students.

1. Caring, Sustained Relationships: relationships are established but not sustained especially in secondary schools. The key that will sustain relationships is the need to build a sense of trust and have time to communicate the complexity, frustrations, and positive aspects of their lives in and out of school.
2. Reachable Goals: student’s goals are not attainable because they are based on what they learn from mass culture. The goals that are most sustained and achieved are those that are within our reach if we apply some effort.
3. Realistic, Hopeful Pathways: students need adults to help them create realistic pathways with guardrails. Students also need what the Character Education Partnership describes as “leeway and forgiveness”--that is, the knowledge that going off the path does not destroy the dream.
4. Engaging School and Community Settings: the idea of engagement takes place when students have a chance to receive positive recognition and to make positive contributions in an environment where teamwork is evident and they realize the possibility of obtaining a new skill that is applicable to their life. Engaging students in the community is identifiable by mottos, logos, and missions that allow the student an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging. Mentors outside the school are great resources to communicate with students their choices and the consequences that are attached to those choices.

In the state of North Carolina, the development of Alternative Learning Programs attempts to fulfill the needs identified in Professor Elias's research. These four components can also be found in a varied version in some of the policies and procedures for the school board in the county in southeastern North Carolina. Furthermore, the four components that he describes in his work can be found in the North Carolina state guidelines for alternative learning schools and/or programs.

Alternative Learning Programs

Alternative programs were created to “serve a population of children and youth whose education and treatment required the use of innovative and comprehensive techniques and methodologies that were, and are, largely absent from most regular educational settings” (De La Ossa, 2005). In the history of alternative education, its foundation or basis can be traced to the beliefs of religious leaders, social reformers, romantics, and individualists. The focus of alternative education lends itself to fulfill the obligation of developing the whole child (mental, physical, spiritual, and social) in an effort to see each individual student be successful, regardless of environment and/or background.

Furthermore, Timothy Young documented the history of alternative schools and determined that the foundational concept of alternative schools could be seen at the onset of education as we know it in America (Ryan, 2009). The word “alternative” is used to describe the vast range of educational settings that provide services not evident in regular education settings. Public alternative schools were defined as “a school, not located within or attached to a mainstream school that students in the public school district can choose to attend at no additional cost” (De La Ossa, 2005).

Miller (2006) identified that alternative schools were born from an attempt to provide support and assistance to students that were not successful in a traditional setting (Miller, as cited in Walker, 2007, p. 20). The goals for these alternative schools are as follows: meaningful relationships, peer guidance, parental involvement, small class sizes, student decision-making, and a diverse curriculum. Miller (2006) further states that alternative schools provide a more flexible curriculum designed to meet the needs of the students in which the school was created to serve. In addition, according to Miller (2006), these schools are designed for students that are underachieving and do not qualify for exceptional children program (Miller, as cited in Walker, 2007, p. 20).

Furthermore, according to the North Carolina Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Alternative Learning Programs are defined as services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, and/or dropping out of school. Such services should be designed to better meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the traditional school setting (NCDPI, 2006).

Alternative Learning Programs serve students at any level who are or have: (NCDPI, 2006):

1. suspended and/or expelled;
2. at risk of participation in juvenile crime;
3. dropped out and desire to return to school;
4. a history of truancy;
5. returning from juvenile justice settings or psychiatric hospitals; and
6. learning styles that are best served in an alternative setting.

In addition, these programs provide individualized programs outside of a standard classroom

setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.

An alternative learning program must:

1. provide the primary instruction for selected at-risk students;
2. enroll students for a designated period of time, usually a minimum of one academic grading period; and
3. offer course credit or grade-level promotion credit in core academic areas.

Alternative learning programs may also address:

1. behavioral or emotional problems that interfere with adjustments to or benefiting from the regular education classroom,
2. provide smaller classes and/or student/teacher ratios,
3. provide flexible scheduling, and/or
4. assist students in meeting graduation requirements other than course credits.

Alternative learning programs for at-risk students typically serve students in a facility within the regular school.

A school board's purpose is to provide a safe and orderly environment at each school using a Behavioral Management Plan, a Parental Involvement Plan, and a Conflict Resolution Plan (Policy Code: 3470/4305). The Alternative Learning program has been implemented as an additional option for students who continue to have challenges with behavior management and/or academics in the regular education setting. According to Policy Code: 3470/4305, the following have been identified by the school district as purposes for an alternative educational setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting,
2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to

- help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,
3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and
 4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.

According to Policy Code: 3470/4305 students are typically referred to schools based on their attendance area. Based on school board policy, the board has the right to assign a student to a school outside of their attendance zone to allow that student to attend a theme/specialized school or for any other reason that the School Board deems necessary. The county in southeastern North Carolina has used the guidelines established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and has established specific board policies as it relates to alternative education.

Students attending an alternative school may be referred to school on a voluntary or an involuntary basis, according to school board policy. The following is the transfer process for students:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:
 - a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,
 - b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and
 - c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative Learning Program or School:

If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral: This type of referral is encouraged whenever possible and parent/guardian should be a part of this process. Once the transfer is approved, the sending and receiving principal must arrange the transfer process. The sending principal must notify superintendent or designee of this transfer.

4. Involuntary Referral

- a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel,
- b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational environment in the regular educational setting,
- c. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue,
- d. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains, or
- e. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Before an involuntary transfer is extended, the referring school must document all academic, social, and/or behavioral problems a student is having within the school. Once those areas have been documented, school staff must identify what action steps or consequences have

been enforced to correct behavior and/or academic performance within the regular education setting. Once the principal has determined that the steps and/or actions put in place have not corrected the academic/behavior needs of the student, the principal must recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred to the alternative school.

The principal must provide the following to support request for alternative placement:

(1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue; (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable; and (3) documentation of the circumstances that support an involuntary transfer (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

The guidelines adopted by the board perpetuate the negative connotation associated with the school because it suggests that the school is a punishment rather than an alternative designed to meet an educational need that the traditional setting is unable to meet.

Alternative programs cannot work without teachers who are committed to meeting the diverse needs of the students enrolled in the program. Alternative Instructional Model (AIM), an alternative program in New York, allows students to remain connected to their home school, thus providing the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Individualized instruction, continuous improvement, scheduling flexibility, community service projects, and an environment rich in student resources have proven to increase student success (Grobe, 2002).

North Carolina school districts may have alternative learning programs or alternative learning schools. The look of an alternative program can be as unique as its student population. Alternative Instructional Model (AIM), an alternative program in New York, allows students to remain connected to their home school, thus providing the opportunity to participate in

extracurricular activities. Individualized instruction, continuous improvement, scheduling flexibility, community service projects, and an environment rich in student resources have each proven to be valuable elements of successful alternative learning programs to increase student success (Grobe, 2002). To gauge the success of alternative learning programs in school districts within North Carolina, it is important to understand what such organizations entail.

Alternative Schools

An alternative school is one option for an alternative learning program. This model serves at-risk students and has an organizational designation based on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction assignment of an official school code. An alternative school is different from a regular public school in areas such as teaching methods, hours, curriculum, or location sites. Alternative schools provide many paths to the end-goal, which, for some, is simply to return to a public school. Despite these differences, alternative schools are intended to meet the diverse learning needs of at-risk students.

The alternative schools in existence today are derivatives of an educational evolution that began in the 1960s. During the Cold War and the 1957 Sputnik launch, schools were deemed cold and insensitive to minority students as well as to those with specialized needs. By the end of the 1960s, the face of alternative schools began to change, becoming more specialized to meet the needs of the nation's most vulnerable students (Ianni, 2009). Alternative programs were created to "serve a population of children and youth whose education and treatment required the use of innovative and comprehensive techniques and methodologies that were, and are, largely absent from most regular educational settings" (De La Ossa, 2005).

The word "alternative" is used to describe the vast range of educational settings that provide services not evident in regular education settings. A general description of what an

alternative education program entails has been elusive. Vernon H. Smith defines an alternative school as “any school that provides alternative learning experiences beyond those provided by the traditional schools within its community and is available to all students at no additional cost” (Ianni, 2009).

Throughout the country, many schools offer alternative learning experiences, but alternative schools are traditionally known to serve students who are at risk of school failure. The United States Department of Education (2002) defines schools classified as alternative education schools as “a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides non-traditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education” (p. 55). There has been a significant increase in the number of alternative education programs in the last fifty years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), there are 10,300 public school districts with district administered alternative schools or programs.

Data presented denotes a breakdown of the number of alternative schools and programs across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010) (see Table 2). Characteristics are also provided to include the region, district enrollment, community type, and poverty concentration. Information is also presented on whether the school or program is administered by a district, another entity, or combination of both (NCES, 2010) (see Table 2).

There are various types of alternative educational settings. Alternative programs are usually sustained within an accredited school. Programs may be based within a traditional school, on the same campus as a traditional school, or at a different site within the school district. An alternative school is not affiliated with another traditional school; it has an official school

Table 2

Percent of Districts with Alternative Schools and Programs for At-Risk Students, by Administering Entity and District Characteristics for School Year 2007-2008

District characteristic	Percent of Districts			
	Alternative schools and programs administered either by the district or by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by the district	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered by both the district and another entity
All public school districts	64	40	35	12
District Enrollment size				
Less than 2,500	54	27	34	7
2,500 to 9,999	86	67	39	20
10,000 or more	96	91	35	31
Community type				
City	94	87	44	37
Suburban	66	43	38	16
Town	77	55	34	12
Rural	56	29	34	8
Region				
Northeast	60	30	43	13
90	90	76	26	11
Central	61	33	40	13
West	60	42	27	9

Table 2 (continued)

District characteristic	Alternative schools and programs administered either by the district or by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by the district	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered by both the district and another entity
Percent combined enrollment of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indians / Alaska Native students				
Less than 6%	55	26	39	10
6-20%	66	42	36	13
21 to 49%	70	54	31	15
50% or more	73	54	30	11
Poverty concentration				
Less than 10%	62	34	42	13
10 to 19%	62	38	36	12
20% or more	68	49	29	10

Note: There were a small number of cases for which poverty concentration was missing. Poverty estimates for school district were based on Title I data provided to the U.S. Department of Education by the U.S. Census Bureau. Percentages do not sum to the total percent of districts with alternative schools and programs administered either by the district or by another entity because district could report using one or both types of alternative schools and programs.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), "District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08" and "Follow-up District of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08," FRSS 96, 2008.

number. In North Carolina, the school number is the sole determinant in distinguishing alternative programs from alternative schools.

School systems embrace the option of placing at-risk students in danger of failing or unable to successfully function in a regular educational setting in a separate setting. Separate settings assist students by providing a non-traditional method of acquiring an appropriate education, protect students in the regular educational setting from violent and excessively deviant behavior, meet state accountability standards and decrease the dropout rate. Similar to other students who attend alternative students, students with disabilities may not be best suited to be successful in a traditional school setting; this population can also greatly benefit from an effective alternative setting.

Of those who attend alternative schools, 12% had a disability (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Most students attend alternative schools because they are unsuccessful in the traditional educational setting. They normally have exhibited deviant behaviors such as failing grades, truancy, and disruptive and/or aggressive behavior. Others attend due to situations such as homelessness and early parenthood.

In the study conducted by Booker and Mitchell (2011), minority students were significantly more likely than Caucasian students to be placed in a disciplinary alternative setting. They are also more likely to return to the setting within the same school year. There were differences found between boys and girls, but none between students placed in the special education program and those who were not.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) are defined as schools designed to serve students who demonstrate difficulty functioning at their home campuses (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). These schools are aimed at correcting or managing the behavior of disruptive

students. DAEPs are not considered “schools of choice” because the enrollment is initiated by an administrative referral from the home school.

A nationwide survey conducted by the United States Department of Education suggested that there is a shortage of schools to meet the needs of at-risk students. Fifty-four percent of existing DAEPs had exceeded the maximum enrollment capacity from 1999-2001.

Understanding reasons students are placed might lead to a reduction in the referrals and an increase in student success at the home school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Zero Tolerance policies, policies where students are suspended from school immediately for serious disciplinary incidents such as possession of weapons, were implemented by the Federal government in 1994 as a disciplinary tool to reduce violence in schools. Placement in DAEPs of students who violated the zero tolerance policy was mandatory after implementation. Zero tolerance policies expanded the discretion of administrators to “engage in the implementation of punitive and judicial forms of discipline.” These forms of discipline included in-school suspension, out of school suspension, placement in discipline alternative education programs, expulsion, and placement in juvenile justice programs (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

The offenses that warranted placement in discipline alternative education programs were much more serious in nature at the onset of this policy’s implementation. As time has progressed, the discretionary practices of administrators have shown that students are being recommended for placement at DAEPs for less serious infractions. A report by the Hogg Foundation reflected that, during the 2005-06 school year in Texas, 70% of DAEP placements were at the discretion of the home school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Mandatory placement of students gave clear categories for behaviors that warranted disciplinary assignment. Discretionary placements allow administrators to determine if a

student's behavior warrants disciplinary assignment to an alternative setting. This use of discretion subjects more students to the possibility of disciplinary placement. Attention needs to be given to the potential of bias and subjectivity when determining placement of students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). It is also important to provide these students with this special attention before they make a decision to drop out of school.

The decision to drop out of school is not a "victimless" act. The effects of this decision are widespread. According to Lehr (2004), "students with emotional or behavioral disabilities had the highest rate of dropout (51%), followed by students with learning disabilities (27%)." Not only do many high school dropouts experience adverse consequences such as feelings of depression, isolation, and drug/alcohol use; they are also more likely to resort to gang activity and violence (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). These are societal ills that result in increases in criminal activity, incarcerations, and unemployment. Many school systems have turned to alternative school enrollments to try and reduce these dropouts.

Enrollment in alternative schools is increasing each year; however, the research on student outcomes in alternative settings is limited. All alternative schools are not held to the same accountability standards creating difficulty in researching and collecting legitimate data. Further research is needed to measure student outcomes in alternative settings. Researchers question whether alternative schools are in existence to adequately serve the students enrolled or to serve traditional schools by providing an educational setting for students who disrupted the traditional learning environment and provide a place for "removal" of the problem.

Raywid (1999) proposes whether alternative programs served students, schools, or school districts. Raywid suggests that there are three types of alternative schools.

1. Type I schools- Choice Schools, such as a Magnet School that have a strong emphasis on curriculum and instructional strategies.
2. Type II schools- “Last-Chance” schools- are schools with a strong emphasis on modification of student behavior. Interventions such as cool-out rooms, in-school suspension, and varied placement terms are employed in these educational settings to deal with those with significant behavioral problems (Raywid, 1994).
3. Type III schools - schools with a strong emphasis on student remediation. Students are referred to this educational setting to address academic, social, and emotional deficiencies (Ryan, 2009). Students usually thrive in this educational setting.

This is evidenced through higher student achievement, better attendance, and overall behavior (Gold & Mann, 1984). However, these results are often short-lived because the resources utilized in these settings usually are not replicated or available when students return to the traditional setting. Consequently, the negative behaviors are likely to recur (Raywid, 1994). According to Carver and Lewis, most alternative schools are a mix of Type II and Type III schools (Raywid, 1999).

“Since 2000, forty states and the District of Columbia have passed new laws or established new regulations related to alternative education,” demonstrating the magnitude of this issue (Almeida et al., 2010). Alternative school policies vary from state to state and are sometimes inconsistent with those of traditional schools. According to Almeida et al. (2010), there are seven policy elements that all states should integrate into their alternative education programs to ensure their effectiveness.

1. Broaden eligibility: Alternative education programs should serve all students in need of educational settings that would increase their chances for academic success, not

- just troublesome students who cannot function successfully in a traditional setting.
2. Clarify district roles and responsibilities: States should detail the standards of operation for all alternative programs and ensure that those standards are being implemented with fidelity.
 3. Strengthen accountability for results: States should allow alternative programs to be flexible in their delivery of instruction, while maintaining the academic accountability standards placed on traditional schools.
 4. Increase support for innovation: States should be willing to invest in various educational opportunities for students who need non-conventional methods to succeed academically.
 5. Ensure high-quality staff: States should actively recruit, support, and retain highly qualified teachers and administrators to ensure alternative schools have the most qualified staff available for students in the greatest need.
 6. Enhance student support services: States must understand that students in need of alternative education must have intense support in order to be successful. This support may have to come from outside sources, so funding should be provided to meet the vast needs of students.
 7. Enrich funding: States must fund programs that will reignite student's desire for education while providing enrichment opportunities to assist them in continuing their education beyond graduation.

Forty states and the District of Columbia have enacted at least one of the aforementioned policy elements through legislation. Most states are only implementing one or two of the elements. The grim reality is that there are not any states that have embraced all seven of the policy

elements by implementing an all-inclusive program to serve alternative education students (Almeida et al., 2010). In 1999, the North Carolina State Board of Education established minimum standards and procedures for operating safe and orderly alternative learning programs and schools. The result is a variety of alternative educational settings. Alternative programs are usually sustained within an accredited school. Programs may be based within a traditional school, on the same campus as a traditional school, or at a different site within the school district. In 2000, more specific guidelines and procedures were enacted to ensure the proper implementation and maintenance of alternative learning programs/schools within each Local Education Agency.

The very nature of alternative education is to decrease the barriers that hinder the academic success of students who have experienced difficulties within the traditional school setting. To achieve these goals, each functioning school must develop a School Improvement Plan, a Safe School Plan as well as obtain approval from the Local Board of Education prior to establishing an alternative program/school (NCDPI, 2006).

According to (G.S. 115C-238.47), Alternative Learning Programs must:

1. describe the mission and goals of the program,
2. describe the services to be provided by the program,
3. describe the criteria for assignment to the program,
4. describe the process for ensuring that the assignment is appropriate for the student,
5. describe the process for the input and participation of parents in the exit/transition decision,
6. describe the process for ensuring a rigorous and high quality program,
7. serve students at any grade level,

8. serve students who demonstrate behaviors (i.e. academic, conduct, dropout, suspension, etc.) that put them at significant risk of school failure,
9. serve students selected by established procedures,
10. provide the primary instruction for students during the enrollment period,
11. offer course and class credit for attendance and grades in each assigned course,
12. assist students in meeting the requirements for grade promotion,
13. assist students in meeting the requirements for graduation,
14. participate in the State Accountability and Testing program as prescribed by law,
15. require attendance,
16. employ highly qualified instructors and serve students for a specific and extended period of time i.e., one grading period, quarterly, semester, etc. (This language does not include in-school suspension, short-term suspension, after/before school, tutorial, or drop-in programs. It does include extended day programs.)

In addition, North Carolina has adopted General Statutes as it pertains to alternative learning programs and schools (see Appendix D).

The school district in southeastern North Carolina addressed school improvement plans in their board policies. Each school has the responsibility of creating a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to address all educational goals established by the Board of Education. This plan should include objectives, strategies, action steps, and a budget to ensure that students are receiving the necessary education within their schools to be college and career ready. The success of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) is based on input from school stakeholders, parents, business affiliates, students, and agencies. The SIP will receive guidance in terms of

implementation and fidelity from the superintendent based on board policy. The principal of each school will be the lead in the implementation of the SIP.

The School Improvement Plan is divided into two essential components:

1. State Program for School-Based Management and Accountability: the board fully endorses that all children should conquer basic skills that will provide a foundation for future learning. The creation of the School Improvement Plan will solidify resources and curricula are provided to ensure that students within the educational process are performing at or above grade level competencies.
 - a. School Improvement Team (SIT): each school should have a SIT whose responsibility shall be to create and execute the School Improvement Plan. The school improvement team should include teachers, faculty, staff, administrators, and parent representatives. Peers via secret ballot should select faculty and staff members selected for the School Improvement Team. Once the SIT is selected the principal shall oversee implementation of plan and compliance of Open Meetings Law.
 - b. Mandatory Components of the School Improvement Plan (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-A rural southeastern Schools Board of Education Policy Manual)
 - i. The plan must specify the effective instructional practices and methods to be used to improve the academic performance of students identified as at risk of academic failure or at risk of dropping out of school.
 - ii. The plan must take into consideration the minimum annual performance goal

established by the State Board and the goals set out in the mission statement for public schools adopted by the State Board of Education.

- iii. The plan must be, to the greatest extent possible, data driven. The team shall use the Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS) or a compatible and comparable system approved by the State Board of Education to analyze student data to identify root causes for problems and determine actions to address them and to appropriately place students in courses such as Algebra I (Math I). The plan must contain clear, unambiguous targets, explicit indicators and actual measures, and expeditious time frames for meeting measurement standards.

To comply with a School Improvement Plan's goal to most completely/effectively serve student needs, an alternative school/program has to consider unique challenges. "Avoidant students present a challenge to even the best schools and educators. Being persistent while maintaining a sense of hope is crucial because students often continue avoiding school only because they see no other option" (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). The properly structured alternative school could be the other option to help these at-risk students experience success. "The ultimate goal is to get students back to school and their education. If a child truly cannot go back to school after multiple efforts on many fronts an alternative high school might be the answer" (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). Casoli-Reardon et al. (2012) state that students who avoid school may be grappling with many challenges in their efforts to end school avoidance. The authors' research identifies these student's needs and offers strategies to get them back in school. School avoidance is a multi-faceted problem that is often chronic and will require different interventions at various times (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). Causes of school

avoidance can be broken down into the following four groups: cultural factors, family factors, peer factors, and neuropsychiatric factors (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). There are various evidence/strategies to address this issue such as mentors, modified school schedules, safe places, modified assignments, and extracurricular activities (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). Results from a Statement About Schools (SAS) Inventory suggest that alternative schools are more successful in meeting the needs of students than regular education schools. Students say that the specific factors or strategies that contributed to their lack of success in the regular education setting were: pace of the course, teachers, class size, and instructional methods. Developed based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs the Statement About Schools (SAS) Inventory assesses how well a school meets the needs of its students based on information provided by teachers and students. There was not sufficient evidence on what approach was used by alternative schools to meet the needs of its students, but a description of the approaches were presented (Retrieved from www.ncaccountabilitymodel.org).

Raywid (1999) indicated that the sole purpose of an alternative school was to provide support for students not being successful in comprehensive high schools in the areas of academic credit, career exploration activities, or vocational work experience, and extended teacher/peer support in an alternative setting where the ultimate goal is that of obtaining a high school diploma. The areas identified as support measures are coupled with methods that will motivate and inspire at-risk students. The motivation methods identified attempted to:

1. reduce the alienation and improve the self-concept of at-risk students,
2. provide at-risk students with increased access to desirable social roles,
3. increase community and parental participation in the education of at-risk students,

4. provide a flexible and integrated academic and vocationally oriented curriculum that emphasizes the importance of school in preparing for later life,
5. provide students with a success-oriented program to obtain academic and employability skills in a school environment,
6. provide a competency-based, self-paced, program with clear quantifiable objectives.

Instruction will be provided in a variety of ways best suited to the individual student's needs, and

7. foster within students the responsibility for their own learning and the expectation that they will take an active role in setting their own goals.

Ianni (2009) utilized the Advocacy Design Center Model, ADC, in his dissertation to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative schools in Long Island, New York. This model was the result of collaboration between members of the faculty of Columbia University Teacher's College and Paterson Public Schools in New Jersey. The purpose of this model was to provide the public with insight on school practices, make necessary changes to those practices, and empower stakeholders; it would also serve as a liaison between all stakeholders to make informed decisions about day-to-day educational practices. The ADC allows stakeholders to explore the four components of learning institutions. Those elements are instruction, organization, governance, and accountability (Ianni, 2009).

According to Smith (1990), instruction refers to the methods in which information is imparted to students. Instruction is then broken down into two components - work and knowledge. Work and knowledge are separated again into two additional components - behavioral and constructivist orientation. Behavioral work is when learning environments consist of students working independently of each other. The assignments/activities are usually

worksheets or call and response type questioning. Constructivist orientation is a more collaborative learning environment where teachers incorporate student learning teams and students are allowed to learn through self-discovery. These learning environments are usually more rigorous in nature due to the absence of rote activities and more time-on-task activities (Smith, 2009). Organization refers to the culture of the schools based upon how people work together and the general organization of the school (Ianni, 2009). Organization - this element encompasses the overall structure of the school and how things and people function. According to Smith, “organization refers to the pattern of purposeful relations that exist among individuals within the boundaries of the school’s sphere of interest” (Smith, 2009). Leaders play a major role in the function of the organization, its priorities, and its successes. According to Ianni (2009), governance is defined as decisions and policies made and implemented at a school, to include who is involved in the decision making process. Lastly, accountability is the way that schools hold teachers and students responsible for their performance.

Behavioral knowledge is demonstrated when students are able to mimic what they observe their teachers doing. Constructivist orientation knowledge is when students are able to understand the concept but discover that there are various processes involved with finding solutions and “construct” their own knowledge. Students are able to use higher order thinking skills, thus making learning meaningful.

In an effort to ensure student achievement, staff members at Oakland schools in California formulated the projects based on what motivates each individual student. According to Yocum, “It’s an attempt to reinvigorate them, and get them to look at academic work differently” (Cavanagh, 2012).

The results of a quasi-experimental mixed method experiment conducted in Texas named poor student-teacher relationships as a primary factor in their inability to be successful in traditional schools. The researches felt that, due to the varying demands placed on teachers, the ability to provide individualized attention was lacking. Students also felt that they were labeled by teachers and were subjected to the teacher's pre-conceived notions of them. They also felt that teachers required respect from them but did not reciprocate respect to their students (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Call Me Different, Not Difficult (2012), is a book authored by entrepreneur John Elder Robison. Although Mr. Robison shares strategies that teachers can adopt to help students who are autistic (as he himself is), many of the strategies mentioned are successful when working with at risk and alternatively placed students. Six relevant strategies mentioned are: Tell students exactly what you want and say exactly what you mean, be consistent and predictable, be flexible in your conversational responses, expect good manners, pay attention to sensory issues, and be sensitive to our state of mind even if we seem oblivious (Robison, 2012).

Safety was another negative factor of traditional schools cited by students in this study. The students felt that they could not perform sufficiently in an environment in which they felt unsafe. They felt that many traditional school environments were hostile with multiple disciplinary infractions. Students also felt that rules were overly rigid in many traditional schools. They understood that rules were necessary in the school environment but they felt that there should always be flexibility. At-risk students cannot be subjected to cookie-cutter rules because they all have varying circumstances that need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. This mentality extended to their peer relationships. The cliques within the school caused them to feel uncomfortable and withdrawn. They had difficulties forming meaningful relationships with

their peers because of the differences in their circumstances, sometimes turning to gangs for acceptance. It appears that the educational system has resorted to using alternative schools as a warehouse or “dumping ground” for underachieving students who exhibit inappropriate behaviors in traditional school settings (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Alternative schools and programs differ from state to state. North Carolina differentiates between alternative schools and alternative programs due to funding and accountability standards. Most students enrolled in alternative schools are disengaged from education. They feel that external factors are the prevailing force that controls their fate and academic success. Disengagement, which is normally characterized by absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and poor academics, is a key indicator of a potential dropout (Ryan, 2009).

Some alternative schools counter these perceptions. Students noted positive teacher relationships, expectations of maturity, understanding of individual differences and circumstances, and supportive atmospheres as components of the alternative school that proved to be factors in their success. Kopp (2011) states, “for young people who have experienced consistent failure, that’s everything; knowing an adult believes in them even when they have given up on themselves.”

Based on research by Kochlar-Bryant et al. (2005):

1. States with alternative learning programs report that 19% to 60% of the students they serve have learning, emotional, and behavioral disabilities.
2. At least 40 states have implemented disciplinary Alternative Education Programs to manage student behavior. Minority students are overrepresented in these alternative education programs.

3. Research has shown that quality long-term alternative education programs have positive effects on student's academic performance by reducing apathy and increasing self-esteem.
4. Alternative education programs are becoming a viable educational option for students at risk of academic failure; therefore, the rate of students attending alternative schools, whether by choice or assignment, has doubled over recent years. The increase of students has prompted school officials to increase the academic standards of the alternative schools.

Due to the manifold needs of at-risk students, teachers who work in alternative schools must demonstrate strong instructional prowess in order to provide a viable opportunity for the students to be successful. "Alternative education reflects society's recognition that educational settings and models cannot be standardized and must be varied to allow each individual to find a learning environment in which they can successfully participate" (Kochlar-Bryant et al., 2005).

Many alternative learning programs abandon the guidelines observed in traditional schools to meet the needs of at-risk students. Innovations such as computer-based learning, distance education, community service projects, and real-world activities have been implemented to meet the varying needs of the students. These innovations are geared toward restoring the respect for the students, their parents, and the community, while promoting the academic success of the students. According to Raywid (1990), researchers have witnessed various practices within the nation's alternative schools. While most adopt a common practice of individualization, positive behavior management, and student-centered education, Raywid (1999) derived that three models were prevalent amongst alternative programs:

1. **Restructured Schools:** Schools that may not specifically target at-risk students but embrace practices that benefit students who have challenges in traditional schools.
2. **Disciplinary Programs:** Programs designed for aggressive and/or disruptive middle and high school students. These educational settings provide students with individualized attention and programs designed to help them modify adverse behavior.
3. **Problem-Solving:** Schools explained as programs that specifically serve at-risk students. There is an intense desire to ensure student success and rehabilitation through compassion and positive reinforcement. There is less focus on punitive actions and more focus on the academic, social, and emotional success of the students (Kochlar-Bryant et al., 2005; Ryan, 2009).

According to Kochlar-Bryant et al. (2005), the following components are prominent in alternative schools that have contributed to student success.

1. **Comprehensive and Continuing Programs:** Students tend to benefit from long-term comprehensive programs rather than short term disciplinary assignments that result in their return to a traditional school setting within a matter of weeks or months. There is a systematic approach to planning and implementing a comprehensive/continuing program. Administrators, staff, and students are included in the planning process to achieve optimum success. Although academics are the primary focus, counseling is an integral component of the curriculum. Students actually set short and long-term goals toward their successful completion of school.
2. **Choice and Commitment:** There is a discernible partnership between students and teachers in alternative programs that prove successful for students. Choice is a

prevailing theme. Students apply to attend. Parents are actively engaged in their child's educational experience. Students are held to high accountability standards. They set goals for themselves and are taught decision-making techniques that promote a positive self-image. Positive reinforcement is consistently utilized to encourage student attendance and achievement.

3. **Caring and Demanding Teachers:** This aspect of alternative education is paramount in ensuring student achievement and success. Teachers assume the role of educator, counselor, mentor, and disciplinarian. Teachers hold students to high academic and behavioral standards. Teachers are clear and concise in their expectations and administrators are consistent in executing disciplinary actions in a fair and equitable manner. Students are exposed to a highly structured environment where the rules and expectations are made clear and consistently enforced. Teachers model the behavior expected of their students.
4. **Flexible Structures:** Student's individual schedules are considered and scheduling options are provided. Flexible schedules such as late arrival and departure, evening classes, computer-based learning, etc. are available to students. Grading procedures are customized. Students are given opportunities to resubmit substandard work to increase the chance of earning higher grades.
5. **Self-Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** Students consistently engage in self-reflection activities, formative and summative assessments to gauge student progress. Teachers also assess themselves and are consistently provided meaningful Professional Development opportunities to consistently improve their practices.

Funding for alternative programs is always challenging. Of the \$7.2 billion budget for North Carolina Schools, 3% of expended state funds services Alternative Programs and Services. This equates to 18.5% (\$254,192,424) of State funding in North Carolina (NCDPI, 2013). This fund is identified under the Categorical Allotment line item of the budget for North Carolina. This allotment provides services and support to special populations that include at-risk students. The funds are available to employ personnel to include: teachers, teacher assistants, and instructional support. The funds may also be extended to provide transportation, staff development, or to purchase supplies and materials (NCDPI, 2013).

According to the Informational Analysis report on North Carolina School Budget (2012), each LEA identified within the state receives the dollar equivalent of one resource officer (\$37,838) per high school. The remaining funds allow distribution based on ADM at 50% (\$79.51 per ADM) and 50% based on the number of poor children, per the federal Title I Low Income Poverty Data (\$357.64 per poor child). Lastly, the LEA receives approximately \$237,422, which equates to two teachers and two support personnel (NCDPI, 2013).

The Southern Regional Education Board (2006) has created a list of states and how they fund their alternative education programs (Southern Regional Board, as cited in NCDPI, 2013):

1. Arkansas: Alternative programs are funded through competitive grant process. For the 2004-2005 bienniums, \$3.8 million was allotted annually for grants.
2. Florida: Alternative programs are funded as part of dropout prevention. Funds allocated are based on the Florida Education Finance Program funding formula. Dropout prevention has an additional program weight applied to the base student allocation in the early stages of the formula calculation.

3. Georgia: School districts are authorized to establish alternative programs for disruptive youth; however, there has been no additional assistance from the state until year of 1999-2000. The budget for 2004-2005 included \$32 million in general funds from lottery proceeds to support these grants.
4. Maryland: The state provided 16.3 million to establish a non-residential middle school for disruptive students in 2004-2005. There was an additional \$500,000 available for other alternative education programs.
5. Mississippi: School districts receive funds for alternative education based on a formula calculation. Those students participating in these programs are not counted as part of the regular average daily attendance in the minimum finance program.
6. Virginia: Alternative schools are provided for in two ways. First, districts with approved programs receive the basic level of funding for students in the alternative settings. Second, pilot programs for alternative education were established in four sites for the year 1999-2000. The 2005 legislature authorized expansion to include nine sites with \$15.6 million to be matched by districts based on local wealth.

Ultimately, human resources play a major role in the success of alternative schools, beginning with leadership. The most important decision that any leader will make is who to hire and who to fire (Dr. L. Mabe, personal communication, April 5, 2011). School climate and school leaders are essential to establishing successful alternative schools.

School Climate and School Leaders

Connecting with people and building relationships is a very important function for all organizations and in education; this has a profound impact on school climate. Great leaders are always seeking potential candidates to strengthen their organization and the following factors

usually help them in deciding who will be the best fit for the organization and meeting the needs of those served: attitude, generation, background, values, life experience, leadership ability (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 93-96). Important questions to examine as educational leaders are: Who is naturally attracted to each other, who have moved on and who have remained due to the leadership, and who will follow the leader when they go? These questions will help determine the law of magnetism as it applies to students in the school and the connections that they make daily. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 102). Students are especially concerned about who cares about them and once they have a sense of care, they will bring one into their inner circle.

Maxwell (2007) points out that it is important for leaders to surround themselves with other leaders within their organization and outside their organization to serve as their mentors (pp. 118-119). Educational leaders need to do this as well, and need to serve as a mentor for the identified student leaders within a school that can help bring about positive change when they are empowered. Brendtro and Larson (2006) emphasize the importance of building caring and trusting relationships with students in order to be successful in *The Resilience Revolution* (pp. 55-57). Maxwell (2007) describes how great leaders cultivate and empower leaders to either lead within the organization or to move on and lead elsewhere (p. 119). Educational leaders must empower leaders within their school or district and nurture them to move on and become leaders elsewhere for the greater cause of improving education in the district, in the state, and in the nation. Additional leaders will help to create buy-in on a much greater scale.

“Once people have bought into someone, they are willing to give his vision a chance. People want to go along with people they get along with,” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 147). Educational leaders need to be able to sell themselves to their school and district. They need to establish

relationships and make all stakeholders believe in them before they will buy-in to any vision. Practice what is preached, visit churches, attend community events, and support the students to get the stakeholders to buy-in to the vision. Unity of vision, diversity of skills, and a leader dedicated to victory and raising players to their potential are the components of victory (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 161-162). Educational leaders need to celebrate the successes for the team and the students. Even small wins are victories and should be celebrated within schools and districts that will lead to momentum. Jaime Escalante, a well-known educator who achieved great success in working with at-risk youth and gang members, according to Maxwell (2007) used the law of motivation to achieve continued success (pp. 165-171). Educational leaders can apply this true story and law to their everyday goals of student achievement empowerment.

Priorities change depending on the school, environment, class, year, and other factors, but priorities are needed to be in line if educational leaders plan to accomplish anything. Maxwell (2007) gives three guiding questions to help get priorities in line: What is required? What gives the greatest return? What brings the greatest reward? One priority that should be constant is empowering students to lead to improve the school. This will require some of the adults in the school to sacrifice some of their power. “Effective leaders sacrifice much that is good in order to dedicate themselves to what is best” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 190). Educational leaders must be in the business to help kids, love kids, and have the passion needed in order to make sacrifices and do what is in the best interest of kids. Knowing when to empower and when to sacrifice are important timing decisions. “Reading a situation and knowing what to do are not enough to make you succeed in leadership. Only the right action at the right time will bring success. Anything else exacts a high price. That is the Law of Timing” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 203). According to Maxwell (2007), this is the only reason that Jimmy Carter became president (pp.

193-195). Knowing when to implement and execute certain initiatives is important for educational leaders and this will lead to growth.

“Here’s how it works. Leaders who develop followers grow their organization only one person at a time. But leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth, because for every leader they develop, they also receive all of that leader’s followers” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 208).

This is important in schools with the faculty, but especially with the students. Educational leaders who understand this can have a huge impact on turning around a school and creating a legacy. Maxwell (2007) points out those significant leaders empower and train future leaders to take over the organization when they are gone (p. 221). Educational leaders who truly care about the schools, districts, and communities that they serve will do this as well, and will truly create the leaders of tomorrow.

Therefore, excellent leadership within alternative schools is imperative to the success of the school. Furthermore, excellent leaders (school administration) will be able to use their leadership abilities to mentor and empower the youth of the school to lead for positive results.

Developing Leadership within Schools to Empower Youth

When people think of great leaders, they initially think about Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy, they often do not initially consider leaders such as Adolf Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte, Fidel Castro, and Stanley “Tookie” Williams. The unrecognized leaders are overlooked because of their ethics, but they are in fact great leaders. Therefore, if educators are going to transform schools and save students, they must begin to look for the “overlooked leaders” in their schools such as Tookie, the “Godfather of the Crips.” One could even conclude that these “overlooked leaders” in our schools are what Malcolm Gladwell identifies as “Outliers.”

In *School Climate That Promotes Student Voice*, Maurice J. Elias (2010) makes the argument that promoting student voice paves the way to greater academic engagement and performance. This is important because students who do not feel heard or engaged are in danger of dropping out unlike students who can express themselves help create their own education (Elias, 2010). The purpose of alternative schools should be to offer a smaller learning environment for students to feel heard and offer more opportunities for engagement rather than reducing the number of opportunities for engagement as a punishment, which is a common practice. “Engagement has the same meaning for students as it does for teachers: wanting to be in class and actively participating in their learning” (Budig & Heaps, 2012). Elias (2010) provides ample amount of research and findings to support his claim. The most compelling of these findings is a study by Lee and Burkan (2003) in which they concluded that one of the main reasons for students dropping out of school is the perception that no one, neither adults or their peers, care for or are interested in them; this was supported later by the national High School Survey of Student Engagement from the Center of Evaluation & Education Policy at Indiana University (CEEP, 2010). Elias acknowledges that it is highly important that individuals promoting student voice must have genuine motivation in order for positive effects to occur (CEEP, 2010). Students often checkout emotionally and intellectually long before they drop out physically and this is the reason why student voice and social-emotional and character development is so important (CEEP, 2010).

Larry K. Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern (2002) identify four ecological hazards in the lives of at-risk youth as destructive relationships, climates of futility, learned irresponsibility, and loss of purpose (p. 8). Educational leaders need to help students

overcome these four hazards and they can do so by understanding what is going on with the youth.

Henry Ford did not understand the law of empowerment; as a result of his need to be in control of everything, he almost ruined what would become one of America's top automakers (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 121-126). Educational leaders cannot possibly do everything themselves either. Therefore, as leaders, they must find the people within their school or district, like Stanley Tookie Williams an outlier with great leadership potential, and then empower them and cultivate them into helping the school and/or district reach even greater potential. This does not only apply to the faculty but to the students as well. The goals that can be accomplished when student leaders, including gang leaders, are empowered are truly amazing.

The law of empowerment is one of twenty-one laws described by Maxwell (2007) in, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People will Follow You*. Maxwell (2007), in this book, has developed an action plan and rulebook for leaders that will assist them in gaining followers, but this book also helps to understand leadership and how to grow leadership, including student leadership. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People will Follow You* is not an educational leadership book; only one chapter in the book even cites an example from education. However, the laws discussed by Maxwell are applicable to all CEO's, pastors, managers, foreman, coaches, teachers, and principals, who seek to strengthen their leadership abilities and gain followers. Educators can apply these laws in mentoring and guiding non-traditional learners and at-risk students.

The Law of the Lid is an individual's level of effectiveness determined by his or her ability to lead (Maxwell, 2007, p. 1). The "lid" is the cap on their ability to lead. Maxwell (2007) illustrates this with a discussion about Dick and Maurice McDonald who began a

restaurant chain but their “lids” on leadership would only allow them to go so far; it was not until Ray Kroc purchased their chain from them that McDonald’s grew into the mecca of fast-food restaurants that exist today (pp. 1-6). Maxwell (2007) points out that the law of the lid can be raised (p. 10). High expectations equal high results! Allison Zmuda (2010) discusses why lowering expectations does not work in *Breaking Free From Myths About Teaching and Learning*. Allison states, “When teachers design learning tasks to be easy ... They end up more exhausted, and students end up more passive, further alienated by the lack of challenge in the work” (Zmuda, 2010, p. 137). Educational leaders often have expectations for their faculty and students but they also need to focus on their expectations for themselves. They need to study the law of the lid, do a self-inventory, and determine where their “lid” is and how to raise it in order to become more effective. This will have a great impact on the level of effectiveness for the whole organization, which will help them with their influence.

Princess Diana was influential. Maxwell focuses on Princess Diana because he states that she never was described as a leader but she did have great influence over many people (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 11-20). As administrators working with students, finding those who have influence over their peers is extremely important for school-wide management. Equally important is to understand how to have influence on those who influence others. In *From Rage to Hope*, Kuykendall (2004) states, “Children of color must believe that academic achievement will improve their status, benefits, and general prosperity” (p. 96). Maxwell emphasizes the importance of leadership by stating, “No matter what anybody else tells you, remember that leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 17). Educational leaders need to continuously improve their public relation skills. The ability to influence others will determine how many followers the leader will have; this includes all stakeholders. As

Maxwell (2007) points out, the title will only buy you a little time, but influence will last you a lifetime (p. 14).

Great leaders did not become so overnight. Educational leaders in many cases only see a small part of what has led to students being recognized as leaders in the school. Attending school and community events, being visible and watchful in the school, and studying cumulative records will give a better understanding of how these students became leaders, but often it is what happens on the streets that lead to their skills for leadership. Leadership is a collection of skills and abilities that are acquired overtime and improved on continuously throughout life (Maxwell, 2007, p. 23). Leaders must understand this and be committed to being lifelong learners if they plan to be successful (Maxwell, 2007, p. 24). Doing two things can sum up the implication of the law of process for school leaders. First, educational leaders must continuously reflect, learn from their successes and failures, and they must work with students on this as well in order to empower them. Second, educational leaders must seek professional development throughout their careers, while working to provide positive opportunities for students to receive leadership development training. One way to do this, according to Kuykendall, is to provide students the opportunities to learn about and experience the strengths of their culture (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 168). The notion of professional development for students is brought to the forefront by Kathleen Cushman (2005) in *Sent to the Principal: Students Talk About Making High Schools Better*. School leaders typically put a lot of work into the professional development of teachers. However, often they forget to coach students in the tools that can help them make a real difference in their daily life.

With some training in survey techniques, focus group facilitation, or other fieldwork methods, for example, students can carry out important research about important issues in their

own school. Their work may bring in even more accurate feedback than that gathered by administrators, because students feel more invested and more willing to speak candidly to their peers (Cushman, 2005, p. 37).

People naturally want to follow leaders stronger than themselves (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 70-71). The law of respect for educational leaders has a great deal to do with those who will follow, work with, and strive to impress the leader. The law of respect for gang leaders has a great deal to do with who is willing to take a risk, such as making a drug deal, stealing a car, or murdering an individual, in order to gain rank. “Violent gang members cite honor as an essential value. They invoke such language as respect, reputation, self-respect, and status as emblematic of honor, while to them dishonor is tantamount to insult and disrespect (Price, 2008, p. 36). Respect is an important component of street gang life and it is important for administrators to gain the respect of their students if they are going to achieve success in empowering them. Maxwell (2007) uses examples of quarterbacks and military leaders to illustrate the law of intuition because no matter how well the law of navigation is; there are always factors that can destroy a game plan. Once the game plan is destroyed, this is when the law of intuition kicks in, some have it and some do not, it is vital that quarterbacks and military leaders have it as Maxwell (2007) points out, but it is also vital that educational leaders have it as well; “the great ones can see things others can’t, make changes, and move forward before others know what’s happening” (p. 78). This is also an especially strong skill for gang leaders because when taking huge risks, the percentage of the game plan being altered is high. These students can be empowered and this skill utilized, especially for athletics.

The law of navigation is one of the most powerful for street gang leaders; they are always prepared for what will happen next on the streets but it is important to develop this tremendous

skill for preparation in school. Maxwell (2007) emphasizes the importance of being prepared. He states, "...the secret to the Law of Navigation is preparation. When you prepare well, you convey confidence and trust to the people" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 42). Student leadership plans, community service projects, lesson plans, SMART Goals, Pacing Guides, etc... educational leaders must have a plan for their district or school if they expect people to follow their lead and progress to be made.

The law of E. F. Hutton focuses on identifying those people that everyone listens to. Within organizations there are several leaders and it is vital for "the" leader to identify these other leaders, tap into their potential, and bring them on board with their vision and mission (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 43-53). Principals must do the same things within their schools. Identifying leaders within the school from all positions and using them for the good of the school will help improve the school climate and allow for progress to be made. In order to identify these student leaders, school administration should conduct careful observations before school, during lunch, between class changes, and after school is critical. These are moments when identifying those on solid ground is critical as well. "Character makes trust possible. And trust makes leadership possible. That is the Law of Solid Ground" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 58). This one statement by Maxwell defines the law very well. Educators emphasize character education for the students, but they must model this and seek ways to empower students through character education and service learning projects. In *Developing Character in Students*, Dr. Philip Fitch Vincent (1999) states, "I believe that we can educate for good character, that we can develop students who are respectful, responsible, caring, and kind towards others in the school" (p. 43). Educational leaders must maintain trust and good character if they wish to stand on "solid ground" with their school or district.

One main accountability measure of effective leadership in alternative schools is the data related to high school completion. Therefore, positive results in high school completion data are essential to the success of alternative schools.

High School Completion

High school completion rates represent the proportion of 18-through-24 year olds not enrolled in high school and have not received high school diploma (Labyer, 2004). According to Labyer (2004), completion rates rose slightly from the early 1970s to the late 1980s but have remained fairly constant during the 1990s. High school completion rates increased for Caucasian and Black young adults between the early 1970s and late 1980s but have remained relatively constant in the 1990s. By 2000, 91.8% of Caucasian and 83.7% of Black, 18-through-24 year olds, had completed high school. Labyer (2004) stated that Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander young adults in 2000 were more likely than their Black and Hispanic peers to have completed high school.

Various estimates are conducted throughout the year in regards and are reported to the U.S. Department of Education under No Child Left Behind as well as to the National Center for Education Statistics (Barton, 2006). The following are some results provided by various researchers:

1. Jay Greene (Manhattan Institute) reported a high school completion rate of 71% for 1998
2. Christopher Swanson and Duncan Chaplin (Urban Institute) reported 66.6% for 2000
3. Thomas Mortenson (Postsecondary Education Opportunity) reported 66.1% for 2000
4. Andrew Sum and colleagues (Northeastern University) reported 68.7% for 1998
5. Walter Haney and colleagues (Boston College) reported 74.4% for 2001

Paul Barton (2006) completed a study that looked at the high school completion rates of other researchers in an effort to confirm the reported percentages. While conducting this research, Barton leaned upon the consensus count of the population cohort that would be of graduation age (17 or 18) in spring 2000 and the number of high school diplomas awarded that year by the National Center for Education Statistics (Barton, 2006). Barton was able to ascertain through this research that 69.6% of youth that were at the appropriate age of graduation received a diploma in 2000.

Further research has identified other challenges in regards to high school completion rates. Elaine Allensworth conducted a research study in Chicago that tracked students based on their records. Based on this information, Black male students identified in this research study graduated at the rate of 19% by the age of 19. Latino male students were at a 58% graduation rate, whereas 58% of Caucasian male students. Female students in this study did somewhat better than their male counterparts with 57% for Black, 65% for Latino, and 71% for Caucasian (Barton, 2006).

A key area that is significantly impacted by educational attainment is annual income. An individual's annual income will increase or decrease based on the level of educational attainment (see Table 3). The more education one has, the more income they will earn; less education equates to less income. Colorado Literacy Research Institute (2001) conducted a study on adults age 25 or over based on educational attainment. A major factor in high school completion data is that of attendance. Furthermore, attendance is greatly impacted by seat time requirements.

Seat Time

According to Berrett, in an effort to address the dropout issue, researchers are reviewing how students are awarded high school credit for class work. Since 1906, schools have used the

Table 3

Earning Statistics According to Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment (25 and Over)	Median Earnings (2000)
Less than 9 th grade	\$15,241
9 th -12 th grade, no diploma	\$17,337
High school graduate	\$25,264
Some college	\$27,696
Associate degree	\$30,773
Bachelor's degree or more	\$43,683

Carnegie Unit to award high school credit for coursework (Berrett, 2012). So, instead of the basis of measurement on a mastery of skills and an individualization of the needs of students, credit for graduation is determined by Carnegie Units based upon contact hours or “seat time.” Seat time is still the measurement that is used by many states as the determining factor of whether students receive credit for a course or not and leading to enough credits to graduate. Since the history of this concept is rooted in the Carnegie Units, the Carnegie Foundation is now trying to decide if it should continue using this model to solidify course credit or if it is now time for a change in the way of thinking in the educational system (Berrett, 2012). According to Elena Silva, a senior associate for research and policy for Carnegie, the use of the unit happened by default and a time-based measurement has endured as the metric largely because its meaning can be universally understood (Berrett, 2012). Mrs. Silva feels now that “we’re at a point where we could do better” (Berrett, 2012).

Based on research by Adams, the Carnegie Unit is defined as one hour of faculty-student contact per week and two hours of outside work over a 15-week semester (Adams, 2012).

Thomas Toch, a researcher at Carnegie, uses the following example to describe this concept: a total of 120 hours in one subject, meeting four or five times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36 to 40 weeks each year earns the student one “unit” of high school credit (Adams, 2012). When this unit was designed it was primarily implemented to determine whether or not faculty members would have the opportunity to receive a pension plan (Adams, 2012). Much of the academic enterprise employs this unit as its foundation, including student and faculty workloads, schedules, financial aid, and degree requirements (Adams, 2012).

Western Governors University has popularized a concept of basing a standardized unit on a measure of competency, instead of time spent within a classroom (Berrett, 2012). Elena Silva

simply believes that a competency-based measure will not replace time as the standard unit of measure (Berrett, 2012). She states, “To come up with a universal metric for competency is a challenge I don’t know if we can meet” (Berrett, 2012). According to Silva, and other researchers in the Carnegie organization, the credit hour serves as a simple way of awarding credit to students as a means to help them matriculate through our educational system, and a change in this way of thinking will result in a major shift in education (Berrett, 2012).

The information that was ascertained from this study provides a comparison of course credit accrual and cumulative course credits earned between students that dropped out of school from spring 2002 to August 2004 and those who actually graduated in four years (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The study identified three separate categories in which to place the students (U.S. Department of Education, 2007):

1. Tenth grade dropouts (who did not earn any additional course credits in high school beyond the 2001-2002 academic year).
2. Eleventh grade dropouts (who did not earn any credits beyond the 2002-2003 academic year).
3. Twelfth grade dropouts (who did not earn any credits beyond the 2003-2004 academic year). Tenth graders in Spring 2002 who completed high school by August 2004 were defined as on-time graduates.

The results from the Course Credit Accrual and Dropping out of High School study were as follows (U.S. Department of Education, 2007):

With the credit hour being established as a means of matriculation and support, as a method of accountability, federal legislation requires all educational facilities to provide graduation rates, which instantly provides insight into the “Silent Epidemic.” There has been

varying research that addresses this concern. Allensworth and Easton (2005) completed a survey in 2005 that examined the relationship between the number of course credits that students accumulate each year and student's high school status (Allensworth & Easton, as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 1). Allensworth and Easton research studied 10th grade students in both the public and private sector of education in spring of 2002, to determine and/or identify the timing of students dropping out and the number of credits earned by the high school student (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The study provided information in regards to the average number of course credits received by high school graduates and dropouts within a school year, as well as across academic years (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The study also examined the accrual of course credit based on subject area as well to include: English, Mathematics, and Science.

1. Eighty-two percent of students who were 10th graders in the spring of 2002 graduated from high school on time.
2. Five percent left school without earning a high school diploma or alternative credential.
3. Two percent were still enrolled without a formal award as of August 2004 (non-graduates).
4. Twelve percent graduated early (before the 2003-04 academic year) or received an alternative diploma, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or certificate of attendance.
5. On-time graduates earned more course credits than did high school dropouts within each academic year. For example, on-time graduates earned, on average, 6.6 credits in the 2000-01 academic year, while dropouts earned, on average, 5.1 credits; 12th-

grade dropouts earned 5.4 credits, 11th-grade dropouts earned 4.4 credits, and 10th-grade dropouts earned 3.9 credits.

6. Tenth graders earned, on average, 6.4 course credits in both the 2000-01 and 2001-02 academic years (9th and 10th grades, respectively, for on-time students). The average number of course credits earned by these students decreased over the subsequent 2 academic years due, in part, to 11th- and 12th-grade dropouts earning fewer credits.

In order to provide insight into this issue, Carnegie will meet with faculty, deans, and administrators to come up with a new policy in terms of the credit hour. Silva and Toch will use a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to reach out to the education community.

This study exemplified the importance of obtaining credits and that those who drop out of high school receive fewer credits than do on-time graduates within each academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Furthermore, the gap between course credit accrual between the dropouts and on-time graduates increases substantially across academic years.

Other forces, including technology, improved measurement methods, and new insights into how students learn, have also influenced Carnegie's decision to reconsider the credit hour, said Ms. Silva, allowing students to learn at their own pace. Silva also proposes that a change in the credit hour is also likely to affect and further connect learning on the primary and secondary levels with what happens in postsecondary education.

The impending change in the credit hour is also part of a larger rethinking of curricular divisions of breadth and depth, said Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Berrett, 2012). The credit hour and breadth-and-depth structures were put in place a century ago to bring a measure of congruity to higher education. Referring to both the credit hour and the breadth and depth structures, Schneider stated in an e-

mail, “are creaky and decidedly out of date” (Berrett, 2012). These comments reinforce the premise that schools are not meeting the needs of 21st Century learners by operating on antiquated educational practices and beliefs.

According to the State Board of Education for North Carolina, in reference to the “Course for Credit,” the policy states the following (Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us):

1. Must consist of 150 clock hours of instruction in a traditional schedule; or
2. Must consist of a minimum of 135 clock hours of instruction in a block schedule; developed curriculum guides, or Advanced Placement syllabi in which high school students are enrolled; and
3. Must be directed by a teacher
 - a. English I, II, III, IV
 - b. Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, and higher level mathematics course
 - c. Biology, Earth/Environmental Science, and a physical science course that
 - d. is used to fulfill the third science requirement
 - e. Civics and Economics, US History, World History
 - f. First year of a World Language
 - g. Second year of the same World Language

Furthermore, the policy states that courses taken for high school graduation at community colleges, public/private colleges are exempt from the 135 or 150 instructional hours with the exception of the following (Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us):

1. One credit of Health/Physical Education

Lastly, the policy grants an explanation of how students can receive course credit for e-learning classes. Exploring these alternatives to students technically being in school, but still meeting the

“hours” mandated to meet the identified standards while simultaneously meeting the differentiated needs of students, perhaps assisting in them staying in school until they graduate (Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us). If students are going to receive credit for e-learning courses they must meet the following criteria:

Any K-7 e-learning course or 8-12 course taken for credit toward a diploma must first be approved for credit by the NC Virtual Public School (Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us).

1. E-learning courses offering instruction in courses included within the NC Standard Course of Study must meet the Standard Course of Study competency goals and objectives. E-learning courses offered for Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit must align with nationally validated standards for AP and IB, where available.
2. E-learning courses offering instruction in courses not included in the Standard Course of Study curriculum must have rigor, depth, and breadth comparable to courses included in the Standard Course of Study.
3. Enrollment in an e-learning “for credit course” shall count toward satisfying local board requirements related to minimum instructional days, seat time policies, student attendance, and athletic and/or extracurricular obligations. Furthermore, Local Education Agency (LEAs) is instructed to be purposeful in establishing processes and procedures to enroll and manage such e-learning students in an environment where they can be successful.

The extensive study of seat time and its evolvement, or the lack there of, has led researches to dive deeper into the understanding of course credits and alternative methods of awarding those

credits. Therefore, it is important to understand the research surrounding the different approaches to earning course credits.

Different Approaches to Course Credits

Practitioners are considering moving away from the “course for credit” requirement to “credit by mastery.” As stated earlier, the “course for credit” requirement, initially implemented and created by Carnegie, focuses on seat time that is necessary for a student to be in class to receive credit for a course. Whereas, “credit for mastery” is solely based on a student’s command of course material at a level that demonstrates a deep understanding of the content standards and application of knowledge. Amy Laitinen, deputy director for higher education at the New American Foundation, states that, “If the founder is saying, ‘There’s something wrong with the unit itself,’ it adds a lot of weight and gravitas to the question: What is it that we’re actually measuring?” (Berrett, 2012). Laitinen also believes that the credit unit is at the root of what plagues higher education and she shares her sentiments in a report entitled “Cracking the Credit Hour” (Berrett, 2012). Another staunch advocate of the change from course for credit is Pamela Tate, president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Mrs. Tate applauded the announcement by Carnegie to reassess the course for credit, calling it “long overdue” (Berrett, 2012).

The new vision of high school is schooling that puts students at the center of their learning. Everything we need to know regarding how to get each student excited about his/her education is in each student’s head and is available, free for the asking. Creating an environment where students feel acceptance and empowerment, motivating them to stay in school and learn, instead of turning to the streets for their education. Education’s job must be to develop skilled professionals who know how to ask the right questions and know what to do with the answers.

A variety of schools in New Hampshire have implemented Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) that ultimately will match the unique interest, abilities, needs, developmental levels, and talents of the students they serve. These opportunities are derived from student interest, teacher support and inspiration, and any opportunities that are supplied within the community. The students that take part in ELOs are given credit for learning that is provided outside a classroom, to include independent study, private instructions, internships, community service, and work-study.

The opportunity to participate in ELOs presents various outlets for all students, but more specifically for the students that struggle in a regular academic setting, according to Freeley and Hanzelka (2009). For example, an 18-year-old student at Manchester Central High School had failed the civics course she needed to graduate. For her extended learning opportunity, she worked at the Manchester City Hall Social Service Department. Her completion of this extended learning opportunity enabled her to graduate on time (Leather, as cited in Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009, p. 64).

Newfound Regional High School in New Hampshire also uses ELOs as opportunities for students to acquire credits. One of the graduating seniors at this high school took advantage of the ELOs to gain access to the information about his interest in the military, which he plans on entering once he graduates from Newfound Regional High School. After conducting the necessary research needed, the student produced a portfolio, a journal, and a final exhibition according to Freeley and Hanzelka (2009). Thus, these projects provide relevant, meaningful life learning experiences, which motivate the individual students.

According to Freeley and Hanzelka (2009), in order for students to use the process of an ELO, the student must ask the following questions: How do I like to learn? What are my

interests? Why do I think an ELO would work for me? After students are able to answer these questions and realize that they still have an interest in the program, each student is assigned a team that consists of the following: coordinator, teacher, counselor, parent, and community partner. This team meets periodically to identify resources and come up with a plan that is specific to the student's interest, as well as evaluating the ELO the student has taken on.

Schools that offer ELOs align their goals and expectations to that of the school's educational goals and objectives. Each individual school in this process determines how credits will be awarded to the students. The students that are involved in ELO opportunities are primarily assessed through teacher check-ins, reflections, and student exhibitions (Freely & Hanzelka, 2009). According to Freely and Hanzelka (2009), these student exhibitions are presented to a team of reviewers; usually, each reviewer completes a rubric illustrating how well the student has mastered the competencies identified as goals of the extended learning opportunity.

North Carolina is currently in the process of implementing a Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM) policy change. According to the North Carolina State Board of Education (2013), beginning in the fall of 2014, students will have the option of using CDM for earning high school credits. Using CDM will also be optional for Local Education Agencies to implement in middle schools. The rationale identified for this policy change was stated as follows, "Every student deserves a high-quality education, and the Credit by Demonstrated Mastery Policy ensures that every student has the opportunity for the most rigorous and appropriate course of study based on academic progress and need" (SBE-GCS-M-001, Section 13, p. 8). According to the NC State Board of Education, North Carolina will be joining nineteen other states which have a similar policy in place to include: Texas, New York,

Tennessee, Oregon, Alabama, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Michigan (SBE-GCS-M-001, Section 13, p. 8-9).

Case in point, Franklin High School allows for its students to earn two credits by using ELOs in either core or elective classes. The two ELOs that students used toward graduation have to include a portfolio, a community partner, and a presentation. Another requirement that Franklin High School expects of its 400 students is that each ELO has what is called a “leave behind” (Freely & Hanzelka, 2009). For example, while studying music and guitar, one student worked with a local music store and developed as his leave-behind portfolio a series of lesson plans for teaching guitar.

According to information collected by the New Hampshire Department of Education, and stemming from the Nellie Mae Foundation grant, early data from four area high schools (Laconia High School, Franklin High School, Newfound Regional High School, and Manchester Central High School) indicated that ELOs accounted for approximately 337 students who participated in the ELO program in 2008 (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009). The study, which was conducted by the Nellie Mae Foundation, also identified that the dropout rates of the participating schools had decreased from 7-8% in 2003 to below 4% in 2008. The report further concluded that 96% of participants took part in the creation of their ELOs and approximately 65% of those students reported that they were extremely involved. Board members, community workers, and superintendents stated that the ELOs were extremely rigorous based on the standards identified by the state. Steven Beals serves as the principal at Laconia High School and made the following statement about ELOs: “Students who are engaged are capable of far greater rigor and do it without feeling overwhelmed by the expectations. We keep our focus on each student and find the item of interest or hook for his or her learning to take off” (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009).

Another example of an effort to help these views become a reality, the New Hampshire school board incorporated a new statewide initiative in 2005 entitled “Follow the Child”, which required the school system to get away from seat time (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009). The school system’s goal was to accomplish this initiative within a three-year period of time and to exert more of an effort geared toward competencies. The state legislature in New Hampshire felt like getting away from seat time would afford the schools greater flexibility. Based on the flexibility afforded by the new initiative, schools were able to create programs that focused on personalized learning, student engagement, and alternate approaches to student assessment (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009).

Other states have created and/or established policies in an effort to loosen the standard of seat time as the only means by which a student can receive course credit. The intent of implementing these new policies, according to Sean Cavanagh (2012) in his article “States Loosening Entrenched ‘Seat Time’ Requirements,” is to make it easier for struggling students to catch up, exceptional students to race ahead, and students facing geographic and scheduling barriers to take the courses they need. The article further states that thirty-six states have established that credits can be received based on student proficiency, as opposed to the amount of time a student physically is in a seat in a traditional setting. Furthermore, there are a number of states that are applying for a seat time waiver in an effort to rid themselves of the seat time issue.

Jason Glass, the director of the Iowa Department of Education, states, “merely having a seat in the class doesn’t guarantee you anything” (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Glass, along with the governor of Iowa, Terry Branstad, is asking the lawmakers in their state to give students an opportunity to prove their ability in a variety of ways in an effort for them to obtain course

credit. They both believe that this can be accomplished through testing, demonstration of skills, and the completion of projects (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Glass believes his state is allowing students to move on based on minimal competencies in the courses that the students are taking. Glass states, “the concept is ‘still sort of cutting edge,’ but he stills wants Iowa experimenting with it” (Cavanagh, 2012).

Elizabeth Utrup, a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Education, noted that at the federal level, districts and states are encouraged to be creative and to implement practices that they feel will be effective for the students they serve (Cavanagh, 2012). She further states that the U.S. Department of Education believes the implementation of those practices will allow districts and states to have more flexibility, which will allow for more productivity. Based on the belief of the U.S. Department of Education, various states have implemented policies that take them away from focusing on seat time as the only means of awarding course credits. There are a number of states that now allow credits based on proficiency and/or mastery, according to the U.S. Department of Education (Adams, 2012):

1. Since 2003, Oregon has allowed districts and schools to use proficiency-based approaches for awarding credit to students. From 2004 to 2006, the state piloted the policy in several school districts. In 2009, state policy was expanded to require that all in-class work be tied explicitly to demonstrated proficiency or mastery of academic standards.
2. Oklahoma requires schools to allow students, upon request, to earn credits toward graduation in core academic subjects based on demonstrations of mastery through tests. Students are required to score grades of 90% or higher on those tests to receive credit, according to state officials.

3. In 1987, Maryland incorporated an outcome-based system in Frederick County involving 30,000 students and 46 schools based on five essential learner behaviors. The essential learner behaviors are as follows: effective communication, problem solving and critical thinking, social cooperation and self-discipline, responsible citizenship in community and environment, and a lifestyle that values wellness and aesthetics.
4. In 2007, Michigan created a policy to grant waivers from seat time requirements to districts on a case-by-case basis. More than 200 schools have requested some sort of waiver over the past year, and about 5,500 students are currently making use of the flexibility, most of them through a blended-learning approach, combining in-person and online instruction.

Presently, Genesee County, located in Michigan, has implemented the “Seat Time Waiver” into their school system (Cavanagh, 2012). The idea initially started as an experiment, but now it is being adopted statewide. The program began with 1,300 students in the county who applied to become a part of the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) Seat Time Waiver Program. The course allows students to stay at home and take courses, according to Genesee Intermediate School District Superintendent Lisa Hagel. Mrs. Hagel states “the program appeals to students who have health or mobility issues or athletes who travel a lot” (Retrieved from www.abclocal.go.com). According to Hagel (2011), “I think this is harder than going to class every day with a teacher because the student has to be self-motivated.” Kassondra Noyce, a student in the program agrees that the course work is much more difficult than she thought it would be and that one has to be dedicated in order to be successful in the courses (Retrieved from www.abclocal.go.com).

Gary Miron, a well-known professor at the University of Kalamazoo, believes the seat time initiative is a monumental step in educational reform in order to increase student achievement throughout the United States (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Miron recognized not only a shift in traditional education in regards to seat time, but also believes it is a shift from “regulatory accountability” of schools, toward more “performance-based or market accountability”. He believes that the latter accountability model affords supporters of non-traditional schools an opportunity to provide results that can be judged, as well as offering more attractive options for the parents involved with these students.

Since the beginning of 2012, over 200 schools has requested a waiver in the state of Michigan and approximately 5,500 students are taking advantage of this waiver according to Barbara Fardell, educational technology manager for the State Department in Michigan (Cavanagh, 2012). According to the information provided by Mrs. Fardell, the students involved in this initiative are doing some form of blended learning, combining a traditional approach with a virtual approach. This method is allowing educators and administrators in Michigan to lure dropouts back into the school system. The combination of the traditional approach with the virtual approach provides an opportunity for the drop out or at-risk youth to become reacquainted with the educational process and to acquire course credits more effectively and quickly. This approach also equips dropouts to come back to school without the stigma that students would normally feel, according to Mrs. Fardell (Adams, 2012).

Oakland Schools located on the outskirts of Detroit, has implemented a program that impacts 17 school districts through the Widening Advancements for Youth initiative (Tomassini, 2012). This agency has taken full advantage of the flexibility that the seat time waiver provides for its students. Widening Advancements for Youth (WAY) is based out of Belleville,

Michigan, and is a nonprofit organization that provides instruction through online lessons and mentoring based on the needs of each individual student. This program started accepting students in September of 2012 and presently has approximately 160 students enrolled with continuous growth. WAY offers instruction to all of its students through online and person-to-person sessions, both of which are in laboratories, and students are expected to attend these sessions to seek support if needed. Michael Yocum, who serves in the capacity of executive director of learning services for Oakland, states that students work on projects in various subjects in order to receive course credit. The staff determines whether the projects completed by the students meet the competencies established by the districts. If so, the students are awarded course credit for the subject area in which credits are lacking (Tomassini, 2012).

Seat-time does restrict students who have mastered skills from progressing at a more rigorous pace, but what happens to students who need more help consistently missing seat-time due to attendance and suspensions, and what alternative measures can be used to address this?

Attendance and Absences

Seat time has much to do with attendance, especially in North Carolina (Retrieved from www.ncga.state.nc.us). The *Compulsory Attendance Law* requires that every child between the ages of seven and sixteen years old attend school on a regular basis. This requirement is the responsibility of every parent and/or guardian (Retrieved from www.ncga.state.nc.us):

1. No person shall encourage, entice or counsel any child of compulsory school age to be unlawfully absent from school. The parent and/or guardian, or custodian, of a child shall notify the school of the reason for each known absence of the child, in accordance with local school board policy.
2. The principal, superintendent, or designee of the principal or superintendent shall

have the right to excuse a child temporarily from attendance on account of sickness or other unavoidable cause that does not constitute unlawful absence as defined by the state Board of Education. The term “school” as used in this section includes all public schools and any nonpublic schools that have teachers and curricula that are approved by the State Board of Education.

3. All nonpublic schools receiving and instructing children of compulsory school age shall be required to make, maintain, and render attendance records of those children and maintain the minimum curriculum standards required of public schools. If a nonpublic school refuses or neglects to make, maintain, and render required attendance records, attendance at that school shall not be accepted in lieu of attendance at the public school of the district to which the child shall be assigned. Instruction in a nonpublic school shall not be regarded as meeting the requirements of the law unless the courses of instruction run concurrently with the term of the public school in the district and extend for at least as long a term.
4. After ten accumulated unexcused absences in a school year, the principal or the principal's designee shall review any report or investigation prepared under G.S. 115C-381 and shall confer with the student and the student's parent, guardian, or custodian, if possible, to determine whether the parent, guardian, or custodian has received notification pursuant to this section and made a good faith effort to comply with the law. If the principal or the principal's designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal shall notify the district attorney and the director of social services of the county where the child resides. If the principal or the principal's designee determines

that the parent, guardian, or custodian has made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may file a complaint with the juvenile court counselor pursuant to Chapter 7B of the General Statutes that the child is habitually absent from school without a valid excuse. Upon receiving notification by the principal or the principal's designee, the director of social services shall determine whether to undertake an investigation under GS 7B-302.

The county in southeastern North Carolina addresses this in two board policies: School Calendar and time for learning, and Attendance (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013).

The school calendar identifies and establishes time requirements that will impact educational goals and objectives. An integral part of the time requirement is to allot the necessary time to facilitate student learning and to permit time for the assessment of learning targets to increase student achievement. The key areas identified in this policy include: instructional time, school day, opening and closing dates, and school calendar. Calendars selected and used by the board should have the following requirements (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. The calendar will consist of 215 days and shall meet state requirements for the minimum instructional days and/or the minimum instructional hours.
2. At least ten of the days on the calendar will be designated as annual vacation leave days.
3. The calendar will include the same or an equivalent number of legal holidays as those

designated by the State Personnel Commission for State employees, including Veteran's Day if it falls on a weekday.

4. School will not be scheduled on Sundays.
5. The total number of workdays for teachers employed for a 10-month term will not exceed 195 days.
6. The calendar will designate "instructional" days, when students must be present.
7. The remaining days will be scheduled by the board, in consultation with school principals, as flexible days, for use as teacher workdays, additional instructional days, or other lawful purposes. Before scheduling these flexible days, each principal shall work with the school improvement team to determine the days to be scheduled and the purposes for which they should be scheduled.
8. Of the flexible days described in subsection D.7, the board will designate at least two days as protected days on which teachers may take accumulated vacation leave. All other "flexible" days may be designated as days on which teachers may take accumulated leave, but the board will give teachers at least 14 calendar days' notice before requiring a teacher to work instead of taking vacation leave on any of these days. A teacher may elect to waive this notice requirement for one or more of these days.
9. The board may, due to school closings because of inclement weather or other reasons, use any of the flexible days designated in subsection D.7 above as make-up days for those instructional days that were missed. If necessary, these make-up days may be scheduled after the last day of student attendance. If either of the two protected days

described in subsection D.8 above are scheduled as a makeup day, teachers may take accumulated vacation leave on the make-up day and will not be required to work.

10. If the school calendar requires students to attend school on September 17, which is Constitution and Citizenship Day, each principal shall ensure that the signing of the United States Constitution is commemorated in the school on that day. If students are not required to attend school on September 17, the principal shall ensure that Constitution and Citizenship Day is commemorated during the preceding or following week.

Students must be in attendance on a regular basis in order for effective teaching and learning to take place. The state of North Carolina requires students from ages 7-16 attend school regularly. The responsibility to ensure that students are in school resides with parents and guardians. The other responsibility to ensure regular attendance by students falls on the schools in the accuracy of record keeping on student attendance based on Compulsory Attendance Law of North Carolina.

Excused Absences are permitted when a student misses a day of school due to the following reasons:

1. personal illness or injury that makes the student physically unable to attend school,
2. isolation ordered by the State Board of Health,
3. death in the immediate family,
4. medical or dental appointment,
5. participation under subpoena as a witness in a court proceeding,
6. a minimum of two days each academic year for observance of an event required or suggested by the religion of the student or student's parent(s),

7. participation in a valid educational opportunity, such as travel or service as a legislative or Governor's page, with prior approval from the principal,
8. pregnancy and related conditions or parenting, when medically necessary, or
9. visitation with the student's parent or legal guardian, at the discretion of the superintendent or designee, if the parent or legal guardian (a) is an active duty member of the uniformed services as defined by policy 4050, Children of Military Families; and (b) has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting.

Excessive absences are not permitted because school attendance is an essential part of teaching and learning. If a student is absent from school five or more days within a semester, the principal or designated committee will determine if the student's grade will be decreased or not (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013). The following recommendations may be taken into account (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. the student will not receive a passing grade for the semester,
2. the student's grade will be reduced,
3. the student will receive the grade otherwise earned, or
4. the student will be given additional time to complete the missed work before a determination of the appropriate grade is made.
5. According to this policy, students with excused absences due to documented chronic health problems are exempt (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service

policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013).

Some students are absent due to the need to take care of themselves and their families. Rules pertaining to attendance punish these students for making mature decisions that have a great impact on their life because of circumstances due to socio-economic status. Many of these students endure an ongoing struggle to overcome the everyday poverty of their lives.

Another reason for frequent absences is suspensions. Student perceptions of suspensions are often that the suspension is a day off from school (Iselin, 2010). In order to effectively participate in educational environments students must possess certain abilities such as academic achievement, impulse and self-control, conflict management, and problem-solving regarding relationship issues (Retrieved from www.teachsafeschools.org). Since these students do not have coping mechanisms that assist in demonstrating positive outlets for their feelings, the inappropriate behaviors surface in the school setting and are punished repeatedly. Punishment is often suspensions resulting in putting these students at a further academic deficit.

A study conducted by Arcia (2007), supported that suspensions are given to the students who are already lacking in the area of academics and suspensions put these students at even higher risk for failure. Concerns regarding these matters have been identified by healthcare professionals (Committee on School Health, 2003). First, for school systems and community leaders to provide an environment and resources that decrease the incidents of student behaviors that result in suspensions. Second, lack of supervision and support offered to students when they are suspended. Third, the educational and learning opportunities that are missed when students are not in attendance at school, recognizing that education are directly connected to health and safety (Committee on School Health, 2003).

Disparities of Punishment Regarding Minorities and Genders

Iselin (2010), Hinojosa (2008), and Mendez and Knoff (2003) have researched the disproportionately that Black students are suspended more than Caucasian students. Most frequently suspended are African-American students who have been identified with emotional or behavioral disabilities (Iselin, 2010). Data collected by the Civil Rights Project (2010) regarding 9000 middle schools, reported an overall suspension rate of 11%; in the same schools, suspension rates for black students averaged over 28%. Data provided by Hinojosa (2008), based upon the United States Department of Education, 2001, denotes that black students comprise 17% of the school population, but make up 32% of the population that is suspended (p. 175).

Males are suspended at much higher rates than females from schools (Streitmatter, 1985-1986, p. 141). The discipline gap refers to the “tendency for African American students to be overrepresented in discipline in proportion to their enrollment, Hispanic students to be proportionally represented, and Caucasian and Asian students to be underrepresented” (Booker, & Mitchell, 2011). Students of color report perceiving discrimination as it relates to disciplinary treatment. The disparities in how discipline is handled for diverse populations in other forms of discipline are well documented. African-American students are more frequently referred to the office than Caucasian students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Research by Booker and Mitchell (2011) indicates that Caucasian students are referred to the office for specific infractions such as smoking, vandalism, truancy, while African-American students are referred for more subjective infractions such as disrespect and threats. Boys are more likely than girls to receive an office referral. Disproportionate rates for suspensions are

consistent with office referrals. Boys are more likely to be referred and suspended than girls are (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

In a study conducted by Mendez and Knoff (2003), African-American students were disproportionately represented in out-of-school suspensions than Caucasian and Hispanic students. African-American students were disproportionately suspended for infractions such as insubordination, disruptive behavior, and fighting. Caucasian students were disproportionately suspended for tobacco, weapons, drug, and alcohol possessions (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Mendez and Knoff (2003) indicated that the rates of suspension of students increase when they enter middle school and decrease in high school. This study did not address the distinction between regular education students and students with disabilities.

Data released by the U.S. Department of Education (1993), urban districts with higher populations of minority students were more likely than suburban and rural districts to have alternative schools for at-risk students. Districts with high minority populations were also more likely to disciplinary assign students for behavioral issues only, rather than other at risk factors such as truancy, parenthood, or mental health issues. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that minority students are more at risk of disciplinary assignment to an alternative school for discretionary reasons. Students placed in the special education program that were assigned to DAEPs were proportionate to the overall population of students with disabilities (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Limited research on the perceptions of at-risk students who attend alternative schools exists. Few researchers have sought to understand the perspectives and opinions of at-risk students attending alternative schools through quantitative research methods (Lagana et al., 2011). There is an evident need for qualitative research on the perceptions of at-risk students

and the components of the alternative schools they attended that helped them succeed in ways traditional schools did not.

At-risk students tend to struggle academically and perform significantly lower on standardized tests than their peers. Due to the academic challenges confronting at-risk students, the likelihood to drop out of school is much greater than those not considered at risk. The population of students classified as “at-risk” continues to increase within our schools. For example, in 2005, ethnic minority groups comprised 42% of the entire student population (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Disparity exists in students between race/ethnicity and gender and, proportionally, minorities and males are suspended at a much higher rate than their peers (see Table 4).

Disparity in students between race/ethnicity and gender that exist nationwide also hold true in North Carolina (see Figures 21 through 23). Demonstrated in these charts that were released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April of 2014 is that proportionally minorities and males are suspended at a much higher rate than their peers (Retrieved from

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>).

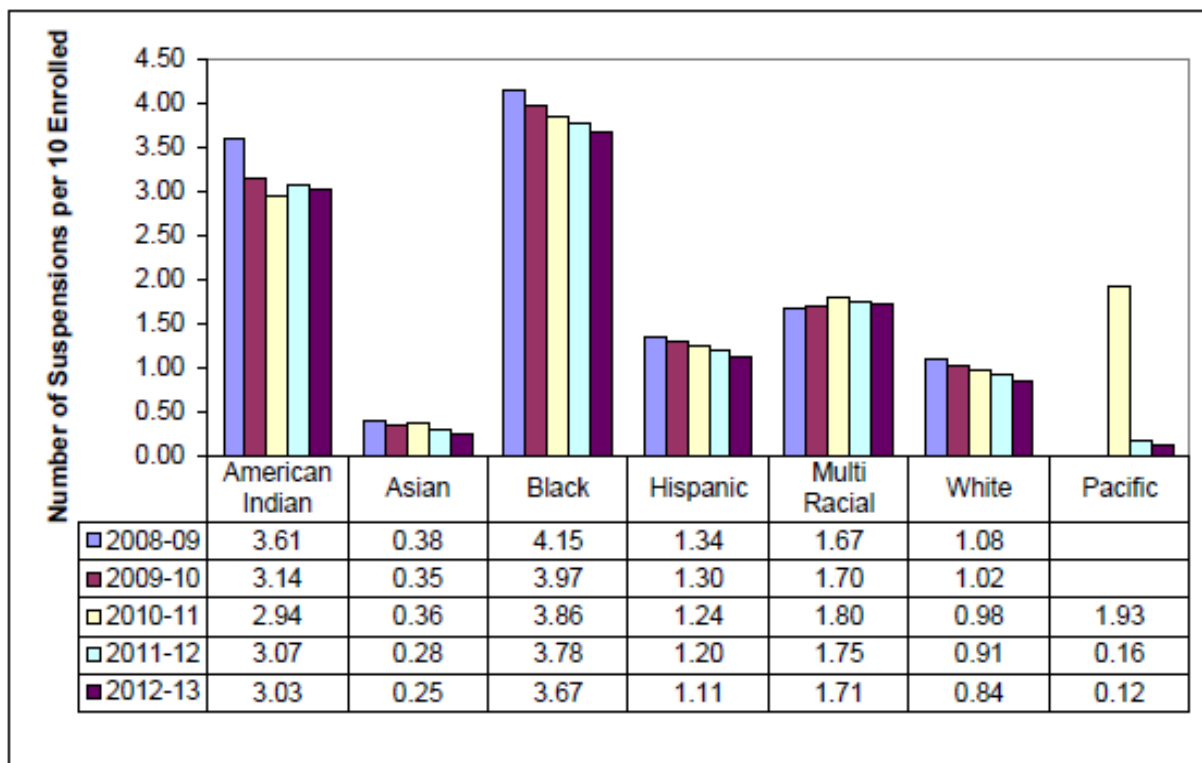
An analysis of a study by Arcia (2007) indicated that common factors exist that reinforce the incongruence of suspension rates between black students and their non-black peers. Characteristics include the schools that have a high percentage of suspensions overall, to include non-black students, a difference in achievement existed between black and non-black students, and the instructional staff was inexperienced (Arcia, 2007). Understanding the background of

Table 4

School Suspensions by Strietmatter, 1985-1986, p. 141

School	Total N	Percent in Total Populations	Percent Represented in Suspension	Percent Represented in Suspensions
SCHOOL A 1843	Caucasian	93.2%	93.1%	Male 64.1%
	Black	.6%	0%	Female 35.9%
	Hispanic	4.9%	6.8%	
SCHOOL B 2001	Caucasian	76.8%	72.4%	Male 65.4%
	Black	5.7%	6.6%	Female 34.6%
	Hispanic	13.9%	21.1%	
SCHOOL C 1911	Caucasian	32.6%	25.5%	Male 72.1%
	Black	7.8%	15.3%	Female 27.9%
	Hispanic	53.4%	59.1%	

Note. The minority groups of Native Americans and Asians were not included due to small numbers.



Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported or was reported as “Other” for 2,069 short-term suspensions in 2008-09, 1,776 in 2009-10, 77 in 2010-11, 110 in 2011-12, and 264 in 2012-13. Rates calculated by dividing number of suspensions in race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by ten.

Figure 21. North Carolina short-term suspension rates by race/ethnicity.

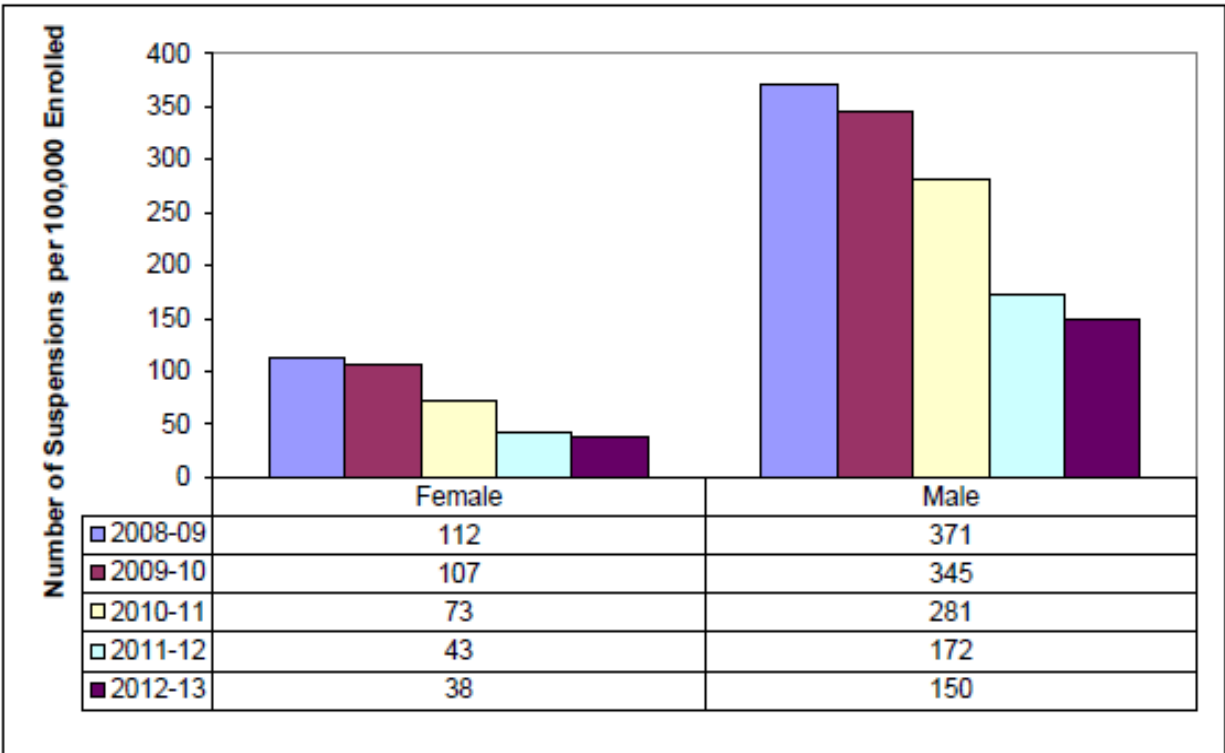
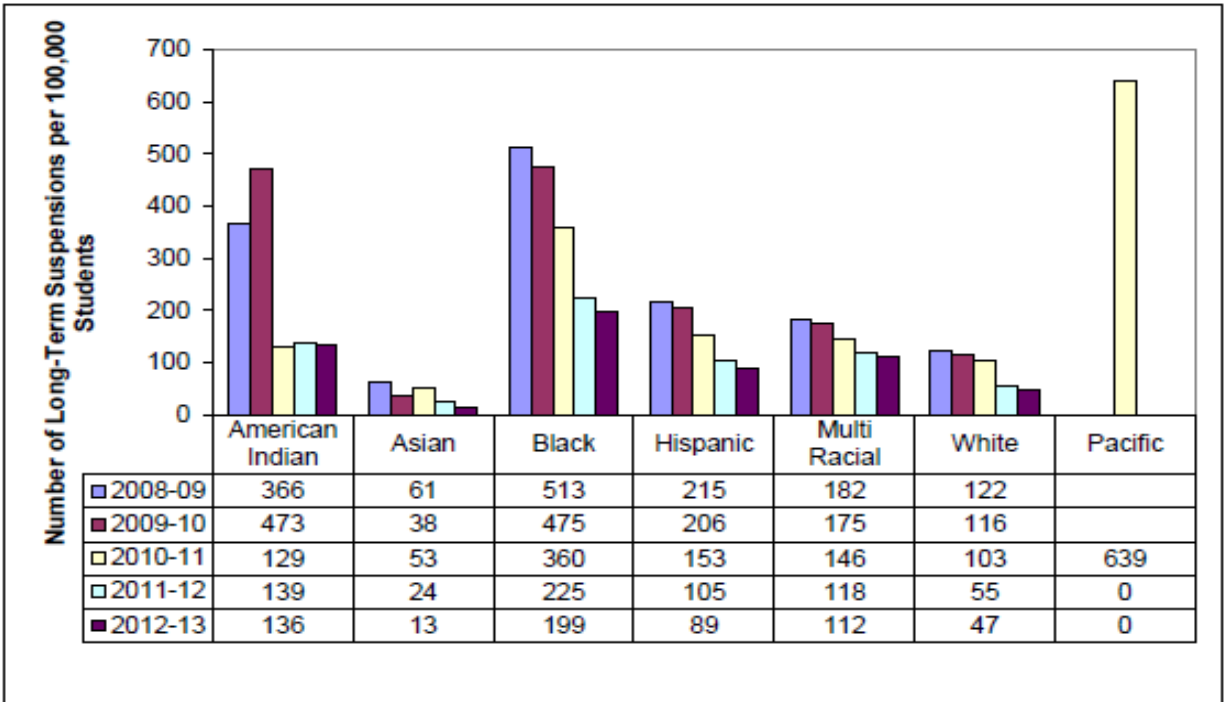


Figure 22. North Carolina long-term suspension rates by gender.



Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported or was reported as “Other” for 29 suspensions in 2008-09, 44 suspensions in 2009-10, two suspensions in 2010-11, and five suspensions in 2012-13. Rates calculated by dividing number of suspensions in race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by 100,000.

Figure 23. North Carolina long-term suspension rates by race/ethnicity, LTS per 100,000.

school suspensions, including the causes and effects, help to understand the disparities discussed above.

Schools Suspension Background, Causes, and Effects

Violence in schools is a topic of national debate following recent current events. When examining violence in schools, discipline procedures are scrutinized and analyzed. Discipline is crucial in schools in order to maintain order and provide a constructive learning environment. The Guns Free School Act (1994) prompted schools to implement “zero-tolerance” policies. Resulting from this zero-tolerance ideology, many states developed guidelines outlining school behaviors that would or could result in school suspensions or expulsions. To ensure the success of the educational process and provide procedures and process for a safe and orderly environment, the North Carolina General Assembly has recognized the need for tools for teachers and school officials in regards to maintaining discipline. To that end, the General Assembly also recognizes the removal of students from schools will increase behavioral problems, diminish academic achievement, and increase dropout rates. Discipline has to maintain balance within the school setting to allow for teaching and learning to take place successfully.

Discipline Policies (Retrieved from www.ncleg.net):

1. Local boards of education shall adopt policies to govern the conduct of students and establish procedures to be followed by school officials in disciplining students. These policies must be consistent with the provisions of this Article and the constitutions, statutes, and regulations of the United States and the State of North Carolina.
2. Board policies shall include or provide for the development of a Code of Student Conduct that notifies students of the standards of behavior expected of them, conduct

that may subject them to discipline, and the range of disciplinary measures that may be used by school.

3. Board policies may authorize suspension for conduct not occurring on educational property, but only if the student's conduct otherwise violates the Code of Student Conduct and the conduct has or is reasonably expected to have a direct and immediate impact on the orderly and efficient operation of the schools or the safety of individuals in the school environment.
4. Board policies shall not allow students to be long-term suspensions or expulsions for specific violations unless otherwise provided in State or federal law.
5. Board policies shall minimize the use of long-term suspension and expulsion by restricting the availability of long-term suspension or expulsion to those violations deemed to be serious violations unless otherwise provided in State or federal law.

Evidence does not support that suspensions deter behaviors (Retrieved from www.teachsafeschools.org). The Committee on School Health (2003) identified that between 79% and 94% of schools have policies based upon the "zero-tolerance" concept and that 90% of Americans are in support of these established policies. Research on suspensions has expanded over the last 30 years.

Regarding suspensions, it is impossible to determine that one factor causes an outcome. One cannot surmise that a school's culture causes high or low suspension rates. One can, however, associate characteristics with outcomes. Suspensions are considered effective in removing disruptive students from the learning environment, heightening the awareness of inappropriate student behavior to parents, allowing a sense of relief to frustrated staff and students.

Research has been conducted for many years regarding the effectiveness of using suspension from schools as a means of a disciplinary method. Nationally, suspension rates have been on an increase over the past decade. According to Lee, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2011), over 3.3 million students are suspended out-of-school every year. According to teachsafeschools.org, the Chicago school system suspended more than 20,000 students in 2003, doubling the amount from the previous decade; programs that are alternatives to suspensions have been implanted in many school districts nationally. When examining the effects of suspension, factors that contribute to the behaviors that result in suspensions must also be analyzed. American schools frequently use suspensions, both out-of-school and in-school, as a common disciplinary action. Suspension, with no additional support or interventions, has not proven to result in change in behaviors for the long term (Mati, 2011). Iselin's research (2010) supported that the higher frequency of suspensions has a correlation with greater likeness of future involvement of the repeatedly suspended students in the juvenile justice system and the student's demonstration of antisocial behaviors. Cicek's (2012) research shares that students are often suspended without any proactive interventions or follow up evaluation to address the underlying issues.

An example of proactive interventions is using various behavior support programs decreased office referrals and suspensions (Iselin, 2010). Identified by Mati (2011) was the importance of a positive relationship between teachers and students in influencing positive choices regarding behaviors. Achievement and safety in schools improved when school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) were adopted, along with reduced suspensions (Civil Rights Project, 2010). By suspending students it impacts school climate negatively and does not

promote social growth to change behaviors that originally caused the suspension (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

Based upon data from the Civil Right Project (2010), behaviors that suspensions were typically given were for offenses other than serious violence, drugs, or weapons. Suspensions were frequently given for non-violent offenses such as unacceptable language, dress-code violations, disruptions, and truancy (Civil Rights Project, 2010). Arcia (2007) stated that, frequently, suspensions were used for minor infractions or the repetition of minor violations and that an alternative not as academically crippling should be explored. Examined by Cicek (2012) were an assortment of Student Code of Conduct Handbooks, from various states and areas. A comprehensive list of offenses was compiled to be able to examine the offenses that resulted in suspensions with no prior intervention and many being non-violent (Cicek, 2012).

Policies as they relate to the discipline data that has been collected are from the county in southeastern North Carolina and their policies are adapted from the policies written by the North Carolina School Board Association (see Appendix E). Noted in these policies are the identified non-violent behaviors that result in out of school suspensions, in school suspensions, expulsions, and placements in alternative programs. No follow up support is identified to address the root cause of the adolescent's behaviors.

While out-of-school suspensions completely remove students from the educational setting, there has been a trend in schools to address discipline issues with in-school suspension. However, the degree to which in-school suspension programs use research-based strategies to help rehabilitate discipline issues varies greatly. Therefore, it is important to note that in-school suspensions have a huge impact on at-risk students.

In-School Suspensions and Other Alternatives

In-school suspension (ISS) is also used as a discipline option in schools. By using in-school suspension the students are at least provided supervision and many programs require the students to complete their classroom work while they are there. In-school suspensions can serve the same purpose as out-of-school by removing the problematic student from the classroom, but does not reward the bad behavior by sending them home to often unsupervised situations (Patterson, 1985, p. 98).

Johnston (1987) suggests creating an in-school suspension environment that has high expectation for schoolwork completion and self-discipline and a structured, accepting environment, rather than viewed as a place for punishment (p. 122). Most commonly, students were sent to ISS for skipping classes and disruptive behaviors (Johnston, 1987, p. 123). Students were surveyed by Johnston (1987) regarding their perceptions of ISS and the majority of students responded that it was necessary and effective (p. 129).

Presented by Morris and Howard (2003) is the importance of counseling as part of an effective ISS program (p. 157). According to Guindon, an ISS program that is inclusive of counseling services aids students in behavioral reflection (as cited in Morris & Howard, 2003, p. 157).

Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, and Rime (2012) conducted a case study regarding an alternative to suspension (ATS) program. A Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) Team developed a list of consequences other than suspensions as follows:

1. Self-management plan
2. Debriefing and reflection assignments
3. Behavior contracts

4. Natural consequences
5. Individualized social-emotional training/learning
6. Counseling
7. Parent Involvement
8. Intervention rooms/in-school suspension

Results were that suspensions were reduced, compared to other years (Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, & Rime, 2012). The improvement noted may be attributed to the “Hawthorne Effect,” defined as people’s social behavior being impacted by the behaviors of others around them, which also impact their own innate ability (“The Hawthorne effect”, 2008).

Also, suggested by Peterson (2005), are ten alternatives to suspensions:

1. Problem solving contracting
2. Restitution
3. Mini-courses or skill modules
4. Parent involvement/supervision
5. Counseling
6. Community service
7. Behavior monitoring
8. Coordinated behavior plan
9. Alternative programming
10. Appropriate in-school suspension

A few of these strategies are being used by some schools; but limited numbers are using most of these strategies and even less are using it as a systemic strategy to improve behaviors that are expressed as school expectations (Peterson, 2005, p. 11). Offered as alternatives to suspensions

that were examined by the Committee on School Health (2003) were parents being required to accompany the offending student during the school day and community service after-school hours. Schools must focus on classroom management if they plan to reduce the number of suspensions.

Classroom Management and Behavioral Sciences

Classroom management plays a significant role in the rate of suspension of students. Schools that serve the greatest population of high-risk students typically have the highest turnover rates of staff and the most novice teachers (Newsandobserver.com, 2011).

One of the common issues that many educators identify as most challenging is classroom management, especially those new to the practice of teaching. Consistently teachers deal with this issue in their effort to successfully educate children. How a teacher manages a classroom or how an administrator manages a school is often an extension of that individual's personality. Therefore, psychology has a major impact on how a school or classroom is managed. Understanding this, one must conclude that increasing knowledge of the major psychological theories that shape educational practice is imperative to being a successful administrator with a well-managed school. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) applies the theories of behaviorism and humanism, two major camps in the field of educational psychology, to school-wide management.

Brookover et al. (1982) state "faculty and administration must share the responsibility for creating an orderly learning climate in which academic pursuits are not disrupted." Goodwin and Miller (2012) make the claim that everyone, from the principal on down, is expected to model and encourage appropriate behavior in *For Positive Behavior, Involve Peers*. They state that, "The best approaches to behavior management don't simply zero in on problems after they

occur but proactively enlist everyone in the school to establish and reinforce clear expectations for student behavior” (Goodwin & Miller, 2012). The authors state that the following have roles for establishing positive behavior in a school: the administrator’s role is creating an oasis of safety, the teacher’s role is establishing a positive classroom culture, and the student’s role is providing peer support (Goodwin & Miller, 2012). Goodwin and Miller (2012) go on to state that, “Research suggests that students who challenge us require a mix of supports,” and that “Student behavior can be improved by creating a positive peer culture”. This is essential in an alternative school setting.

William Sterrett (2012) seeks to answer the question, “What can school leaders do to support teachers in building stronger relationships with students?” in *From Discipline to Relationships*. He states that, “In our evolving world of education, one thing remains constant: our success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students” (Sterrett, 2012). Sterrett (2012) offers personal examples from his time as a principal to reduce discipline by building relationships and “creating classroom communities,” while providing educators with the support and professional development needed to accomplish this. “Moving from a focus on discipline to a focus on relationships has implications for all stakeholders. For students it clearly sends the message, you belong here...For parents, the implications are enhanced communication and a greater focus on their student as an individual” (Sterrett, 2012).

Behaviorism is a field of psychology that focuses on how the environment evokes specific reactions from people. This field of psychology can be traced back to Ivan Pavlov and his theory of operant conditioning. Behaviorists believe that changing the environment can produce changes in human behavior. Thus, if an educator desires a change in student behavior, then the school environment must be changed. The leading proponent of applying behaviorism

to education is B. F. Skinner. Skinner (1971) believes that, “almost all living things act to free themselves from harmful contacts” (p. 36). Therefore, students can be controlled through the consequences of their environment, positive and negative reinforcement (Skinner, 1971, pp. 36-37).

An example of positive reinforcement would be an exciting activity sponsored by the school administration at the end of the week for students who accumulated a designated number of positive points. This reinforcement would evoke the students to have positive behavior because they desire to go to the school activity. An example of negative, or aversive, reinforcement would be students having positive behavior because they do not want to have their parents called by the teacher. Both positive and negative reinforcement use the environment to control the behavior of the students. Behaviorists argue that students wish to escape aversive controls and that inner states such as feelings, emotions, and desires do not have an impact on the behavior of the students because these are not measurable changes in behavior, therefore, they are only convenient myths that are proposed by humanist thinkers (Skinner, 1971, pp. 40-41).

“In the minds of most behavioral scientists, man is not free, nor can he as a free man commit himself to some purpose, since he is controlled by factors outside of himself” (Rogers, 1983, p. 42). Humanism is in direct contrast to behaviorism because humanists believe that individuals have an understanding of their own behavior and therefore, individuals are free to make choices. The choices that individuals make are often based on inner feelings (Rogers, 1983, p. 45). Behaviorists disregard these inner feelings because they argue that such feelings are not measurable by the scientific method. However, many humanist disagree by asserting that, “none of what we do is caused by any situation or person outside of ourselves . . . what goes on in the outside world never makes us do anything” (Glasser, 1986, pp. 18-19). William

Glasser compiles his book, *Choice Theory In The Classroom*, from a humanist perspective and argues that by helping students understand their choices, and that better choices exist, an educator can increase positive behavior among the students. Gerald Gutek (2004) also holds a similar belief that is evident in the following statement, “The years of adolescence and youth ... is the time when young people begin to understand that making choices is what life is about” (p. 89). Rogers (1983) states that everything can be taken from a man but his ability to choose his own way and decide his own attitude (p. 45).

Robert J. Marzano (2003) identifies motivation as a major factor that accounts for student achievement (p. 124). Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) seeks to motivate students to have positive behavior and to excel academically by applying the theories of behaviorism and humanism. PBIS applies behaviorism theories through the use of a positive reward system. PBIS also applies the theories of humanism by teaching students character traits that will help them analyze situations that they may encounter so that they may make better choices. While behaviorism and humanism are two distinctively different psychological camps, PBIS effectively applies the theories of both to assist in school-wide management.

As stated by Emmer, teachers with a lack of experience may resort to an authoritative disciplinary method of classroom management sometimes resulting in fight or flight situations between themselves and students (as cited in Skiba & Peterson, 2000, p. 336). Often the lack of behavioral strategies may be due to lack of teacher professional development, even though that classroom management is rated as highly important by both teachers and administrators (Skiba & Peterson, 2000, p. 337).

Ross W. Greene (2010), in *Calling All Frequent Flyers*, states that if a school discipline program is not working, then collaborative problem solving may be the key to repairing the

program. He makes the claim that punitive discipline systems do not work with today's youth, "Rewards and punishments don't teach kids the skills they lack." Ross makes a very important point, as it would relate to the staffing of a school, "The behaviorally challenging students being sent with great regularity to the office aren't the only frequent flyers in the building. The teachers sending them are frequent flyers, too."

Behaviorism and humanism are different, the proponents of each make very good arguments as to why their method is superior, thus educators are still debating this issue of which theory should shape educational practice. Should behaviorism or humanism shape educational practice? The ideal conclusion is to apply both methods – PBIS does this effectively.

All humans have choices and for every choice, there is a positive or negative consequence. Behaviorism should be used to help control certain behaviors through the use of positive and negative reinforcement. PBIS uses positive reinforcement to help control and promote desired behaviors at school. However, educators should understand that many students are in fact filled with emotions and feelings that may cause their behaviors to be uncontrollable through the use of behaviorist techniques. The best method of addressing this issue is to supplement behaviorist techniques with humanist techniques.

Humanist techniques help students understand why they make the choices they make and show students that by making better choices, they will reap the benefits of desired positive outcomes; this is another important aspect of PBIS. A good example of this humanist thinking that dates back for many years is the story of Job in the *Bible*; regardless of how much was taken from Job or how much his environment changed, he maintained a positive attitude. Instilling the choice to maintain a positive attitude such as Job, in the minds of students, is the goal of humanist educators in attempting to best help shape educational practice.

Through the use of both behaviorism and humanism, positive outcomes of classroom and school-wide management will increase. PBIS does an excellent job of linking these two psychological camps to address many needs within a school. Teachers and staff receive staff development in positive reinforcement and a new tool for classroom management, which results in less classroom disruptions due to discipline. Positive behaviors are occurring in the classrooms, which allows for increased time-on-task and results in improved delivery of curriculum and instruction. Students are gaining more from experiences in the school and in the classroom, which improves their learning. This also leads to a positive school climate with an inviting atmosphere for all stakeholders. Parents and community members have opportunities to be involved in the school in exciting ways through the PBIS program. All of these effects result in increased teacher satisfaction, retention, and effectiveness. PBIS, if properly implemented and molded to meet the needs of a given school, will ultimately result in an administrator's ability to effectively and efficiently manage a school to reach its fullest potential.

Methods such as these must also be used to increase the desire of all students to be present in school. The inability to rehabilitate discipline problems and build positive relationships with students leads to increased senses of not belonging. Their participation in school continues to decline until ultimately they dropout, negatively impacting dropout rates.

Dropout Rates

Student dropout rates are the "silent epidemic" the United States is presently facing and it is controlling our communities, schools, and society. This "Silent Epidemic," as it is regularly referred to, is the high school dropout issue that confronts all Americans in some way or another. According to a report by Civic Enterprises, one third of all public high school students and approximately one half of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans fail to graduate on time with

their original classmates. Based on a report the majority of these students abandon school with two or less years of schooling remaining prior to obtaining their high school diploma (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

This epidemic continues to rear its ugly head even though education has been on the public agenda for the past few decades. Margarita Donnelly (1987) states that educational reform has changed the rules before the system has had a chance to accommodate to an increasing number of students who are dropping out and becoming a burden to society. Others believe it is due to incorrect and inappropriate data, believing that the public has been deceived about the severity of this problem and the number of dropouts continues to grow in our society.

Research conducted by Costenbader and Markson (1994) noted that reporting by school administrators was between 51% and 55% of students who dropped out of school had been suspended during their school careers (p. 107). Peterson (2005) points out research that the suspension of students does not deter or change behaviors, but instead puts the student academically further behind and at greater risk of dropping out of school (p. 10).

Once a student decides to drop out of school their life ultimately takes a downward spiral to despair. According to many reports, dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school as well (Donnelly, 1987). These students are now referred to as at-risk students. At-risk students are defined as students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts (Donnelly, 1987). According to Donnelly (1987), at-risk students tend to be low academic achievers who also exhibit low self-worth. She goes on to say that unbalanced numbers of these students are males and minorities, and generally, they come from families of low socioeconomic

status. Students who occupy both low income and minority status are at higher risk, potentially due to the fact that many of them have parents of low educational backgrounds and who may not have high educational expectations for their children. Furthermore, at-risk students tend not to participate in school activities and have a minimal identification with the school. These students have disciplinary and truancy problems that lead to credit problems and they exhibit impulsive behavior and their peer relationships are problematic. Family problems, drug addictions, pregnancies, and other issues prevent them from participating successfully in school (Donnelly, 1987). As they experience failure and fall behind their peers, school becomes a negative environment that reinforces their low self-esteem.

Karen Gavigan and Stephanie Kurtts (2010) identified data that was collected as a result of federal and state legislation. This data was a good indicator of which students were meeting standards and which students were most at risk. For example, the Caucasian House reported that approximately half of our dropouts are Latinos and African American students (CNN.com, as cited in Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010, p. 10). In addition, as a consequence of the large dropout rate, it is estimated that the United States loses almost \$320 billion in potential earnings each year (CNN.com, as cited in Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010, p. 10).

The dropout issue also negatively impacts communities. The loss of productive workers and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care, increased gang memberships, and social services are by-products of the dropout issue. This leads many educators, administrators, parents, and political figures to wonder why so many students decide to make this decision to drop out of school. During their early school years, students have dreams and aspirations that they want to conquer and achieve, but many ultimately decide to put those dreams off and go in another direction. What can we do to increase the number of students

that are deciding to pursue a high school diploma? Once at-risk students have been identified, the challenge is to implement comprehensive school-wide initiatives for keeping them in schools and to close the existing achievement gap. Leadership must be chosen that supports this philosophy.

Civic Enterprises (2006) cited a number of reasons that students drop out of school to include: a lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, feeling unmotivated, academic challenges, the weight of real world events. A report by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provides the following insight as it relates to why students drop out (Bridgeland et al., 2006):

1. Nearly half (47%) said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. These young people reported being bored and disengaged from high school. Almost as many (42%) spent time with people who were not interested in school.
2. Nearly 7 of 10 respondents (69%) said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard, 80% did an hour or less of homework, 80% did one hour or less of work each day in high school, two-thirds would have worked harder if more was demanded of them (higher academic standards and more studying and homework), and 70% were confident they could have graduated if they had tried.
3. Many provided personal reasons for leaving school. A third (32%) said they had to get a job and make money; 26% said they became a parent; and 22% said they had to care for a family member. Many of these young people reported doing reasonably well in school and had a strong belief that they could have graduated if they had

- stayed in school. Also, these students were the most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.
4. About 35% of the students surveyed said that “failing in school” was a major factor for dropping out; three out of ten said they could not keep up with school work; and 43% said they missed too many days of school and could not catch up (Lehr, 2004).
 5. Approximately 32% were required to repeat a grade before dropping out and 29% expressed significant doubts that they could have met their high school’s requirements for graduation even if they had put in the necessary effort.
 6. Ranging from 59% to 65% of respondents missed class often the year before dropping out. Students described a pattern of refusing to wake up, skipping class, and taking three-hour lunches; each absence made them less willing to go back. These students had long periods of absences and were sometimes referred to the truant officer, only to be brought back to the same environment that initially led them to become disengaged.

Another study that provided insight to the silent epidemic is the 2012 High School Dropouts in America survey. This survey was conducted by Harris/Decima, which is a division of the Harris Interactive, on behalf of Everest College. The rationale for conducting this survey was to provide some insight to policymakers and educators in an effort for them to gain a clearer understanding of why students are dropping out and what could be done to re-engage students and increase high school graduation rates nationally. Graduation rates are great indicators of whether the programs implemented in schools are really working (Ryan, 2009). The research provided information from participants ranging in age from 19 to 35. The total number of adults

surveyed was approximately 513 and they responded to the following question: “Which, if any, of the following reasons prevented you from finishing high school?” The following are the responses to that question:

1. Absence of parental support or encouragement (23%)
2. Becoming a parent (21%)
3. Lacking the credits needed to graduate (17%)
4. Missing too many days of school (17%)
5. Failing classes (15%)
6. Uninteresting classes (15%)
7. Experiencing a mental illness, such as depression (15%)
8. Having to work to support family (12%)
9. Bullied and did not want to return (12%)

The survey, which was conducted in October of 2012, identified that 55% of the participants began looking into the GED equivalency program, thus opting to drop out and attain a GED as opposed to graduation from high school and contributing to the dropout rate numbers. Thirty-three percent of the dropouts involved in this study are either employed full time, part time or self-employed; another 38% of the men and 26% of the women were unemployed. The ability to re-engage these participants in education is a daunting task. The 2012 High School Dropouts in America survey also states that many of the participants do not have an interest in returning to the same school and would like some flexible options to obtaining a high school diploma, perhaps alternative school options being able to meet the identified needs (Retrieved from www.nodropouts.org).

In a 2002 study conducted by Algozzine and Algozzine, they established a more definitive definition of dropout in their research study. A dropout is a student that has left the school or the district for one of the following reasons:

1. The student quit school after reaching the compulsory attendance age.
2. The student dropped out of school and the district system prior to reaching 16 or completing tenth grade.
3. A dropout is any person who has legally left school for reasons other than graduating, transferring to another school or comparable program, enrollment in the armed services, marriage, or illness.
4. A dropout is a pupil who leaves school before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another school.

Aiken (2001) conducted research entitled, “The High School and Beyond” and he was able to provide the following insight: (a) Dropouts were also more likely to be older than their peers, to be males rather than females, and enrolled in public school in urban areas in the South or West, (b) Dropouts tended to come from homes with a weaker educational support system. After completing a comparative analysis with dropouts and staying in school the data identified that dropouts: (a) had fewer study aids present in their homes, (b) had less opportunity for non-school related learning, (c) were less likely to have both natural parents living in the home, (d) had mothers with lower levels of formal education, (e) had mothers with lower educational expectations of their offspring, (f) had mothers who were more likely to be working, and (g) had parents who were less likely to be interested in monitoring both in school and out-of-school abilities (Aiken, 2011).

A Nation at Risk, published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), focused on the challenges that confront public education (Labyer, 2004). The publication did a comparative analysis of academic achievement of American students with students in industrialized nations. The study reported and identified that student achievement in the United States was not adequate. Furthermore, approximately 23 million Americans were categorized as functionally illiterate with about 13% of 17 year olds classified as functionally illiterate (Labyer, 2004). The publication noted a major concern in math in science to the point of using the term “Disturbing inadequacies” (Labyer, 2004). The research pinpointed that 35 states involved in the research where graduating students with one course in math and science. The study further goes on to state that student achievement was suffering due to a reduction in standards and expectations. This publication has brought to the forefront the need to focus on students identified as at risk and the need to ensure that the educational needs of each student described are met (Bell, 1993).

Students not performing academically have been a trend in education throughout the establishment of American education. Before the beginning of World War II, the mediocre academic student in America failed to graduate from high school. During this time in American history quite a few teenagers left high school and received employment in both unskilled and/or semi-skilled jobs. Students were able to receive these jobs without a high school diploma to the extent that there were some students that obtained highly skilled jobs (Labyer, 2004).

A study conducted by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the following findings as it pertains to dropouts and completion rates in 2000 (Labyer, 2004):

1. Five out of every 100 young adults enrolled in high school in October 1999 left school before October 2000 without successfully completing a high school program.

- The percentage of young adults who left school each year without successfully completing a high school program decreased from 1972 through 1987. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, the percentage of students dropping out of school each year has stayed relatively unchanged since 1987.
2. In 2000, young adults living in families with incomes in the lowest 20% of all family incomes were six times as likely as their peers from families in the top 20% of the income distribution to drop out of high school.
 3. In 2000, about three-fourths (75.8%) of the current-year dropouts were ages 15 through 17.
 4. Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000, 10th-12th grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program.
 5. In October 2000, some 3.8 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. These youths accounted for 10.9% of the 34.6 million 16 through 24 year olds in the United States in 2000.
 6. The status dropout rate for Caucasians in 2000 remained lower than the rate for Blacks, but over the past three decades the difference between the rates for Caucasians and Blacks has narrowed. However, this narrowing of the gap occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1990, the gap has remained fairly constant. In addition, Hispanic young adults in the United States continued to have a relatively high status dropout rate when compared to Asian/Pacific Islanders, Caucasians, or Blacks.
 7. In 2000, the status dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Islander young adults was lower than for young adults from all other racial/ethnic groups. The status rate for

Asian/Pacific Islanders was 3.8% compared with 27.8% for Hispanics, 13.1% for Blacks, and 6.9% for Caucasians.

Policymakers are examining the dropout rates in the United States. Realizing that if addressed properly and effectively, it can benefit many students as well as their families. There is a direct correlation between the increase in alternative schools and the increase in at-risk students who seem detached from school and high school dropouts. Policymakers in North Carolina have addressed this by establishing a Committee on Dropout Prevention (§ 115C-64.6. Committee on Dropout Prevention). This was established to provide insight and leadership to local school administrative units, schools, agencies, and nonprofits. The committee consisted of approximately fifteen members whose primary objective is to reward dropout prevention grants to deserving schools, agencies, and nonprofits. The decision to reward dropout grants is based on the following criteria:

1. Grants shall be issued in varying amounts up to a maximum of one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars (\$175,000).
2. These grants shall be provided to innovative programs and initiatives that target students at-risk of dropping out of school and that demonstrate the potential to (i) be developed into effective, sustainable, and coordinated dropout prevention and reentry programs in middle schools and high schools and (ii) serve as effective models for other programs.
3. Grants shall be distributed geographically throughout the State and throughout the eight educational districts as defined in G.S. 115C-65. No more than three grants shall be awarded in any one county under this section in a single fiscal year.

4. Grants may be made to local school administrative units, schools, local agencies, or nonprofit organizations. Applications from nonprofits shall be subject to the additional fiscal accountability controls described in G.S. 115C-64.8.
5. Grants shall be to programs and initiatives that hold all students to high academic and personal standards.
6. Grant applications shall state (i) how grant funds will be used, (ii) what, if any, other resources will be used in conjunction with the grant funds, (iii) how the program or initiative will be coordinated to enhance the effectiveness of existing programs, initiatives, or services in the community, and (iv) a process for evaluating the success of the program or initiative.
7. Programs and initiatives that receive grants under this section shall be based on best practices for helping at-risk students achieve successful academic progress, preventing students from dropping out of school, or for increasing the high school completion rate for those students who already have dropped out of school.

School systems in North Carolina are required to report dropout data on all dropouts in grades one and higher to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) annually (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf>).

Students whose whereabouts are unknown must be included in the total count of dropouts for the reporting year for each local education agency (LEA). Each LEA is required to report dropouts by the grade level of their last membership in the reporting year. “For example, an eighth grader who fails to return to school in the fall as a ninth grader is reported at the eighth grade level, not the ninth grade. For this reason, all sending and receiving schools should share information on the status of school leavers during the first twenty-day period and for the remainder of the school

year” (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf>). North Carolina has a very specific definition for dropouts and a method for calculation (see Appendix A).

Each school should maintain a School Leaver Roster (SLR). A copy of the official roster should be located in the school and in the central office. Figure 1 details that dropout rates by race/ethnicity and gender in North Carolina High Schools for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014 (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>).

Dropout totals vary by race/ethnicity and gender in the southeastern District in North Carolina for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014; this district had one of the ten highest dropout rates in the state for 2012-13 (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>) (see Figure 2).

The student dropout count for the county in rural southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and it has fluctuated since that year (see Figure 3).

The ten-year dropout rate of the county in southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and has increased substantially since that year. Based on the data, it is obvious that something needs to change in order to meet the needs of all students and prevent them from dropping out of school (see Figure 4). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported in April of 2014 that the district in Southeastern North Carolina has

one of the top ten highest dropout rates out of the 115 school districts in the state (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>). Assessing and strengthening the strategies used in the alternative learning model may certainly help change this data for the positive in the future. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports the following key terms as it relates to dropouts (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf>):

1. Dropout Referral Law: A state law that requires school systems to refer dropouts to appropriate education alternatives including community colleges. (Refer to G.S. 115C-47)
2. Initial Enrollee: A special status for students who enroll in a school system for the first time and remain in membership for twenty days or less. Students with this status are not included in the dropout count.
3. No Show: Term used to designate a student who is expected to return in the fall, but on day 20 of the new school year is not in membership at the assigned school or in any other approved program. (Students whose whereabouts cannot be determined must be reported as dropouts.)
4. Receiving School: Any school in the LEA to which a student is normally promoted or assigned during or at the end of a school year.
5. Reporting Exemption: Any reason, as stated in the Uniform Dropout Definition, which excludes a student from being reported as a dropout.
6. Reporting Year: A twelve-month period in which data are collected on dropouts. In

North Carolina the reporting year begins on the first day of the school year and runs through the last day of summer vacation.

7. Sending School: The school from which students are transferred or promoted during or at the end of the school year.

Because there is currently a focus on dropout rates and how to decrease them, many strategies obviously revolve around how to provide better support to students. Students of low socio-economic status pose a unique challenge to schools today.

Poverty

There are many urban educators that face an uphill battle in educating children in poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Students in poverty face emotional and physical challenges, health care, poor nutrition, dysfunctional family units, and inner city neighborhoods (Dubow & Luster, 1990). These challenges hamper and prevent students from receiving a quality education. Furthermore, students in poverty are often times placed in adult roles in terms of duties and responsibilities, which impact their academic performance. Some of the roles that students in poverty take on are financial, social, and/or emotional. These students are caught in a cycle of either generational or situational poverty that does not provide an opportunity to escape their situations or challenges. Once a student has identified that there is no way out of this situation they become hopeless and helpless, which takes away the importance of obtaining a quality education. In addition, a major issue that students in poverty face is lack of resources. These issues continue to hamper students in the educational arena more than lack of motivation and attentiveness. These issues lead many educators to place the blame of low student performance on the student, when it is simply that the student's basic needs are not being met. The fact that these needs are not being met lends to inattentiveness, lack of motivation, discipline

and lack of focus. Students placed in this situation are then labeled as slow learners and placed in classes that are low level.

Schools with lower socio-economic students have higher suspension rates (Iselin, 2010). Based upon research by Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997), poor children are more often identified with behavioral and emotional issues compared to their counterparts. Children from low socioeconomic households demonstrated higher incidents of problems with internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Externalized behavior transpired into acts of aggression and violence. Internalized behavior in poor children often results in depression, anxiety, and social issues (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Based upon research by The Committee on School Health (2003), the school population that are habitually suspended from school are the least likely to have adult supervision while they serve the suspension.

Furthermore, many of the youth who suffer from poverty often turn to street gangs as a financial means -- this activity often flows over into the schools and is no longer limited to cities, street gangs are now very active in rural areas as well.

Understanding the History of Street Gangs and How

They are Filling the Need of Adolescents

Street gangs were once only prevalent in inner-city schools, but they now have a presence in rural schools. “In American popular culture, the word ‘rural’ invokes images of sunny farms and little red schoolhouses – while ‘urban’ means drugs, poverty, and crime. But those who know the reality of both worlds will tell you that rural schools face many of the same challenges as their urban counterparts” (Lockette, 2010). On December 13, 2005, Stanley “Tookie” Williams, co-founder of the Crips, was executed. This worldwide news was the main topic of

discussion for many students in both urban and rural schools. Administrators too often attempt to stop gangs due to laws and policies that have been enacted, but this is a difficult task. The goal of administrators, in order to be successful, is to acknowledge and uphold the laws that exist while understanding that the law or policy will not end the problem. Therefore, rather than combating the issue with consequences for breaking the laws and/or policies, administrators should also seek to first understand the policies of the gang and then to manipulate those policies so that these students can begin to understand how to function in society as well as in a public school. Gaining the trust and respect of the students is an important part of this process.

The Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) (2011) has investigated and published several reports on the existence of criminal gangs in North Carolina, since 1997. "Once thought of as a juvenile activity or not significant enough to investigate or report, these activities earned a dominate role in criminal justice activities in the first decade of the 21st century" (GCC, 2011). A codified definition of what constitutes a criminal gang has been established due to events within the past ten years. The major new law enacted for North Carolina was the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act. This law, along with enhancements to existing laws and sanctions has been implemented and a tremendous amount of state and community funding has been expended in efforts to deter, prevent, divert, investigate, and suppress street gang activities (GCC, 2011). These efforts have led to increased communications across jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies, state and federal prosecutors and corrections in order to support the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act (GCC, 2011).

The North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act is found within the North Carolina General Statutes Section 14, Article 13A. The laws in this act provide legal definitions of street gangs and the various criminal offenses deemed as street gang activity. "The North Carolina

Street Gang Suppression Act under article 13A was enacted into law on December 1, 2008, in an effort to protect North Carolinians against gangs and their criminal behavior” (North Carolina Gang Investigators Association, 2009).

The first active gangs in Western civilization are documented to be the existence of gangs of highway robbers in Great Britain during the 17th century (Howell & Moore, 2010). Although one could argue that in the United States, the existence of gangs date back to colonization and the Sons of Liberty, a gang led by Patrick Henry that terrorized the British Army that occupied the American Colonies. However, Powell and Moore (2010) states that the history of street gangs in the United States began around 1783, as the American Revolution concluded.

The south would be the last geographic region of the United States to experience emergence of street gangs, while the rest of the United States would experience this emergence due to increased immigration and poverty (Howell & Moore, 2010). During times of immigration, gangs would be support networks for immigrants, rather than criminal activity being a primary focus (Howell & Moore, 2010). Over time, gangs would evolve into focusing on regional/territorial control with an emphasis on crime, which would evolve over time into the modern day street gangs of today (Howell & Moore, 2010). The North Carolina Gang Awareness Association (NCGIA) identifies the following most common modern gangs in North Carolina and their histories:

1. Bloods: The original Bloods were formed in the early 1970s to provide protection from the Crips street gang in Los Angeles, CA. The United Blood nation (UBN) is an East Coast entity, which started in 1993 in New York City (NCGIA, 2009).
2. Crips: The Crips street gang was established in Los Angeles in the early 1970s by Raymond Lee Washington and Stanley Tookie Williams (NCGIA, 2009).

3. Folk: Folk Nation began as an affiliation of Chicago street gangs in the 1980s that were allies of the Gangster Disciples (NCGIA, 2009).
4. People Nation Gangs: People Nation began as an affiliation of Chicago street gangs in the 1980s. People Nation gangs that are located in North Carolina include Latin Kings and Vice Lords (NCGIA, 2009).
5. Sureños a.k.a SUR 13: The term Sureño (meaning southerner) originated in the 1960s in the California prison system. Throughout the 1990s until present day, as the Hispanic population grew, the Sureños have significantly increased their numbers in North Carolina and is one of the largest gangs in the state (NCGIA, 2009).
6. Latin Kings: The Latin Kings formed in Chicago in the mid-1960s with the goal of helping Puerto Rican immigrants overcome racial prejudice by forming an organization of “Kings” (NCGIA, 2009).
7. 18th Street: The 18th Street Gang was founded by undocumented Mexican immigrants and youths of mixed Mexican ancestry in the 1960s near 18th Street and Union Avenue in the Rampart area of Los Angeles, CA (NCGIA, 2009).
8. MS13: Salvadoran nationals came from war-torn El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s and settled in the Rampart area of Los Angeles, CA, where they integrated with other Hispanic immigrants. This gang is aligned with the Mexican Mafia (NCGIA, 2009).
9. Asian Gangs: The most recognizable Asian Gangs in America are defined as Tiny Rascal Gang, Boys In Style and America are defined as Tiny Rascal Gang, Boys In Style, and Asian Boyz. Asian Gangs are not turf orientated like many other street gangs (NCGIA, 2009).

10. Motorcycle Gangs: An outlaw Motorcycle Gang is an organization whose member uses their motorcycle club as a conduit for criminal enterprises. The three major gangs in North Carolina are the Hell's Angels, Outlaws, and Pagans (NCGIA, 2009).
11. Extremist/Caucasian Supremacists: Extremist and Caucasian Supremacist groups emerged early in American history as proponents of Caucasian racial superiority but became notorious in the 1960s with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood in prison systems (NCGIA, 2009).
12. Hybrid / Non-traditional Gangs: Hybrid gangs are more frequently encountered in most North Carolina communities in which gang activity has emerged since the late 1990s. These gangs may have several of the following characteristics: a mixture of racial/ethnic groups, male and female members, display symbols and graffiti of different gangs, or have members who sometimes switch from one gang to another (NCGIA, 2009).

Along with the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act came creation of agencies to help uphold this law. The NC Gang Investigators Association, N.C.GangNET, Project Safe Neighborhoods, the High Point Model, and other efforts were all designed to confront the issue of criminal gangs and they provide a wealth of data related to gangs (see Figures 24 through 27) (GCC, 2011).

GangNET is a data base for North Carolina which has strengthened the collection meaningful data with the partnership of counties willing to identify and report on the activities of criminal gang members and the gangs they represent (GCC, 2011). Interestingly, not all counties participate in the reporting, to include the Southeastern, North Carolina County being researched

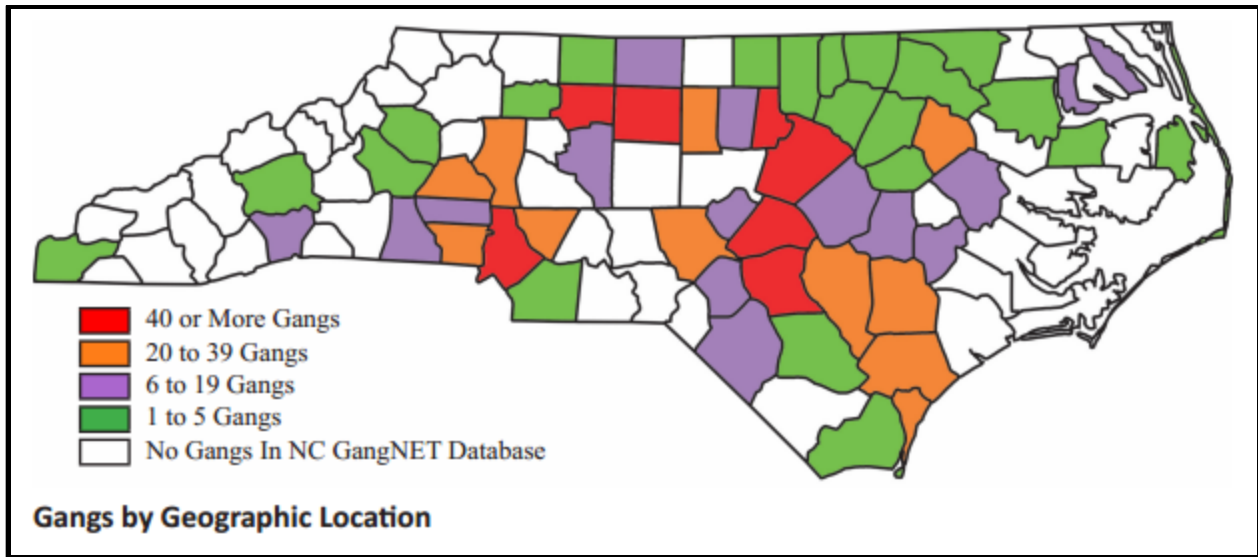


Figure 24. Counties in North Carolina who indicate gang activity (GCC, 2011).

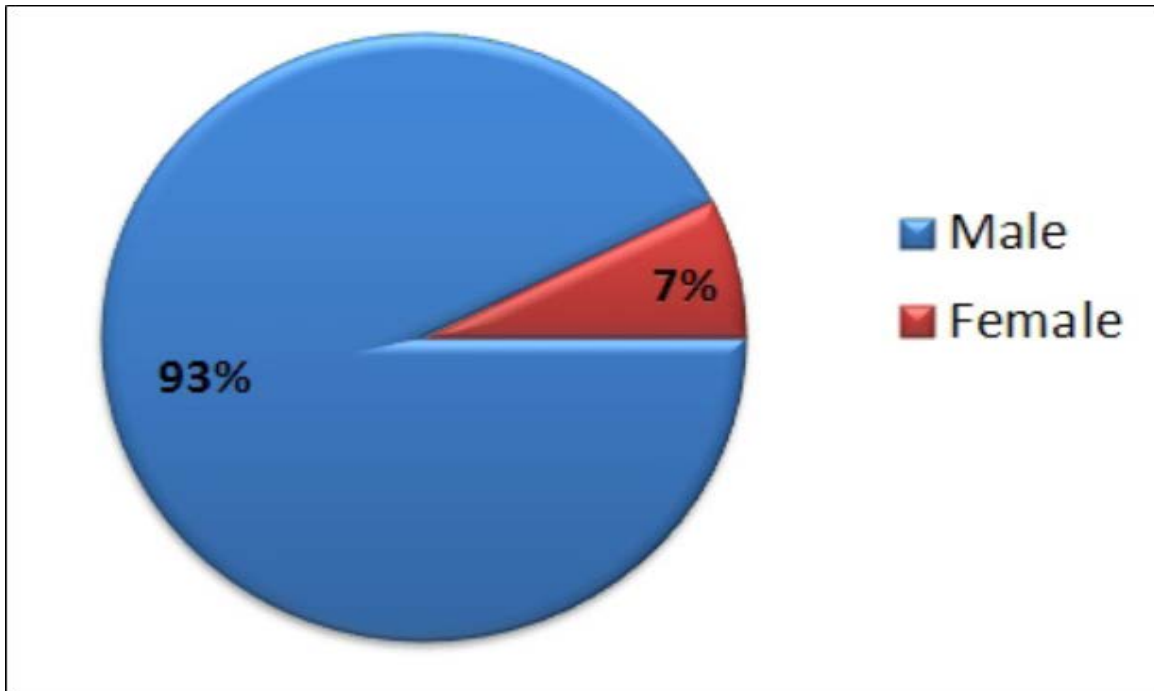


Figure 25. Percentage of male and female gang members in NC (GCC, 2011).

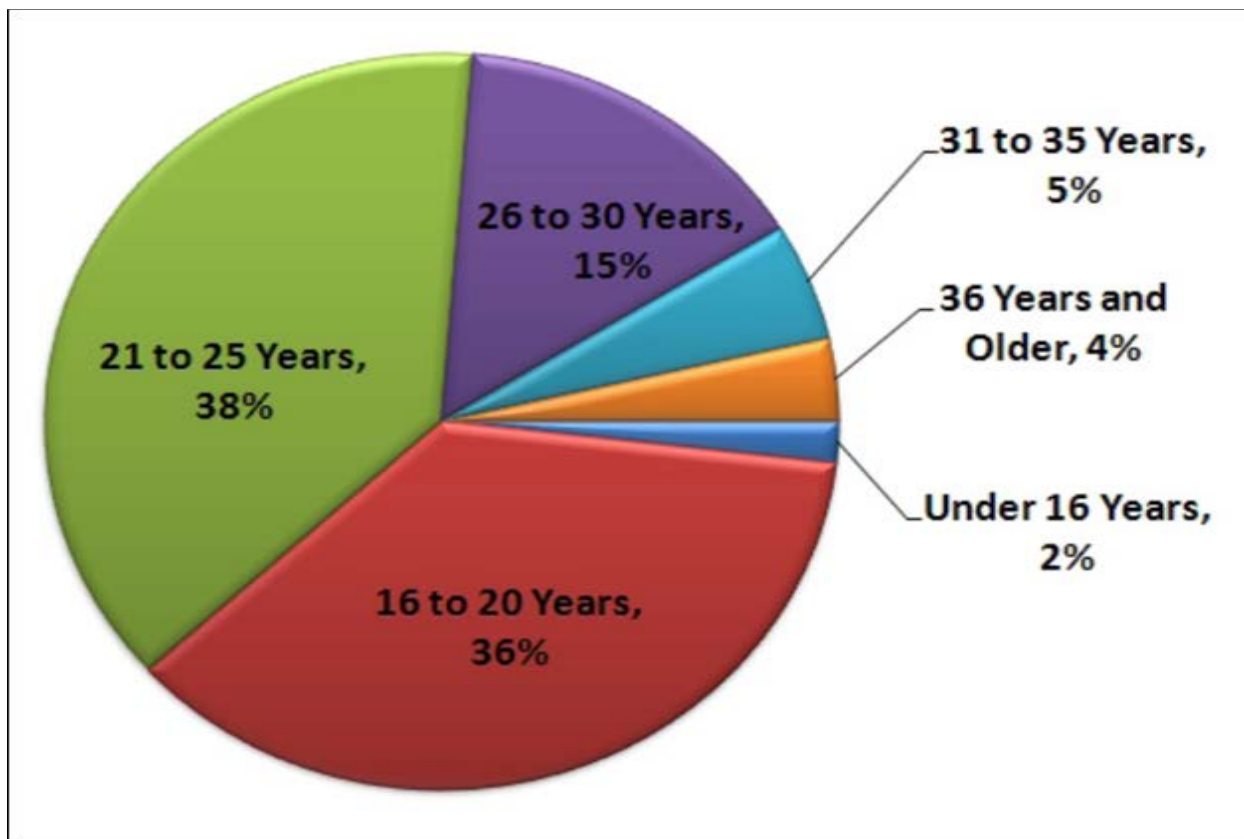


Figure 26. Percentage of ages of gang members in NC (GCC, 2011).

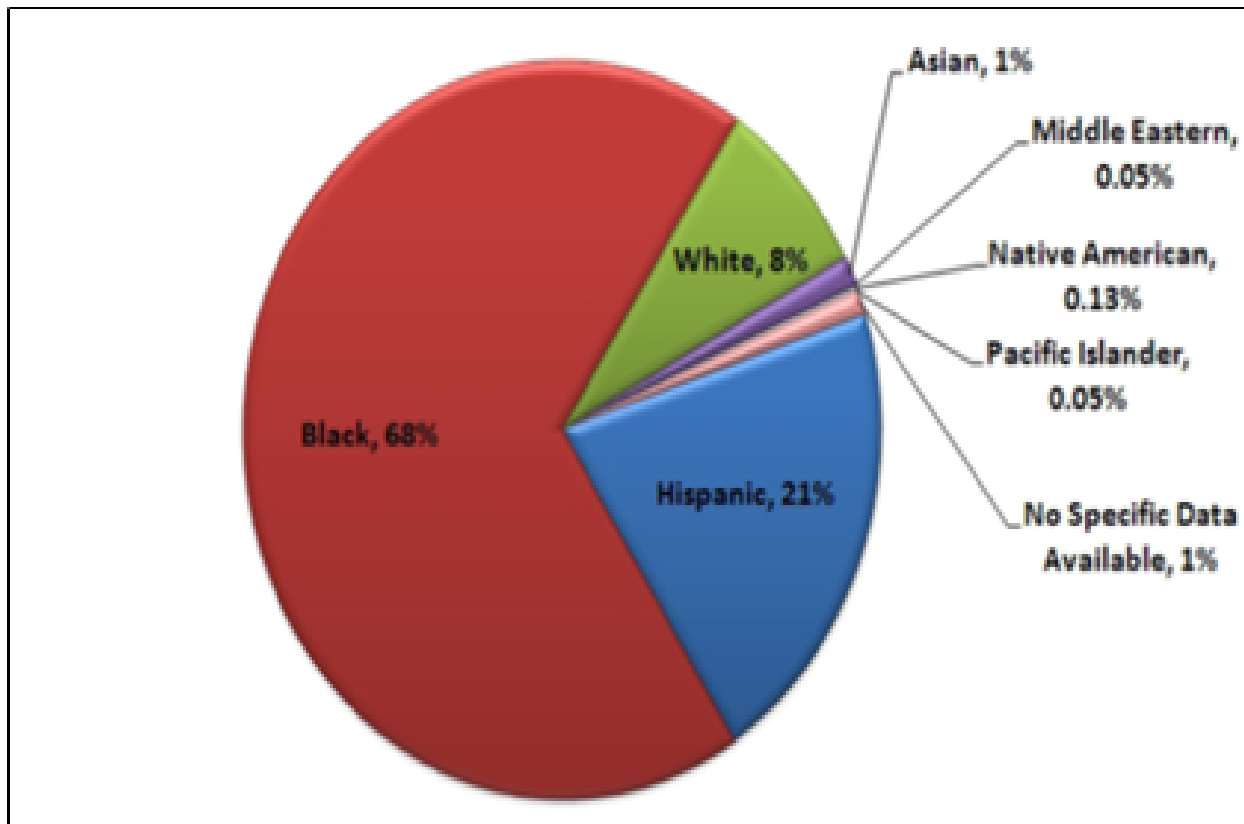


Figure 27. Percentage of ethnic people who make up the total number of NC gang members (GCC, 2011).

in this literature review. “Today data is now available to provide a meaningful snapshot of what the data tells us about criminal gangs and their members in North Carolina” (GCC, 2011).

A review of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center (NCCJAC) reports on the subject reveal that gang activity has been present in North Carolina communities since well before initial research on the topic started back in 1997 and was present in many communities before law enforcement was willing to accept or acknowledge its existence (GCC, 2011). Today, GangNET (2011) provides an information resource to tap in order to obtain a snapshot of gang activity in the state. The picture continues to be a bit fuzzy as there are law enforcement agencies that do not have the personnel resources to enter information into the N.C.GangNET system or do not have investigators trained to recognize and document these types of individuals. This is not due to a lack of available gang training, N.C.GangNET training or access to N.C. GangNET. All of these have been made available to law enforcement via funding from the GCC. Given these caveats, the gang data for the state as of the end of December 2010 is provided below (see Figure 24) (GCC, 2011).

North Carolina officials think that as more agencies are created and people are educated on gangs, the activity will begin leveling off and will hopefully decline in the future; however, the state acknowledges that their findings thus far are more than likely an understatement (GCC, 2011). Educational leaders are one of the many groups who need to familiarize themselves with gang activity in order to combat and reduce the number of juveniles getting involved.

Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randall (2004) point out that when viewing policy through multiple lenses, it is important to understand who participates in the process, the dynamics of the process, and the ways in which the institutions interact with each other as well as various interest groups, the media, and the policy communities (p. 7). Scott Mooneyham (2008), a North

Carolina political journalist, answers many of these questions regarding the enactment of the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act in his article, *How Bad Laws Are Made* (2008).

Mooneyham (2008) stated the following:

“Here are a few ingredients: a gubernatorial election, the slaying of a popular student leader, oodles of law enforcement officers and mayors crowding into the building.”

The soon-to-be law at issue would get tough on criminal gangs. It would make it a felony for anyone to be a member of a “criminal street gang” while participating in “a pattern of criminal street gang activity.” Being an organizer or recruiter of such a gang would be a higher-grade felony. The law defines a “criminal street gang” as any ongoing group or association of three or more people which has as one of “its primary activities the commission of one or more felonies.”

With such remarkable language and circular definitions, college fraternities should hope that North Carolina lawmakers never make hazing a felony. Thinking back to that advice from mamas everywhere, perhaps all of us have more reason than ever to consider with whom we associate (Mooneyham, 2008).

The bill was proposed during an election year involving Charlotte Mayor and Republican gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory and, at the time, Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, his Democratic opponent in the fall (Mooneyham, 2008). This was initially an unfunded mandate with an estimated one-time prison construction costs — to house an additional 370 prisoners a year — at \$26 million with ongoing operational costs to watch over those prisoners would be rising to \$11 million (Mooneyham, 2008). Obviously, those participating in the process, the dynamics of the process, and the ways in which the institutions interact with each other as well as various interest groups, the media, and the policy communities certainly had a huge impact on the way this

would play out, and eventually shape communities, society, and schools. Mooneyham (2008) describes this very well:

“Of course, no politician wants to be accused of being weak on crime. And the slaying of UNC-Chapel Hill's student body president, Eve Carson, only created more impetus for this kind of legislation. Carson's slaying certainly showed deficiencies in the criminal justice system. But considering what's been learned regarding the two people accused of the crime, wouldn't the money be better spent beefing up a broken probation system? And shouldn't North Carolina's criminal laws focus on individual criminal acts, rather than beginning down the slippery slope of criminalizing associations?” (Mooneyham, 2008).

The North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act is a direct result of the advocacy coalition framework (see Figure 28). One could informally define a gang as a group of people who come together for a common purpose. In this sense, the National Rifle Association, Sororities, Fraternities, the Democratic Party, and the Republican Party could all be considered gangs. The proponents of the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression act were most likely members of at least two of the organizations mentioned above. Therefore, the legislation would have to be carefully worded in order not to include those prestigious gangs. While, initially one would think this is discrimination based on racial lines, upon future thought, it is not. This is actually the advocacy coalition framework. Advocacy coalition theorists study the complex processes of discrimination based on social class and the passing of this legislation would play out through formation and change within interest groups that support or resist a policy or program (Cooper et al., p. 26). Any resistance to this law would be what was described above so the carefully wording of the law, using the term “Street Gang,” would help to alleviate any

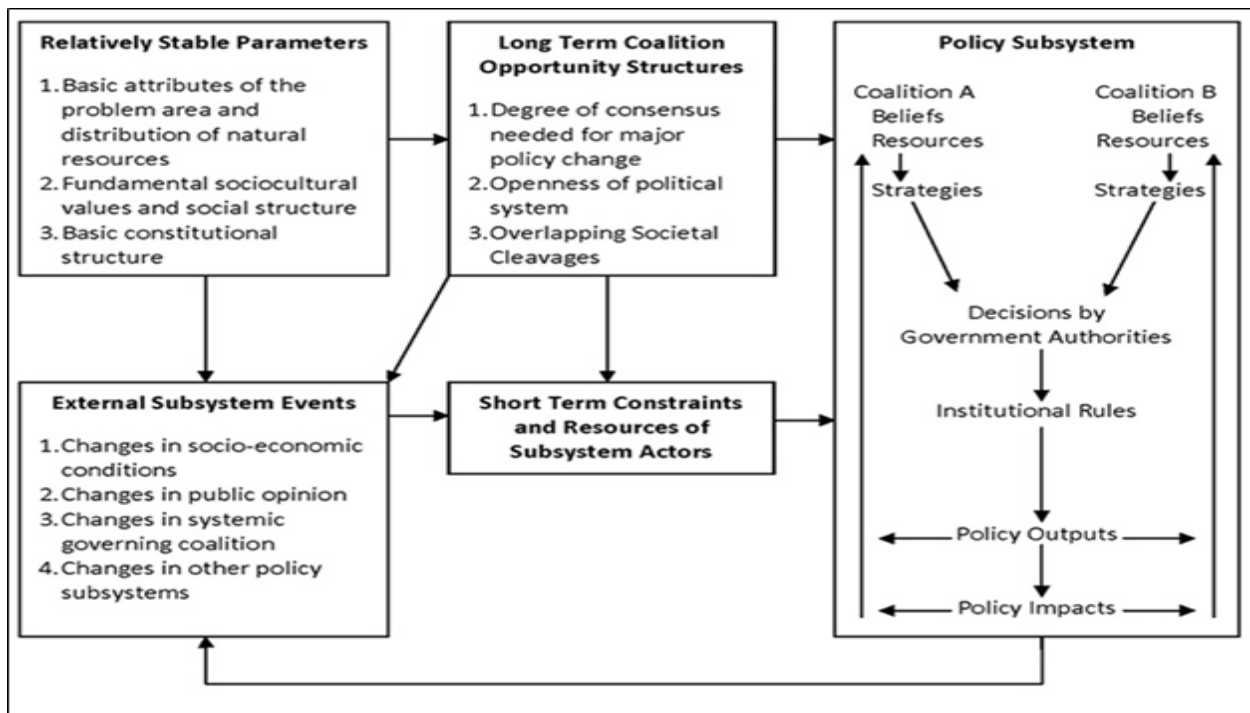


Figure 28. Advocacy Coalition Framework (Cooper, 2004).

resistance based on this. Key individuals from different arenas and institutions interact, from coalitions and factions, fight among themselves, and attempt to hammer out a winning compromise in both the field and the legislature (Cooper, 2004, p. 26). The compromise would be the careful wording of the law and the notion that this law would help all through improving the safety of communities and schools. Safety is always a key policy issue that all can agree on. This agreement on a common key policy is the third component of the advocacy coalition framework (Cooper, 2004, p. 27). The advocates of the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act put safety at the forefront when promoting the passage of this law. However, while designing the policy to suppress gangs, one could ask the question if the policies of the gangs were actually studied to determine why they are effective in empowering youth?

Data Specific to the County in Southeastern North Carolina

On November 4, 2013, the County Sheriff's office announced that they have created a task force that will meet bi-monthly to concentrate efforts in areas identified by residents and sheriff's deputies as high-crime areas, "According to [the captain] of the patrol division at The ... County Sheriff's office, officers will meet monthly to determine which...County neighborhoods need the most attention. He said that so far, the office has targeted Cross Street in..., Riverton Road in ..., Blakely Road in ... and the general area of East" (Retrieved from <http://www.laurinburgexchange.com/news/news/2794570/Task-force-to-target-high-crime-locations>). While gangs were not mentioned, the plan is to eliminate problems within communities that deal with drugs, traffic concerns, suspicious persons, and domestic violence; much of what is involved in street gang areas (Retrieved from <http://www.laurinburgexchange.com/news/news/2794570/Task-force-to-target-high-crime-locations>).

On September 12, 2013, shortly after one of the district's school board members had assumed responsibilities as Chief of Police, the Police Department announced the establishment of its first gang unit. The city council welcomed the creation of this unit (Retrieved from http://laurinburgexchange.com/news/home_top/2481280/City-police-team-to-reclaim-the-street) "According to [Chief of Police] the gang unit will be subject to special training, both in and outside the city limits. In its infancy, the Chief said the gang unit will be especially reliant on information provided by locals. 'We are going to go out to them and ask them what they know,'" the Chief said. "That's part of doing our homework to determine what we're dealing with." Once the gang unit is fully established, it will continue to rely on tips from locals. 'I think the community is very aware of the gang activity that is going on, and that they see it as an issue. So we are going to expect them to approach us whenever there is an issue,' he said. The Chief kept mum on details. 'We have several ways of attempting to address the gang situation ... and that includes (outreach) and trying to make sure they never join gangs to begin with,' the Chief said. 'The gang unit will also work closely with drug enforcement, but I don't want to get too much into that.' The Chief said while prosecuting those involved in gang activity 'will also be a big part of what we do,' the gang unit will be part of a larger vision, the 'effort to restore the image of [the city]'" (Retrieved from http://laurinburgexchange.com/news/home_top/2481280/City-police-team-to-reclaim-the-street).

One does not have to look far to find an example of a minority male of low socioeconomic status who faced many of the challenges in the research and ultimately became a dropout. Furthermore, he went on to become the founder of one of the leading street gangs in the United States.

A Case Study of a Dropout

When students end up dropping out of school they turn to the streets for their learning and to meet their needs not met in the school setting. One insightful example of this is Stanley “Tookie” Williams. “Tookie” developed leadership skills not in the schoolhouse, but in a much more informal manner. He earned the “reputation as a quiet, tough guy who was also crazy” (Williams, 2004, p. 55). His opposition would fear him in his adolescent and teenage years due to his reputation. Although, he would earn the respect of them and his peers; “The moment I stepped to the forefront, it was a position I would not relinquish” (Williams, 2004, p. 60). As an adult, he still carried the same reputation, “They thought exactly what I wanted them to think: ‘Tookie is crazy,’” but he had also earned an intimidating size due to an interest in weightlifting, “At that time I sported a pair of twenty-two-inch arms and a chest over fifty-five inches” (Williams, 2004, p. 219). Tookie was a leader that was feared yet respected, which he referred to several times as “Machiavellian Skills” (Williams, 2004, p. 166). The combination of the crazy image is what caused others to fear him while his massive size is what earned him respect – Tookie believed that as a leader, it is better to be feared than loved. Due to discipline problems in school, he lacked a true formal education as described below:

“Like most of my peers, I stumbled through life ‘dis-educated,’ a very different quality than being merely uneducated. My options and opportunities were restricted. For me there were no Rotary Clubs, yacht clubs, Explores Clubs, boys’ academies, or any other privilege-bound associations. I was afforded equal opportunities on society’s underbelly among street thugs, ex-cons, pimps, gamblers, con men, thieves, prostitutes, and other hustler types. Here, the prevailing motifs were violence and the daily battle to survive. Might was right, always” (Williams, 2004, p. 15).

Throughout his life up to incarceration, Tookie had two main weaknesses. The first was the lack of a formal education and the second was an addiction to drugs during his twenties. Great leaders recognize their weaknesses and improve them; Tookie did so while in prison. While in prison, Tookie began to educate himself, study vocabulary and history, and develop a sense of critical reasoning which helped him to reach his defining moment in his life that he called, “redemption” (Williams, 2004, p. 301). Tookie believed that he could redeem all of the terrible things that he had done which led to his incarceration and at this point, Tookie began to lead for the good, renounce gangs, promote peace, and write children’s books; he knew that street gangs were targeting children and he wanted to reach out to these children and educate them before they were too deep into the street gang life. Throughout his life, his strength was his self-confidence. This strength brought him followers no matter what. Upon renouncing gangs, Tookie stated, “As a result I was able to stand among men from any walk of life, and be confident of who I now define myself to be” (Williams, 2004, p. 293). In addition to this strength was his ability to plan, “Slowly, a strategy began to take shape in my head, a strategy that would form the core of my life for the next few years” (Williams, 2004, p. 55), and his intuition to see ahead and seek out other leaders to bring into his organization and life or as he stated, “become part of my circle” (Williams, 2004, p. 76).

This scenario is all too familiar in the public school system. This is a real life example of a non-traditional learner that is not being reached. Sadly, Stanley Tookie Williams did not turn his life around until he was incarcerated for life and this will be the case for many non-traditional learners if they are not reached during their developmental years, provide an education culture and climate that supports them, and tap their leadership potential before it is too late or it is focused in the direction of negative leadership.

There are too many educational studies devoted to how to stop gangs because the focus is on the policies in place to end gang involvement rather than focusing on the reality. The reality is that in order to stop gangs, one must move children out of their environment or decimate their proven leadership skills that have allowed them to earn rank within the gang. Moving a child from their environment is impossible and attempting to decimate leadership skills only creates more rebellion and misbehavior. Furthermore, the following questions should be asked, “Why are students joining gangs?” and “Are their structures within gangs that could be incorporated into schools that would provide students the same things that they seek in a gang?” Educational leaders must seek the answers to these questions and find ways to empower students, even the gang leaders, and teach them how to use their leadership abilities in a positive manner.

The students of today are much different from those in the past, just as the skills needed to be successful today are far different from the skills needed in the past. If we are not meeting the needs of the students, then they are sure to become lost just as Stanley did. In *The Resilience Revolution*, Larry K. Brendtro and Scott J. Larson (2006) state that, “the core pathology of modern society lies in the loss of a sense of shared community (p. 131). This is the attraction of the gang for many youth who are not positively bonded to caring adults.” The lack of responsible role models who truly care about children is a major societal issue. Brendtro et al. (2002) define it as “Learned Irresponsibility” that is characterized by learned helplessness, the defiant rebellion against authority, lacking a sense of responsibility, and negative peer subcultures, all of which are learned from irresponsible role models (p. 25).

Conclusion

Research on academic structures that successfully serve non-traditional students demonstrates that there are many factors that affect the results of these programs. Since a

significant portion of the student population that end up participating in these programs are at-risk students, external factors that influence their behaviors need to be addressed by school staff. External influences include factors such as community dynamics, poverty, and gang influences. Current research also indicates that the school leadership, culture, use of suspensions, and classroom management greatly influence the school environment and ultimately the educational success of students. Also supported by research is that systemic change can occur if certain changes do occur, with the ultimate goal being increased numbers of students graduating from high school and becoming productive members of communities and society. Many programs and school districts are experimenting with novice programs. This topic would greatly benefit from further research, such as a longitudinal study on the effectiveness of many of these new programs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina. The research design that was utilized for this study was program evaluation. The design of program evaluation is to determine the level of success or failure of programs and to make decisions in regards to such programs (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). According to Lodico et al. (2010), findings in program evaluation are often used for short-term as well as long-term decision-making purposes, these educational programs can be changed or improved based upon the findings of this research. Furthermore, programs could possibly be eliminated if the results are not positive. The validity of this program evaluation is the degree to which evidence and theory support the explanation of test scores (North Carolina Department of Instruction Technical Manual, 2008). The validity yields a confirmation on how well a test achieves its function. Regarding End of Grade (EOG) tests, evidence of validity is provided through content relevance and relationship of test scores to other external variables. The written items on the EOG are reviewed by at least two content area teachers. Furthermore, additional data, to include dropout, graduation, and discipline data are provided by North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, which is reviewed by departmental leads to ensure the validity of the information provided. Lastly, the questions on the survey are aligned with the above-mentioned data to ensure validity.

There is limited research on alternative schools. Researchers have primarily focused on the characteristics of alternative schools and the programs provided to at-risk students. Most of the existing studies have used quasi-experimental designs. According to Lagana et al. (2011), few

researchers have focused on the perceptions of students enrolled in alternative school through the use of qualitative research methodology. Furthermore, there is limited research on the effects of alternative schools on student success as it relates to student performance.

This chapter describes the history of the county studied, the state of the alternative school, the North Carolina accountability data, the research design, the population, the procedures, and the instrumentation.

History of the County

The county being researched is located in southeastern North Carolina east of Interstate 95 and has a very unique history in the fact that from colonization to post-reconstruction, three distinct populations were established and well represented throughout the county: Native American, Black, and Caucasian. Upon the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools remained segregated in this county; it was not until approximately fifteen years following this decision, voluntary desegregation began which would involve desegregating schools for Native Americans, Blacks, and Caucasians. The first integrated class would graduate from the main high school in 1970 (J. W. Locklear, personal communication, December 30, 2013).

The alternative learning school that was studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools; this school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least restrictive environment (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning school was moved to its present location. Previously, this site had been one of the black high schools during segregation, next a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014).

The “at-risk” population has grown and just as with post-reconstruction, three races still

remain to be served (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The need to study and address the needs of at-risk students, especially how their needs can be met by the school district's alternative learning school is delayed but has been identified as a necessity by the school district (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013).

The State of the Alternative Learning School

First, as with many alternative schools, there is a negative connotation associated with the alternative school in southeastern North Carolina, the alternative school that serves the county's middle and high school students. The community's opinion of this school is that it is where students are sent to drop out; this opinion holds true to a certain extent when assessing the graduation rate comparisons of the alternative school with the only high school in the county. Furthermore, the fact that it is a separate alternative school, may add to the stereotype that exists. One could reason that transforming the alternative school into an alternative learning program, essentially a school within a school of the only high school, could have substantially positive effects on the culture and climate of the school and the greater community. This change could benefit the county by potentially keeping students in school and ultimately increasing the graduation rate.

Secondly, the discipline data for students enrolled in the school district, especially the discipline data of minority students, has a direct impact on placement of students at the alternative school, the dropout rate, and the graduation rate. There has been a major population shift in the county during the past ten years, subsequently causing a substantial increase in the minority population; however, there has not been a change in the philosophy of the school system in terms of professional development on how to facilitate instruction for diverse populations or use of effective discipline models. Many of these students are involved in gang

activity, however the county is still in denial about this, which is evident because the county is not a member of the *North Carolina Gang Net Database*. Professional development on how to work with gang populations and how to keep such students in school (increasing the graduation rate and decreasing the dropout rate) needs to occur as well.

Finally, these data are clear for many districts across the state; they are increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates through the use of virtual learning, which directly correlates with seat time. They are also achieving this through reduced credit diplomas and this has a direct correlation to seat time. Therefore, an extensive virtual plan, a reduced elective plan, and appropriate counseling practices for students must be constructed and implemented in order for the data to improve.

The county in southeastern, North Carolina has used the guidelines established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and have established specific board policies as it relates to alternative education (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013). The purpose of the board is to provide a safe and orderly environment at each school using a Behavioral Management Plan, Parental Involvement Plan, and Conflict Resolution Plan.

The alternative learning school has been implemented as an additional option for students that continue to have challenges with behavior management and/or academics in the regular education setting. The following have been identified by the school district as purposes of an alternative education setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting,
2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to

- help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,
3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and
 4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.
 5. Students are typically referred to schools based on their attendance area. Based on law, the board may decide to assign a student to a school outside of their district in an effort for a student to attend a theme/specialized school or for any other reason that the board deems necessary.

Students attending an alternative school may be referred to school via voluntary or involuntary basis. The following in the transfer process for students:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:
 - a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,
 - b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and
 - c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.
2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative learning Program or School.

If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral: this type of referral is encouraged whenever possible and parent/guardian should be a part of this process. Once the transfer is approved the sending and receiving principal must arrange the transfer process. The sending principal must notify superintendent or designee of this transfer.
4. Involuntary Referral
 - a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel,
 - b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational environment in the regular educational setting,
 - c. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue,
 - d. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains, or
 - e. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Before an involuntary transfer is extended, the referring school must document all academic, social, and/or behavioral problems a student is having within the school. Once those areas have been identified, then action steps or consequences must be enforced to correct behavior and/or academic performance within the regular education setting. Once the principal identifies that the steps and/or actions that have been put in place does not correct academic/behavior needs of the student, then the principal must recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred

to the alternative school. The principal must provide the following to support request for alternative placement: (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue; (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable; and (3) documentation of the circumstances that support an involuntary transfer (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina. The following research question was investigated:

1. To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

Overview of Study

The basis of the three-step approach to this study was to examine the impact of a high school (9-12) alternative educational setting on student performance.

Step one consisted of collecting data (achievement, discipline, graduation rate, dropout rate and suspension) that pertains to the state of the alternative learning school in the rural part of southeastern North Carolina. Step two addressed the research question established in this study. Finally, step three addressed the perception of the alternative school and how it impacts student performance.

The research design method used for this case study was descriptive statistics (see

Figure 29). No variables were manipulated. No treatment was applied to the subjects. Any differences in the variable had already occurred prior to research being conducted.

Population and Sample

The data was collected from students of an alternative school in southeastern North Carolina during the 2013-2014 school year. The participants of this study included sixty-seven students assigned to alternative placement in the district's alternative program. The alternative school in this district has the following grade level breakdown: ninth grade- ten students, tenth grade- twelve students, eleventh grade- twenty students and twelfth grade- twenty-five students who were enrolled during the 2013-2014 school year. The students who are eligible to attend the alternative school fall into the following categories: school of choice, alternative placement because of discipline, and students that are suspended for more than five days. This arrangement of students has caused the administration and district to explore and research methods for restructuring this environment. The age of the students range from 12-21. The alternative school serves middle and high school students in the same setting.

The alternative campus is located in the rural Southeastern North Carolina and is approximately fifteen miles from the district office. The staff consists of the following: principal, assistant principal, twelve teachers, school resource officer, guidance counselor, social worker, computer assistant, and an administrative assistant. The number of students at the alternative campus varies throughout the year due to circumstances and/or situations that may arise within the district. The students at the alternative school are taught in a traditional setting that presently is ineffective. The school dropout rate is high, the graduation rate is low, and no improvement is likely to occur unless changes are made to the current educational structure.

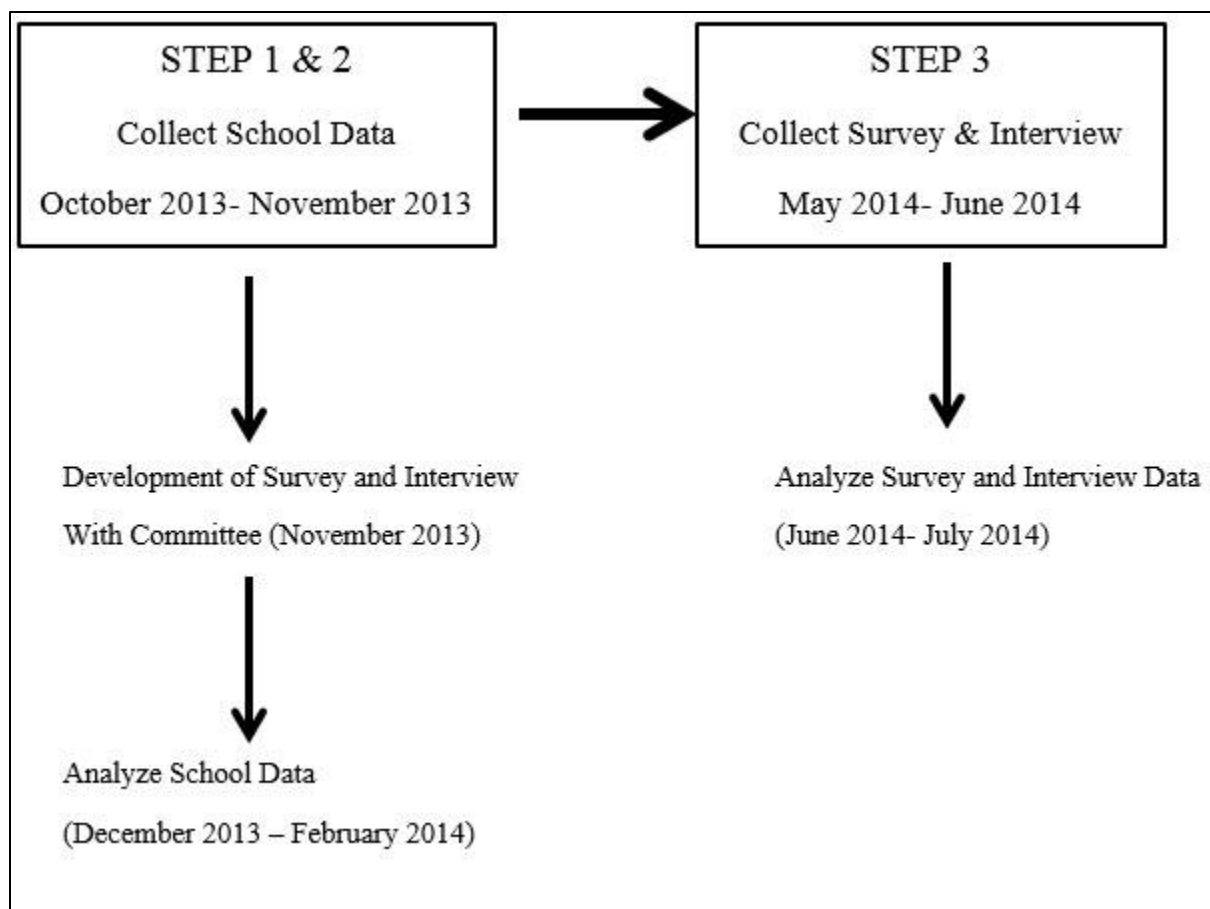


Figure 29. Descriptive statistics flow chart.

Adult and student surveys were used to identify the effectiveness of the alternative school and provide support in answering the research question, by providing information on the perceptions of the alternative program from the perspective of students, parents, administrators and identified community members. These perceptions were not only identified through the use of surveys, but also determined through open-ended structured questionnaires and data.

Instrumentation

This research was conducted using surveys (parent, student, faculty, and staff). Prior to providing surveys to the participants, the surveys were reviewed by three administrators for clarity and understanding of questions. After receiving the feedback from the administrators, the survey questions on the parent, student, and faculty and staff surveys were adjusted accordingly for better understanding. The surveys consisted of Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strong negative impact, 2-negative impact, 3-neutral, 4-positive impact, 5-strong positive impact), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. The student survey comprised 101 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strong negative impact, 2-negative impact, 3-neutral, 4-positive impact, 5-strong positive impact), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Students that were under the age of 18, and had a desire to participate, received parental permission prior to completing the survey. The faculty survey comprised 99 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly

agree), Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strong negative impact, 2-negative impact, 3-neutral, 4-positive impact, 5-strong positive impact), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Parents, students, and faculty/staff members completed their surveys on their personal computer, as well as school computers through Google. Participants were provided a paper copy of the survey if they did not have access to a computer. Faculty/staff, students, and parents completed surveys during Spring semester of 2014.

Open-Ended Structured Questionnaires

Open-ended structured questionnaires were the second instrument used for this research study. Two administrators and one community member were identified to complete open-ended structured questionnaires. The administrators (principal and assistant) responded to sixteen questions through electronic mail. This open-ended structured questionnaire technique allowed the researcher an opportunity to access participants quicker and provided a rich content directory for qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2008). Lastly, it provided the opportunity for the researcher to extend conversation with the participant to extend research and exploration of the central phenomenon of the study. These open-ended structured questionnaires were completed in the Spring of 2014.

Findings from both surveys and open-ended structured questionnaires were used to examine the impact on alternative education on student performance. Furthermore, the findings allowed the researcher to address the following research question:

1. To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

The administrators at the alternative school provided class rosters, handbooks, rules and

procedures, policies, orientation material for students and parents, discipline, student performance data, and faculty/staff schedules.

Procedures

Permission was obtained from the Assistant Superintendent of the school district for the survey and open-ended structured questionnaires to be administered to the students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators at the alternative school. The principal, assistant principal, and community member were contacted to discuss the purpose of the survey and were emailed the questionnaires. The researcher gave surveys to the participants along with a cover letter explaining the procedures for completing the survey. In order to ensure that an individual would not be identified by name in any subsequent reports, strict anonymity was expressed. The survey instruments were collected during follow-up visits to the school. To ensure collection of all surveys, the researcher made follow-up calls and sent various emails. A general coding system was conducted and the information from each survey instrument was transformed into a code and entered into the computer using Google Drive. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies tables, matrices, and graphs were constructed using Google Drive (with T-tests, if results are significant) and composite variables were performed on the survey results. All data was presented exactly as answered by the participants. There were no grammatical corrections made by the researcher.

Analysis of Study

The analysis of the study was based on the following research question:

1. To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

In order to answer the identified research question above, the researcher used a quantitative and

qualitative approach. The surveys created for parents, faculty, and staff fulfilled the quantitative aspect of this study. Open-ended structured questionnaires were used in this research study to gather data from school administrators and a community leader. Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize the data from the surveys. Open-ended structured questionnaire responses were compared with elements that have been identified in the research literature as being vital to the success of alternative education programs.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate educational structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina.

CHAPTER 4: TO WHAT EXTENT IF ANY, WERE THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAM STANDARDS IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTING TO IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in southeastern North Carolina. The ten-year dropout rate remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and has since increased substantially. Based on North Carolina Department of Public Instruction dropout data, it is obvious that something needs to change in order to meet the needs of all students and prevent them from dropping out of school. In April 2014, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that the district in southeastern North Carolina has one of the top ten highest dropout rates out of the 115 school districts in the state (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>). Assessing and strengthening the strategies used in the alternative learning model may certainly help change these data for the positive. This researcher will report the findings of surveys (parent/guardian, student, faculty and school) and open-ended structured questionnaires (school administrators and a community leader) in this section. The area of focus was the organizational structure of an alternative school in southeastern North Carolina, with regard to the implementation of the seven alternative learning program standards as established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

The alternative campus is located in southeastern North Carolina and is approximately fifteen miles from the district office. The staff consists of the following: principal, assistant

principal, twelve teachers, school resource officer, guidance counselor, social worker, computer assistant, and an administrative assistant. The number of students varies throughout the year due to circumstances and/or situations that may arise within the district. The students are taught in a traditional setting presently viewed as ineffective due to the school's dropout and graduation rates. This researcher will attempt to offer research-based strategies to make necessary changes to the current structure in an effort to increase student achievement.

Components of the Academy's organizational structure with regard to the standards of alternative learning programs-- school leadership, culture and climate, professional development, parent/community involvement, curriculum and instruction, and monitoring and assessment-- were analyzed. Using this information, this researcher investigated the following question:

To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

Student Performance Definitions

Student performance is defined as the academic progress of a student. Academic progress has to do with several factors that are defined as terms. The following terms, unless otherwise noted, are taken in part or in their entirety from *Dropout Prevention: Strategies for improving high school graduation rates* (Center for Child and Family Policy Duke University, http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/s_ncfis04report.pdf, 2013).

1. Alternative learning program (ALP): Term used in North Carolina to refer to various kinds of alternative learning environments. North Carolina law requires that every school system have at least one alternative learning program. However, each school can define the target or targets for that program. ALPs serve different populations in different school systems.

2. Alternative schools: Most states have alternative schools to serve students whose needs cannot be met in a regular education, special education, or vocational school. They can take various forms, but generally provide non-traditional education and may serve as an adjunct to a regular school. Although these schools fall outside the categories of regular, special, and vocational education, they may provide similar services or curriculum. Some examples of alternative schools are schools for children with severe disabilities, schools for older students who want to complete their education in the evening, education provided in residential treatment centers for substance abuse, schools for chronic truants, and schools for students with behavioral problems. About 6 percent of schools in the North Carolina Common Core of Data files are alternative schools.
3. At-risk: In the context of dropping out of school, being “at-risk” means a student has one or more factors that have been found to predict a high rate of school failure at some time in the future. This “failure” generally refers to dropping out of high school before graduating, but also can mean being retained within a grade from one year to the next. The risk factors include extreme poverty, having a parent who never finished high school, living in foster care and living in a household where the primary language spoken is not English.
4. Cohort graduation rate (as currently defined in North Carolina): The percentage of ninth graders who graduate from high school four years later. This rate does not account for students graduating in more than four years or those who drop out of school prior to grade nine. The federal rate (also referred to as the averaged freshman graduation rate) focuses on public high school students, as opposed to all high school

- students or the general population, and is designed to provide an estimate of on-time graduation from high school. Thus, it provides a measure of the extent to which public high schools are graduating students within the expected period of four years.
5. Completion rate (high school): The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds who have left high school and earned a high school diploma or the equivalent, including a General Education Development credential.
 6. Drop out (verb): The event of leaving school before graduating. Transferring from a public school to a private school, for example, is not regarded as a dropout event.
 7. Dropout (noun): An individual who is not in school and who is not a graduate. A person who drops out of school may later return and graduate, but is called a “dropout” at the time he/she left school. At the time the person returns to school, he/she is called a “stopout.” Measures to describe these often-complicated behaviors include the event dropout rate (or the closely related school persistence rate), the status dropout rate, and the high school completion rate.
 8. Dropout prevention programs: Interventions designed to increase high school completion rates. These interventions can include techniques such as the use of incentives, counseling or monitoring as the prevention/intervention of choice.
 9. Dropout rate: The percentage of students who drop out of school in a given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
 10. High school completion: An individual has completed high school if he/she has been awarded a high school diploma; in some states, an equivalent credential, such as the General Education Development (GED), counts.
 11. High school dropout rate: Event, status, and cohort dropout rates each provide a

different perspective on the student dropout population.

12. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001: A federal law that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts and schools, as well as providing parents/guardians more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend. This law requires states to recruit and maintain “highly qualified” teachers. The progress of all public school students is measured annually for math and reading in grades three through eight and at least once during high school.
13. Non-traditional student: A public school student with any of the following characteristics: is old for grade, attends school part time, works full time while enrolled, has dependents or is a single parent.
14. Public school: A public institution that provides educational services. The age ranges are defined by state law, but may start as early as age 3 and, for certain populations, last as long as the early 20s. Public schools include regular, special education, vocational/technical, and alternative public charter schools. They also include schools in juvenile detention centers, schools located on military bases and operated by the United States Department of Defense, and the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs- funded schools operated by local public school districts.

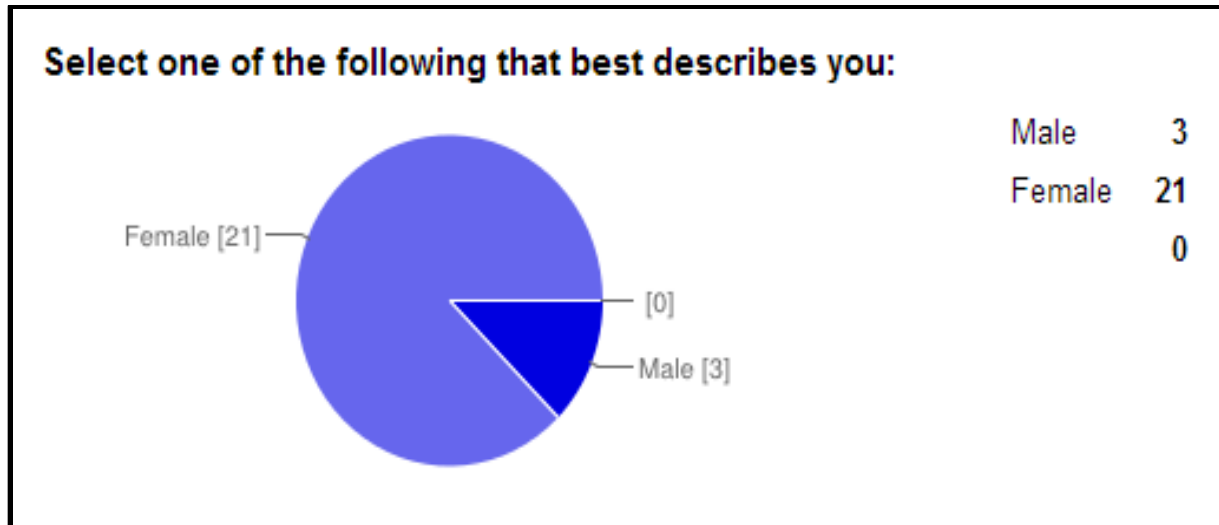
Federal and state statutes generally require that all U.S. residents are entitled to an opportunity for a free and appropriate public education.
15. Retention: Repeating an academic year of school. Students are retained in grade if they are judged not to have the academic or social skills to advance to the next grade.

- Retention is known as “grade retention,” “being held back” or “repeating a grade.”
16. School district: An education agency at the local level that exists primarily to operate public schools or to contract for public school services. Synonyms are “local basic administrative unit” and “local education agency (LEA).”
 17. Social promotion: The practice of promoting students to the next grade, despite low achievement.
 18. Student perception: How the student feels about their home school and/or alternative school based on survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
 19. Transition: Movement from alternative school back to home school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Research and Demographics

This research was conducted using surveys (parent/guardian, student, and faculty) and open-ended structured questionnaires (school administrators and a community leader). Prior to providing surveys to the participants, the surveys were reviewed by an expert panel for content validity. After receiving feedback, the survey questions on the parent/guardian, student, and faculty surveys were adjusted accordingly as recommended by the expert panel.

The parent/guardian survey consisted of 83 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strong negative impact, 2-negative impact, 3-neutral, 4-positive impact, 5-strong positive impact), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. 69% (24 out of 35) parent/guardians responded to the survey, 12.5% (3 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents were male and 87.5% (21 out of 24) were female (see Figure 30).



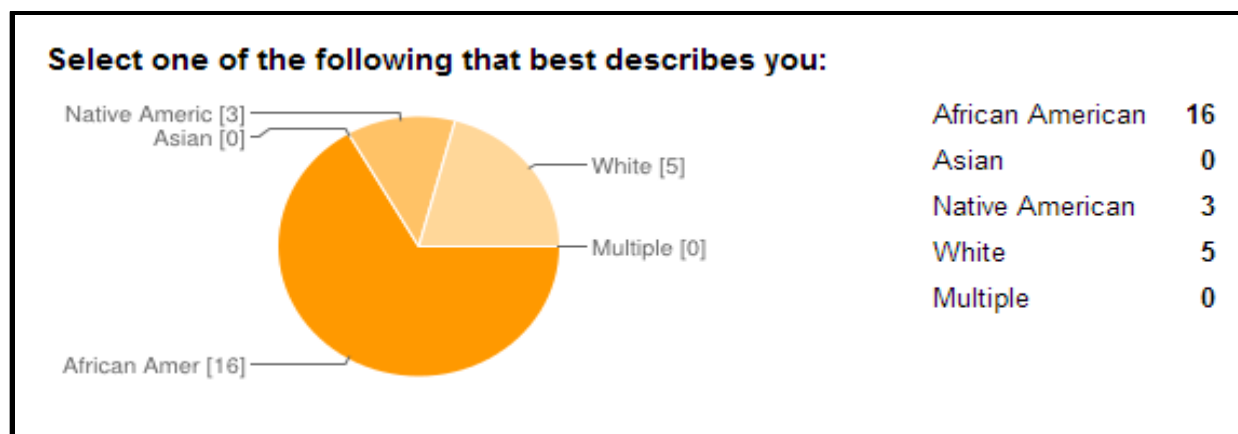
Note. Twelve and a half percent of parent/guardian respondents were male and 87.5% were female.

Figure 30. Gender of parent or guardian.

The majority of parent/guardian respondents were African American at 67% (16 out of 24); 21% (5 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents were Caucasian, and 12% (3 out of 24) were Native American (see Figure 31).

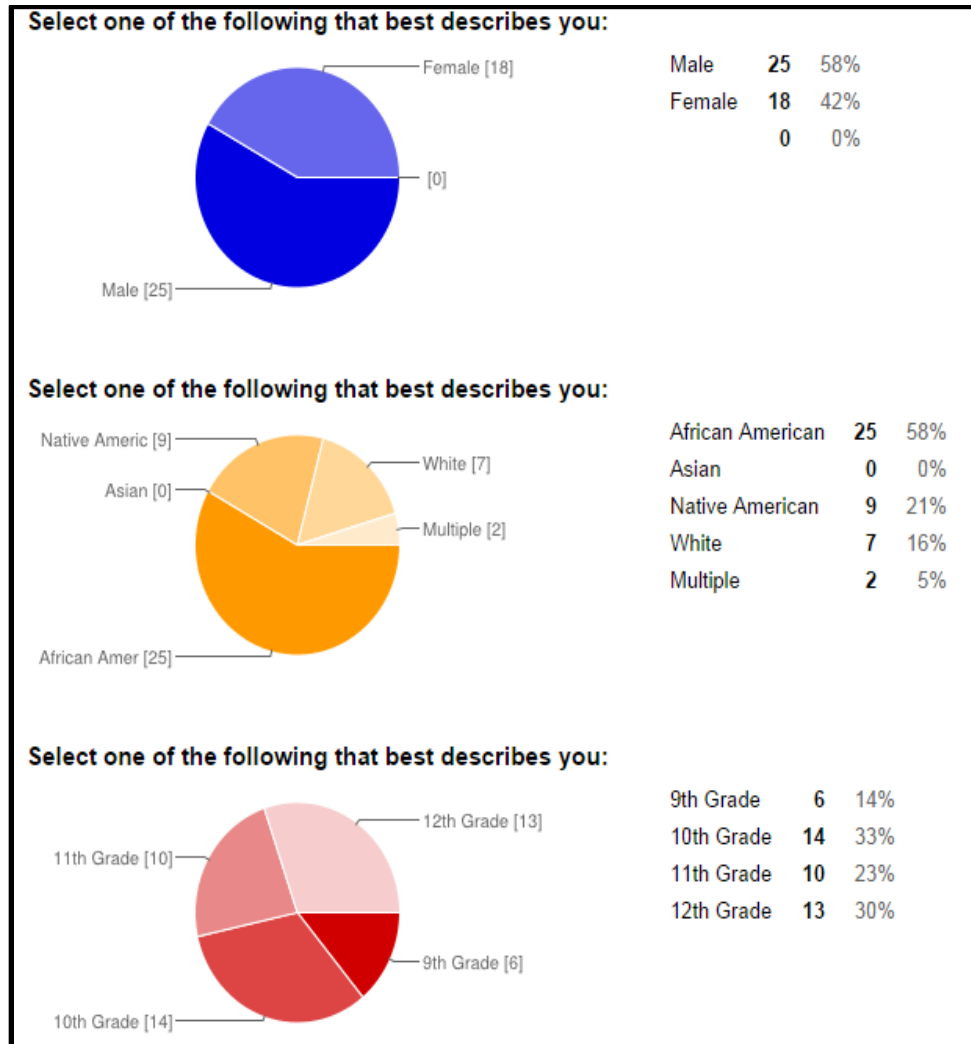
The student survey consisted of 101 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strong negative impact, 2-negative impact, 3-neutral, 4-positive impact, 5-strong positive impact), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Students under the age of 18, and having a desire to participate, received written parental permission prior to completing the survey. The investigator provided the parent a consent form that was signed and returned prior to the minor subjects' completion of the survey. Sixty-four percent of students responded to the survey (43 out of 67) (see Figure 32). Forty-two percent (18 out of 43) of student respondents were female and 58% (25 out of 43) were male. Fifty-eight percent (25 out of 43) of student respondents were African American, 21% (9 out of 43) were Native American, and 16% (7 out of 43) were Caucasian. The grade range at the school was from 9th to 12th grade with the highest percentage of student respondents in grades 10 and 12 followed by grades 11 and 9. Lastly, the majority of student respondents were in the range of 15-18 years of age. Thirty-three percent (14 out of 43) of student respondents were in the 10th grade, 30% (13 out of 43) were in the 12th grade, 23% (10 out of 43) were in the 11th grade, and 14% (6 out of 43) were in the 9th grade.

The faculty survey consisted of 99 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strong negative impact, 2-negative



Note. Sixty-seven percent of parent/guardian respondents were African American, 21% were Caucasian and 12% were Native American.

Figure 31. Ethnicities of parents/guardians.

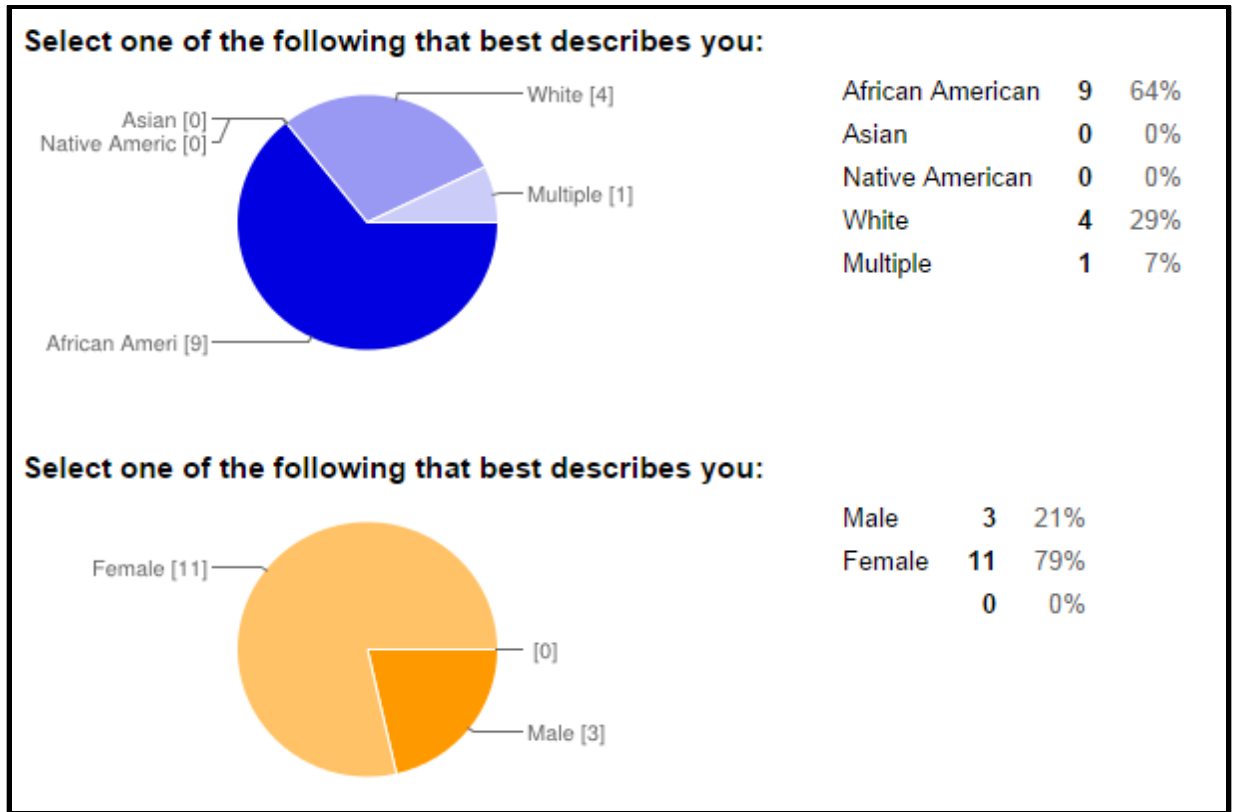


Note. Fifty-eight percent of student respondents indicate that they are male, 42% female -- 58% of student respondents indicate that they are African American, 21% indicate that they are Native American, 16% indicate that they are Caucasian, and 5% indicate that they are multi-racial -- 33% of student respondents are in the tenth grade, 30% are in the twelfth grade, 23% are in the eleventh grade and 14% are in the ninth grade.

Figure 32. Student demographics.

impact, 3-neutral, 4-positive impact, 5-strong positive impact), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Faculty members completed their surveys on their personal computers, as well as school computers through Google. Sixty-seven percent (14 out of 21) of faculty members responded to the survey. Sixty-four percent (9 out of 14) of faculty respondents are African American, 29% (4 out of 14) were Caucasian, and 7% (1 out of 14) were multiple races. Seventy-nine percent (11 out of 14) were female and 21% (3 out of 14) were male (see Figure 33).

Open-ended structured questionnaires were the second technique used for this research study, where two administrators and one community leader were the recipients. The school level administrators (principal and assistant principal) responded to sixteen questions. The questions allowed the administrators to give the history of the southeastern North Carolina county and express their perceptions on various school-related topics, to include alternative schools (with an emphasis on the Academy being studied), non-traditional students, and organizational structures of schools. The questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions in which the individuals responded via computers and the Internet. It provided a look at the organization of the school and the county as well as the perceptions of the subjects in relation to the effectiveness of the school. The responses provided the researcher a more detailed account of the organizational structure of the school, the impact of the school on the students being served from the lens of the administrators, member of the community, and the perceptions of the school from their individual perspectives; these responses were recorded and reported in this document with no edits.



Note. Sixty-four percent of faculty respondents are African American, 29% are Caucasian, and 7% are multiple races; 79% are female and 21% are male.

Figure 33. Faculty demographics.

One participant, an administrator at the Academy, reported that the alternative school is “great.” It is the respondent’s belief that “it has been great for the school system.” The respondent also stated that the principal was effective because “he knows and understands the students and the make-up of the family. He has a staff that he is willing to work with and help in all ways of the job.” The respondent also felt that the Academy would continue to help the LEA with the addition of a virtual school (see Figure 34). Components of the Academy’s organizational structure were described from the lens of another administrator. The respondent expressed that the school’s mission is “to equip students with necessary skills to improve academic performance and behaviors so that they may function successfully in school and the community.” The respondent also stated that the Academy offers a variety of services to students, especially those students who are at-risk-- to include “core academic instruction and a 1:5 teacher-student ratio.” “Students are assigned to the Academy based of student negative behaviors at parent school; poor attendance and poor academic record.” The respondent maintained that, “Yes, the Academy enrolls students who are at-risk of failing and/or dropping out of school.” There is a guidance counselor in place to provide “support and assistance to students who are nearing graduation” (see Figure 35).

The community member’s perception of the Academy was that it “meets the needs of a select group of [the] student body,” needs to be “more than a holding cell” and should focus more on academics, providing support as needed. The respondent felt that it “meets the needs of a population that traditional school is unable to serve effectively.” It also appeared “to help with dropout rate, little with academic growth and graduation rate.

Email responses from a current administrator of the alternative school:

1. What can you tell me about the history of the county and how has the county changed over the past 10 years?

When I moved to the county in 1988, there were so many industries for people in the county to work for and earn a really good living. Then the recession hit and it hit the county hard. First it was [local industry] that left, then [local industry], a lot of others ones, but with [local industry] closed down, the county almost closed down. Now the county has the highest unemployment rate and the highest tax rate in the state.

2. What opportunities exist for the youth in the County?

The county Parks and Recreation has always been the life line for the youth. It operates year round giving the youth many things to do. One major problem with P&R is that the budget and staff have been cut due to the budget.

3. Why has there been an increase in gang involvement in the county and how do you think this can be improved?

When gangs and gang members began to move in from surrounding counties, the county closed their eyes to it and said "We are the county, we don't have gangs and they aren't coming here. Now they are there and it is a big problem. In order to improve this, the county will have to become more pro-active and more involved in the youth life's.

4. Do you think that there are other services or opportunities that the county or school system could offer to youth?

Yes. A few years ago, YMCA tried to come in but the county would not let me. Why wouldn't they, because they didn't want to build a pool where "the black" children would be swimming with "the Caucasian" children. A truly bad and stupid mistake on the county's part.

5. What is your opinion of the Academy?

It is great!!! The Superintendent at that time, was one of the first in the state to come up with this kind of Academy, it has been great for the school system.

6. When you hear the term "alternative school" what comes to mind?

It can mean two things.....a school for students with special needs, i.e., "at-risk" students, potential drop-outs, pregnant teens, returning students, or a school for at-risk students.

7. When you hear the term "non-traditional school" what comes to mind?

Nontraditional schools include everything other than the traditional school model.

A charter school is a nontraditional approach to schooling proposed by individuals or groups to the local school district. It is a new approach to organizing and operating a school.

8. If you could design the "perfect" school for youth who may not find the "traditional" school setting to be the best fit, what would it be? (describe location, staff, services, hours, curriculum offered, etc...)

A charter school is approved to operate outside the general rules for public schools and provide service to students but would not be restricted to the structural constraints that public schools have. A charter school might not have to follow bargaining laws requiring negotiations with representative teacher groups; a required number of hours and days in school; teacher and staff certification requirements; state or local graduation requirements; and some testing requirements. Charter schools can benefit students because they offer new and different ideas to address a particular population of students or a particular level of learning. Also, charter schools do not have the same regulations that apply to public schools.

9. What is your perception of the Academy?

The Principal is the best person for the job at the Academy. He knows and understands the students and the make-up of the family. He has a staff that he is willing to work with and help in all ways of the job. The Academy will only continue to help the school system. With VIRTUAL SCHOOL coming to the Academy, better things will happen for the school system.

Figure 34. Open-ended structured questionnaire of a current administrator at the Academy.

Email responses from a current administrator of the alternative school:

A. Describe the mission and goals of the Academy? To equip students with necessary skills to improve academic performance and behaviors so that they may function successfully in school and the community.

B. Describe the services that the Academy provides for students? Core academic instruction; small school environment; 1:5 teacher-student ratio; on-line classes; health and physical education classes.

C. Describe the criteria for assignment to the program? Students are assigned to the Academy based of student negative behaviors at parent school; poor attendance and poor academic record.

D. Describe the process for ensuring that the assignment is appropriate for the student? Students are afforded due process with requisite hearings and appeals before student placement at the Academy.

E. Describe the process for the input and participation of parents in the exit/transition decision? Parents are required to participate in the orientation of students during intake at the Academy; additionally parents participate in the exit transition meetings.

F. Describe the process for ensuring a rigorous and high quality program? The Academy is guided and mentored by the district's Central Office Staff and the NC Department of Public Instruction.

G. Does the Academy serve students at any grade level? If so, what grade level do you presently have attending your school? Grades 6-12.

H. Do you serve students who demonstrate the following behaviors: academic, conduct, drop-out, suspension that put them at significant risk of school failure? Yes, the Academy enrolls students who are at-risk of failing and/or dropping out of school.

I. Does the Academy serve students selected by established procedures? The Academy in concert with the main high school enrolls and exit students based of established school board policies.

J. Provide the primary instruction for students during the enrollment period. Students are enrolled in 4 blocked courses, usually two academic and two elective courses per semester. Instruction is teacher led and teacher directed.

K. Does the Academy offer course and class credit for attendance and grades in each assigned course? Please explain your process. Students who are earning a passing grade in a course will receive 1 academic credit for that course. A student who absents himself or herself for more than six school days will not receive academic credit for that course.

L. What type of assistance is provided for students in meeting the requirements for grade promotion and graduation? The Academy has one guidance counselor who provides support and assistance to students who are nearing graduation.

M. Does the Academy participate in the State Accountability and Testing program as prescribed by law?

The Academy participates in the state accountability system as other high schools. We are required to meet the accountably requirements and we also participate in the local options.

N. Is student attendance required at the Academy? Yes

O. Are all employees highly qualified instructors and do they meet the standard of Accomplished in each area of teacher evaluation. Yes

P. Does the Academy serve students for a specific and extended period of time i.e., one grading period, quarterly, semester, etc. (This language does not include in-school suspension and short-term suspension, after/before school, tutorial, or drop-in programs. All students are required to spend one complete semester at the Academy before returning to parent school.

Figure 35. Open-ended structured questionnaire of a current administrator at the Academy.

The respondent indicated that the school could offer additional resources to students, to include collaboration “with community resources, law enforcement, mental health facilities, and juvenile services.” The respondent also stated that the “perfect” school for students who did not deem the traditional setting a good fit would be a “separate setting in the center of the district” that offers trades (vocational opportunities), has flexible hours, a licensed therapist, and a comprehensive curriculum. The school would also have well trained staff “that want to serve this population, with high expectations, knowledge of effective strategies that work, use of technology” (see Figure 36).

Background Information & Data

There are two main issues concerning the county in southeastern, North Carolina and the alternative school that serves its students: (1) a negative connotation and (2) a population shift without a change in philosophy. First, as with many alternative schools, a negative connotation exists with the alternative school in southeastern, North Carolina that serves the county’s middle and high school students. The community’s opinion of this school was that it is where students are sent to drop out. When asked if the school district cares about the school, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 12% (3 out of 24) “strongly disagree,” 17% (4 out of 24) “disagree,” 42% (10 out of 24) neutral, 29% (7 out of 24) “agree,” and 0% (0 out of 24) “strongly agree” (see Figure 37).

It appears that the educational system has resorted to using alternative schools as a warehouse or “dumping ground” for underachieving students who exhibit inappropriate behaviors in traditional school settings (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). When asked if the school is a “dumping ground” for bad students, parent/guardian respondents were in the following

Email response from a community member of the county being studied:

1. What can you tell me about the history of the county and how has the county changed over the past 10 years?

Less industry
Higher unemployment
Higher Poverty
Higher gang presence
School system wide
One era; Schools from around the state were visiting us, (at all levels), to see strategies, that were in place, as to how we were growing academically.

2. What opportunities exist for the youth in the county?

Few opportunities exist with workforce low.
However, youth tend to participate in school programs and parks and recreation activities.

3. Why has there been an increase in gang involvement in the County and how do you think this can be improved?

Increase in gangs; with youth people seeking a sense of belonging and acceptance.
This also, represents a further breakdown in family structure, Poverty and drugs.
I believe we have given a lot of lip service to this, but little true action.
I think this can be improved by offering several other opportunities and / or activities for youth to become involved.
There is no gang prevention program, even though we have SRO on staff.
Also, make it clear to youth and adults, what will be acceptable.

4. Do you think that there are other services or opportunities that the county or school system could offer to youth?

Yes, other activities, like public swimming, open gyms at school sites and recreation center
(Focus age groups specific days), boys and girls clubs.
Collaborate with community resources, law enforcement, mental health facilities, and juvenile services.

5. What is your opinion of the Academy?

The Academy meets the needs of a population that traditional school is unable to serve effectively.
Appear to help with dropout rate, little with academic growth and graduation rate.

6. When you hear the term "alternative school" what comes to mind?

Not able to deal or adjust to traditional school, for whatever reason. Maybe, another chance.

7. When you hear the term "non-traditional school" what comes to mind?

Different school, but traditional school does not meet their needs. Maybe, online, or virtual learning.

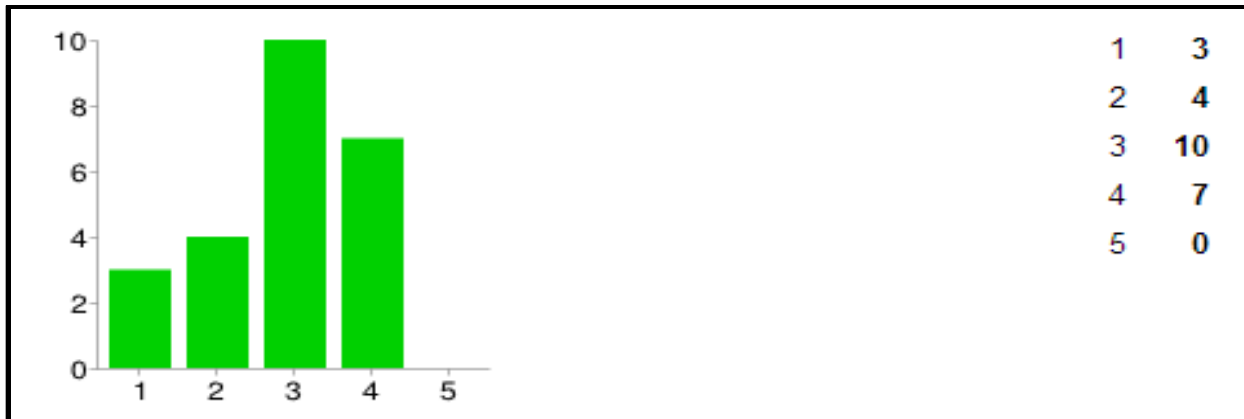
8. If you could design the "perfect" school for youth who may not find the "traditional" school setting to be the best fit, what would it be? (Describe location, staff, services, hours, curriculum offered, etc...)

Separate location; in center of district.
Staff that want to serve this population, with high expectations, knowledge of effective strategies that work, use of technology.
Offer trades(barbering, construction, cosmetology)
Licensed therapist
On the job training (seeking employment)
Staff trained with dealing and meeting special needs of this population.
All services offered at traditional school should be offered. (It is a small school, like Pate, but students still deserve same offering of services.
Flexible hours for students 8-8
Self-pace with close monitoring of pace
Full curriculum, comprehensive middle/ high school

9. What is your perception of the Academy?

Meet the needs of a select group of our student body.
Need to be more than a holding cell.
More focus on academics, with necessary support.
My views have been ,students assigned rarely return to traditional setting
The poor you will have always (but it is how we treat them that make the difference).

Figure 36. Open-ended structured questionnaire of a community member.



Note. When asked if the school district cares about the school, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 12% “strongly disagree,” 17% “agree,” 42% neutral, 29% “agree,” and 0% “strongly agree.”

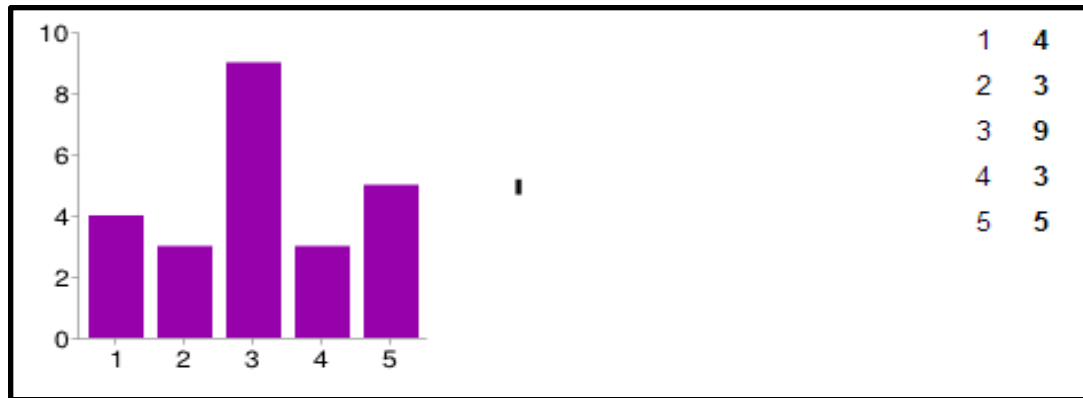
Figure 37. Parent/guardian’s thoughts on whether the school district cares about the Academy.

categories: 17% (4 out of 24) “strongly disagree,” 12% (3 out of 24) “disagree,” 38% (9 out of 24) neutral, 12% (3 out of 24) “agree,” and 21% (5 out of 24) “strongly agree” (see Figure 38).

Fifty percent (12 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents stated that they sometimes hear their child speak negatively about the school, 39% (9 out of 24) stated “never,” and 12% (3 out of 24) stated “always” (see Figure 39). Forty-six percent (11 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents stated that they sometimes hear negative comments about the school in the community, 42% (10 out of 24) stated that they never hear negative comments, and 12% (3 out of 24) stated that they always hear negative comments (see Figure 40).

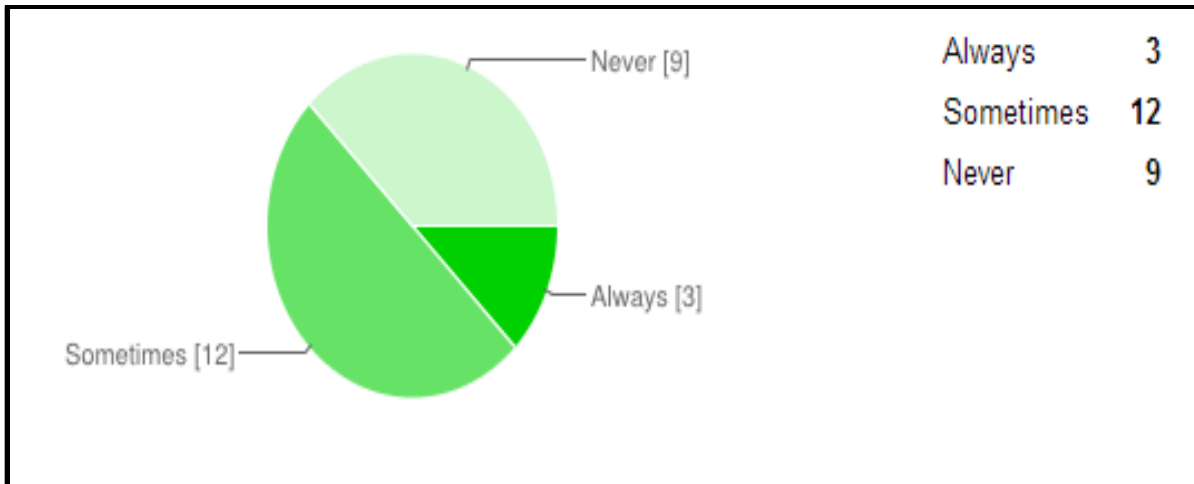
These negative opinions are justified when assessing the graduation rate comparisons of the alternative school with the only high school in the county. The ten-year dropout rate for the school district in southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and has increased substantially since. Based on the data, it is obvious that something needs to change in order to meet the needs of all students and prevent them from dropping out of school. In April 2014, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that the district in southeastern North Carolina has one of the top ten highest dropout rates out of the 115 school districts in the state (Retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf>).

Furthermore, the fact that it is a separate alternative school adds to the stereotype that exists. When asked if the school should become a program and not a school, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 7% (1 out of 14) “strongly disagree,” 7% (1 out of 14) “disagree,” 29% (4 out of 14) neutral, 21% (3 out of 14) “agree,” and 36% (5 out of 14) “strongly agree” (see Figure 41). North Carolina school districts may have alternative learning



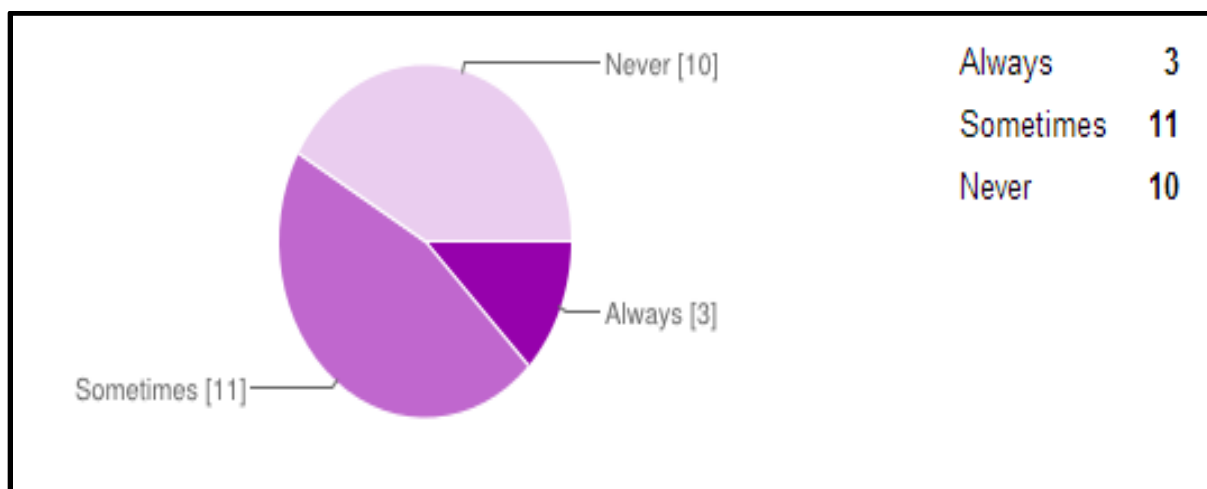
Note. When asked if the school is a “dumping ground” for bad students, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 17% “strongly disagree,” 12% “disagree,” 38% neutral, 12% “agree,” and 21% “strongly agree.”

Figure 38. Parent/guardian’s thoughts on the Academy being a “dumping ground.”



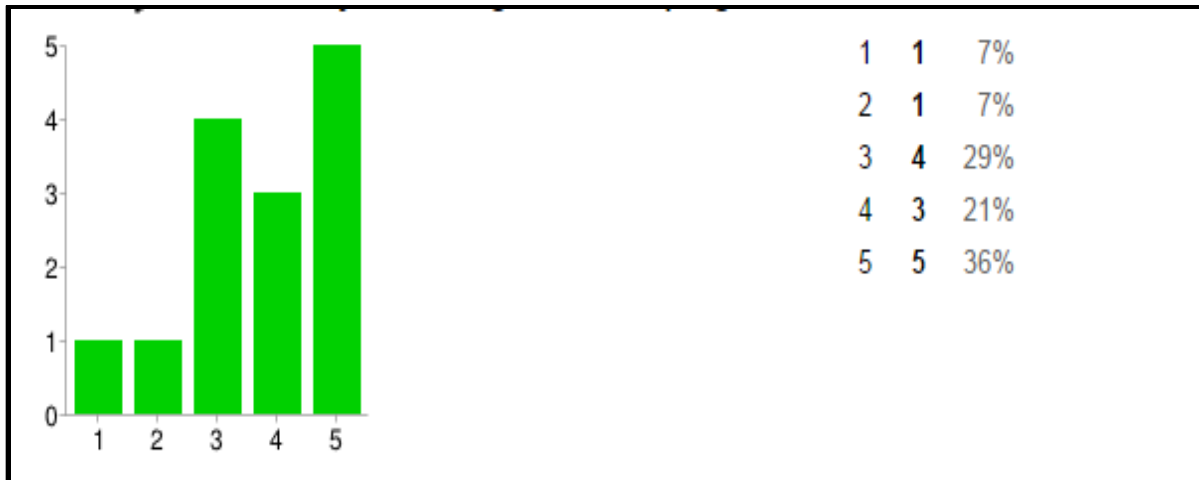
Note. Fifty percent of parent/guardian respondents stated that they sometimes hear their child speak negatively about the school, 39% stated never, and 12% stated always.

Figure 39. Parent/guardian's thoughts on children communicating negatively about the Academy.



Note. Forty-six percent of parent/guardian respondents sometimes hear negative comments about the Academy in the community, 42% never hear comments, and 13% always hear comments.

Figure 40. Parent/guardian's thoughts on negative comments about the Academy in community.



Note. When asked if the school should become a program and not a school, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 7% “strongly disagree,” 7% “disagree,” 29% neutral, 21% “agree,” and 36% “strongly agree.”

Figure 41. Faculty response to the school becoming a program and not a school.

programs or alternative learning schools. The look of an alternative program can be as unique as its student population. Alternative Instructional Model (AIM), an alternative program in New York, allows students to remain connected to their home school, thus providing the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Individualized instruction, continuous improvement, scheduling flexibility, community service projects, and an environment rich in student resources have each proven to be valuable elements of successful alternative learning programs to increase student success (Grobe, 2002).

The alternative learning school that was studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools. This school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least environment restrictive (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning program was moved to its present location which had previously been one of the black high schools during segregation, next a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014). There has been a major population shift in the county during the past ten years, subsequently causing a substantial increase in the minority population. However, there has not been a change in the philosophy of the school system in terms of professional development on how to facilitate instruction for diverse populations or use of effective discipline models (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013).

Organizational Structure

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has determined that each alternative learning program must have seven standards in operation. In May 2005, *House Bill 1076* ordered the State Board to adopt standards, rather than policies and standards, for alternative

learning programs. These standards serve as the foundation for successful educational programs based on research and historical data gleaned from functioning alternative programs throughout the country. The seven standards are:

1. Clear mission
2. Leadership
3. Culture and climate
4. Professional Development
5. Parent/Community involvement
6. Curriculum and Instruction
7. Monitoring and Assessment

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has taken the seven standards and aligned them with legislation adopted in 1999, G.S. 115C-47(32a). These standards are the foundation upon which the alternative school's organizational structure should be governed.

A review of the literature disclosed that an effective alternative program design has specific components that should prove beneficial in meeting the needs of at-risk students (DeAngelis, 2012; Grobe, 2002; Lehr, 2004). First and foremost, leaders who are visionaries, supportive in nature, and strong in their leadership practices, should govern alternative programs. These leaders should hire and retain staff with a genuine concern for the well-being and success of all students. All teachers and staff should demonstrate high expectations for themselves, as well as students, and should maintain a highly engaging relationship with the students (NCDPI, 2006).

There should be a holistic approach to teaching and the dispensation of services to students (Almeida et al., 2010). The student-teacher ratio should be kept to a minimum to

provide for more individualized and flexible instruction. There should also be a comprehensive counseling program that encompasses a wide range of services provided for students with varying issues affecting their academic performance. The school should be safe and orderly, maintaining a family-like atmosphere. School leaders should indeed hold students accountable for their actions, while being fair and equitable in the execution of consequences and intervention (NCDPI, 2006).

The school board noted in this study has specific board policies (Policy Code: 3405 Students At-Risk of Academic Failure, 2013) for at-risk students. These policies ensure students acquire academic information and skills for success in secondary education as well as career. To support this endeavor, structures have been identified and established to provide the needed support for students who are at-risk of academic failure and not being promoted or graduating (www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp, 2000).

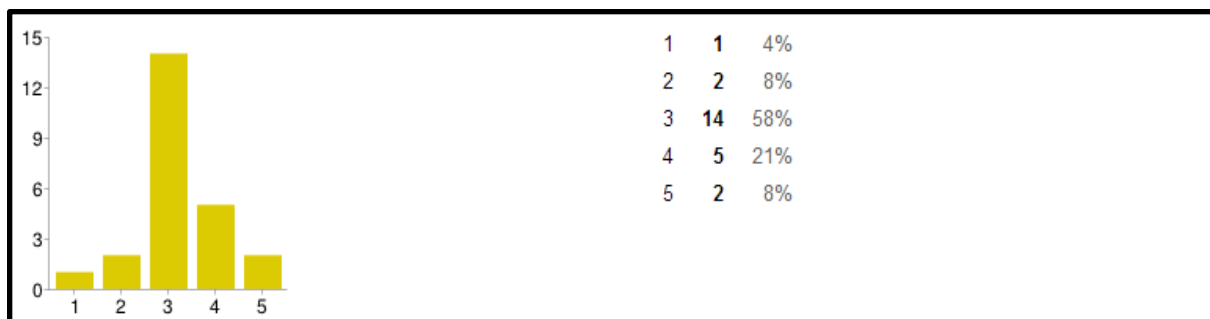
According to Green and Cypress (2009), “the structure of the organization has to facilitate the change initiative. When an appropriate structure is in place, everyone is aware of who does what, when it is to be done, and who is accountable for the results.” Organizational structure involves leadership, culture and climate, resource allocation, programs, physical structure, and support systems of an organization (Baldy et al., 2014). In an article entitled “The Four Keys to Helping At-Risk Kids,” Maurice Elias, professor at Rutgers University, identified strategies that provide support and positively impact at-risk students (Elias, 2009). These strategies are caring, sustained relationships, reachable goals, realistic, hopeful pathways and engaging school and community settings. The data provides insight on whether these strategies were effectively implemented in the organizational structure of the Academy of focus.

Eight percent (2 out of 24) of parents/guardians felt the organizational structure strongly

impacted student performance and 21% (5 out of 24) felt it impacted student performance. Fifty-eight percent (14 out of 24) responded “neutral” regarding its impact, 8% (2 out of 24) felt it had a negative impact and 4% (1 out of 24) felt it had a strong negative impact on student performance (see Figure 42). The parents/guardians responded regarding their knowledge of the Academy’s use of organizational structure to impact student performance. Of the 11 responses recorded, only 3 seemed to have an understanding of organizational structure. Those parents/guardians felt that small classes, keeping students on task and focused, and enforcing strict rules impact student performance (see Figure 43).

The majority of the students enrolled in the Academy also felt that the organizational structure in place impacted student achievement. The majority of the responding students felt that the organizational structure impacted student performance, with 5% (2 out of 43) responding “strong negative impact,” 5% (2 out of 43) responding “negative impact, 40% (17 out of 43) responding “neutral,” 19% (8 out of 43) responding “impact,” and 33% (14 out of 43) responding “strong impact” to the question, “To what extent, if any, does the Academy use an organizational structure to impact student performance?” (see Figure 44). The students reported factors such as strict enforcement of rules, taking time with students, the faculty and staff, virtual learning, and fair treatment of students as components of the organizational structure in place (see Figure 45).

Fifty-seven percent (8 out of 14) of the faculty reported that the organizational structure impacted student performance, 36% (5 out of 14) of the faculty was neutral and 7%



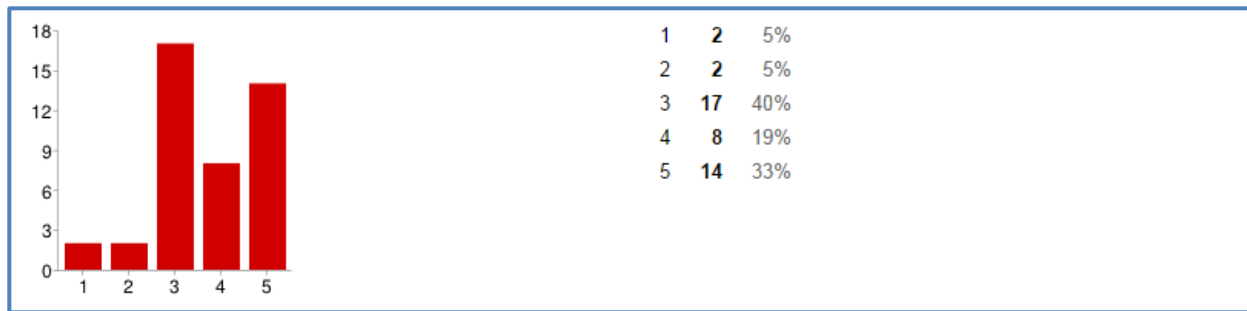
Note. Twelve percent of parents/guardians responded that the organizational structure negatively impacted student performance. Fifty-eight percent were neutral and 29% felt the organizational structure impacted student performance.

Figure 42. Parent/guardian's thoughts on the Academy's use of an organizational structure to impact student performance.

How does the Academy use an organizational structure to impact student performance?

- Keeps students focused on task not giving time to get into trouble.
- N/A.
- I don't know.
- No answer.
- Good.
- Small classes.
- No idea.
- Academy organizational structure is enforced and the students know what will happen if they don't follow the rules. The strict rules are necessary to ensure the safety of students and school staff.
- No comment.
- No answer.
- Not sure.

Figure 43. Parent/guardian's thoughts on the organizational structure of the school.



Note. Fifty-two percent of the students responding to this question feel that the Academy’s organizational structure impacts student performance. Forty percent responded “neutral” on the matter and 10% felt that the organizational structure negatively impacted student performance.

Figure 44. Student’s response to the Academy’s use of organizational structure to impact student performance.

How does the Academy use organizational structure to impact student learning?

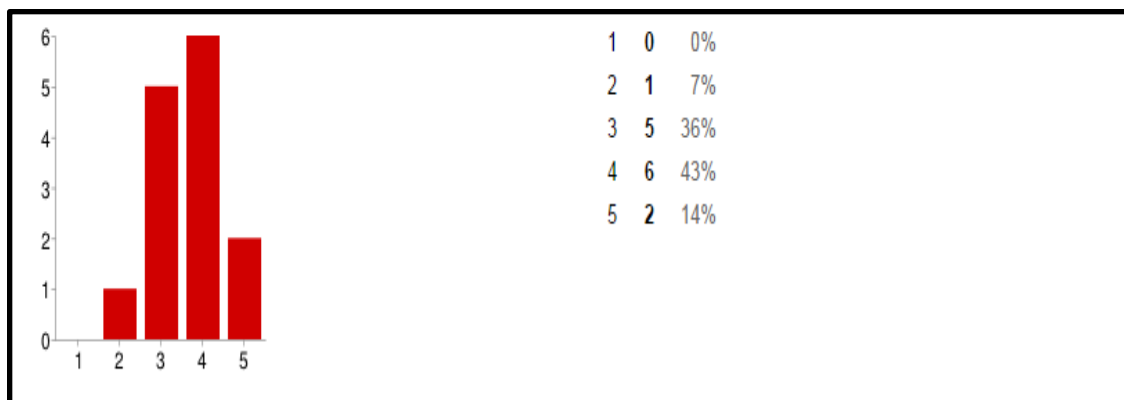
- Teachers, Principal.
- (Blank).
- They treat everyone fair if they don't listen there would be consequences.
- Behave.
- Keep us in order.
- I don't know.
- ?.
- IDk.
- Good.
- Schedule for students don't work.
- Give us classes we need.
- The teachers help.
- Do better.
- Give us notebook and paper to take notes.
- Keeps us in order.
- By giving strict rules and enforcing them.
- By taking their time with the students.
- They give us the things we need to make sure we get pass grad point and out of school.
- Gradpoint and Virtual school.
- Teachers, Social Workers.
- Teacher and Principal.
- They use the rules of the student handbook.
- Principal to run school.
- Very helpful.
- It's pretty organizational and in order.
- Teachers.
- Try to get experience teachers to teach us.
- Just to do good.
- Work hard.
- By using computers I guess.
- The try to give us as much help as they can.
- They make you follow the rules.

Figure 45. Student responses to how the Academy uses an organizational structure to impact student learning.

(2 out of 14) of the faculty felt that the structure in place negatively impacted student achievement (see Figure 46). Four members of the faculty were unsure if the Academy used an organizational structure to impact student performance. Other responses suggested that teachers and administration working together impacted student performance. One faculty member felt “that the organizational structure and collaboration between student, teacher, counselor and administration here has a strong positive impact on students’ performance” (see Figure 47).

The researcher sought to determine the stakeholders’ perceptions of the Academy. Alternative schools and programs differed from state to state. North Carolina differentiates between alternative schools and alternative programs by funding and accountability standards. Most students enrolled in alternative schools are disengaged from education. They feel external factors are the prevailing force controlling their fate and academic success. Disengagement, which is normally characterized by absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and poor academics, is a key indicator of a potential dropout (Ryan, 2009).

Alternative schools/programs such as the City-As-School (CAS) program and Borough Academies in Buffalo, New York, the Community Academy (CA), located in Boston, Massachusetts, and AIM High School in the Williamsville New York Central School District have sought to counter these perceptions (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996; Grobe, 2002). Students noted positive teacher relationships, expectations of maturity, understanding of individual differences and circumstances, and supportive atmospheres as components of the alternative school that proved to be factors in their success. Kopp (2011) states, “for young people who have experienced consistent failure, that’s everything; knowing an adult believes in them even when they have given up on themselves.”



Note. Fifty-seven percent of the faculty report that the organizational structure impacts student performance. Thirty-six percent of the faculty is neutral and 7% of the faculty feel that the organizational structure negatively impacts student achievement.

Figure 46. Faculty's response to the Academy's use of an organizational structure to impact student performance.

How does the Academy use organizational structure to impact student performance?

- Working with administrator to share information and setting up a way to implement more effective instruction.
- (Blank).
- Not sure.
- It doesn't.
- One way is that students are aware of where they are academically in regards to what is needed for them to progress towards graduation. I feel that the organizational structure and collaboration between student, teacher, counselor and administration here has a strong positive impact on students' performance.
- Mainly in a positive manner.
- By making sure the students know the structure of the Academy.
- Not sure.
- Use outside resources and some personal finances to supply students needs and visions to succeed.
- I am not sure.
- The teachers and administration work together to design and implement a course of study for each student.
- We all work together her to get the job done.
- Staff follow protocol.
- Not sure.

Figure 47. Faculty responses to how the Academy uses an organizational structure to impact student performance.

The Academy

Parent/guardian's thoughts about the Academy ranged from "no answer" to "A good small place for students who don't get the help they need in a large place." Four parents/guardians felt that the Academy is a school for troubled students or students with behavior problems that cannot attend public school. Four parents/guardians thought that the Academy is a good school and one stated that the Academy cared about the welfare of its students (see Figure 48). Fifty-four percent of the parents/guardians were confident in the Academy, with 25% (6 out of 24) responding "strongly agree" and 29% (7 out of 24) responding "agree." Twenty-five percent (6 out of 24) of the respondents responded "neutral" in their feelings and 21% the parents/guardians were not confident in the Academy, with 17% (4 out of 24) responding "disagree" and 4% (1 out of 24) responding "strongly disagree" (see Figure 49).

The majority of the parents/guardians, 42% (10 out of 24) responded "neutral" regarding the Academy being a respected school in the County. Twenty-five percent (6 out of 24) agreed and 8% (2 out of 24) strongly agreed that the Academy is a respected school in the county (see Figure 50).

The data suggested that, overall, the students felt that the Academy is a good school. Only one student acknowledged it as an Alternative school; another stated that it was "different than other schools," while yet another student stated that the Academy was "a place where I'm graduating from." All students didn't respond favorably. Students stated that the Academy was "very, very boring," "corny, small, not fun" and "needs more students and activities" (see Figure 51).

The Academy is:

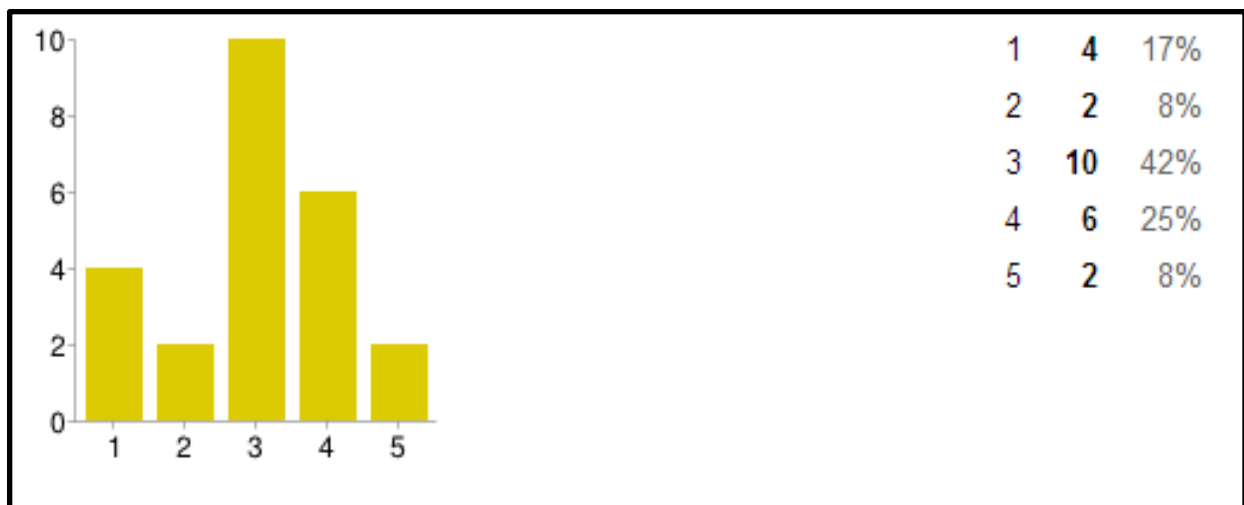
- For bad students and I am not pleased.
- No answer.
- No comment.
- Alternative School.
- Son school.
- A small school and is able to focus more on my grandson's education.
- Alternative.
- A good small place for students who don't get the help they need in a large place.
- A great school. Child only was there a couple weeks before end of year. But as far as I can tell. I was treated very warm with a lot of the care when first arrived.
- For trouble students.
- A great school helping kids that don't do good in regular school setting.
- school/alternative school where students receive an alternative education.
- School.
- a school for students who get in trouble.
- No comment.
- No answer.
- A school for troubled students.
- A good school.
- A school that enhance students that have behavior problems and the students can't attend public school. The Academy cares about the welfare of their students.
- Alternative school.

Figure 48. Parents/guardian's thoughts about the Academy.



Note. Fifty-four percent of parents/guardians express confidence in the Academy, with 29% responding agree and 25% responding strongly agree. Twenty-five percent of the respondents are neutral and 21% are not confident in the Academy.

Figure 49. Parent/guardian's confidence in the Academy.



Note. According to parents/guardians responses in Figure 46, 25% of the respondents do not feel that the Academy is a respected school in the County. Forty-two percent of the respondents responded “neutral” and 33% felt that the Academy is a respected school in the county.

Figure 50. Parent/guardian’s response to the Academy being a respected school in the county.

The Academy is:

- An alternative school, it's alright.
- A good school that helps me to do better.
- (Blank).
- A fun school that you have great opportunities.
- A great school.
- A good school, they help you and you learn better.
- A good school to attend.
- Fun.
- Great.
- I don't know.
- Alright.
- A good school that will help you graduate.
- A old school.
- The right path for me.
- Is very, very boring.
- Different than other schools.
- Corny, Small, not fun.
- The school I attend.
- A fun place to be.
- It a great school that helps people out when they can't help themselves.
- Boring.
- School.
- Is a fair school it provides better learning.
- Great school.
- Needs more students and sports activities.
- A good school.
- Fair they make sure you on the right track.
- A place where I'm graduating from.
- Kind of fun to me.

Note. Based on the responses in Figure 51, student responses to what they feel the Academy is range from “An Alternative school, it’s alright” to “A fun school that you have great opportunities.”

Figure 51. Student’s thoughts about the Academy.

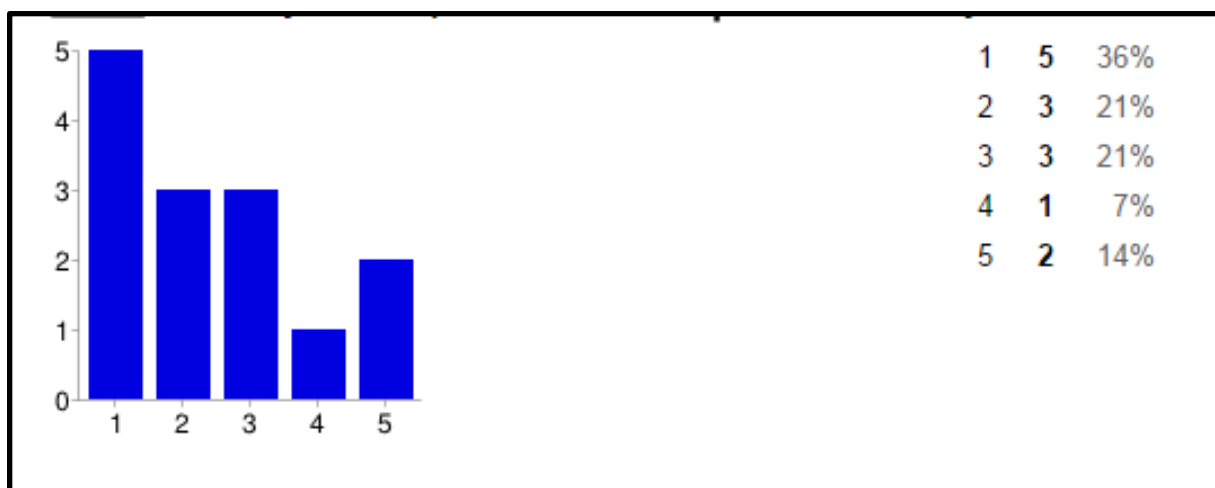
Faculty responses to what they believed the Academy is ranged from “An educational opportunity for students who did not excel in the traditional school setting and would benefit from a smaller learning environment (in a non-traditional track)” to “An alternative setting for those students who have had some difficulties being at the main high school in the district. I feel that it has an environment for students to have individualized attention in the classroom.” There were some favorable responses. One respondent stated that the Academy is an “Excellent alternative school serving the needs of students that has needed a more structured standard behavior/academic setting to ensure that they would receive a more individual instructional setting.” Another stated that “The alternative school for the school district. It serves middle and high school aged students who often have difficulty remaining at their home school. These students usually come from low-income, one-parent homes. The Academy has been an educational benefit from many well-deserving students in the county.” Finally, a respondent stated that the Academy is “a great place to work and the staff members are a caring group.” There were no negative comments given regarding the Academy (see Figure 52).

While the faculty responded favorably about the Academy (see Figure 52), the data revealed that 57% (36% [5 out of 14] strongly disagreed and 21% [3 out of 14] disagreed) of the faculty did not feel that the Academy is a respected school in the county (see Figure 53). The majority of the faculty, 57% (8 out of 14), also felt that the school is a dumping ground for students, with 36% (5 out of 14) strongly agreeing and 21% (3 out of 14) agreeing with the statement, “I feel like the Academy is a “dumping ground” for “bad” students (see Figure 54).

The Academy is:

- An alternative school with a wonderful staff and brave administration who care deeply for our students. And we live by the creed that our students are worth the effort.
- A good fit for students who struggle with many barriers: attendance, low academic achievement, are two or more grade levels behind, and have parental responsibilities.
- A school environment that offers at-risk students a second chance at an education.
- The last chance for some students to continue their education and receive a HS diploma.
- An alternative setting for those students who have had some difficulties being at the high school. I feel it provides a good environment for students to have individualized attention in the classroom. The Academy is capable of pulling the best out of many of these students who may otherwise give up on themselves and life.
- A great place to work and the staff members are a caring group.
- An educational opportunity for students who did not excel in the traditional school setting and would benefit from a smaller learning environment (in a non-traditional track).
- An alternative learning environment for "at risk" students or students that do not find success in a traditional setting.
- A great place to be.
- Excellent alternative school serving the needs of students that has needed a more structured standard behavior/academic setting to ensure that they would receive a more individual instructional setting.
- The alternative school for the school district. It serves middle and high school aged students who often have difficulty remaining at their home school. These students usually come from low-income, one-parent homes. The Academy has been an educational benefit from many well-deserving students in the county.
- A place where students have the opportunity to succeed outside of the traditional classroom.
- Non-traditional school for students with smaller class sizes and more individualized instruction.
- Small school utilized to support/supplement district students that are for an alternative tract of education.

Figure 52. Faculty's thoughts about the Academy.



Note. As seen in Figure 53, most faculty, fifty-seven percent, responded with a 1 or 2, “strongly disagree/disagree,” when asked if the Academy is a respected school in the County. Twenty-one percent responded “neutral” and 21% felt that it is a respected school in the county.

Figure 53. Faculty’s thoughts on the Academy being a respected school in the county.



Note. From the data in Figure 54, 57% percent of faculty agreed that the Academy is a “dumping ground” for “bad” students. Twenty-one percent who responded answered “neutral” and 21% disagreed with the statement.

Figure 54. Faculty’s thoughts about the Academy being a dumping ground for bad students.

Educational leaders must be in the business to help kids, love kids, and have the passion needed to make sacrifices and do what is in the best interest of kids. Knowing when to empower and when to sacrifice are important timing decisions. “Reading a situation and knowing what to do are not enough to make you succeed in leadership. Only the right action at the right time will bring success. Anything else exacts a high price. That is the Law of Timing” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 203). Knowing when to implement and execute certain initiatives is important for educational leaders and this will lead to growth.

“Here’s how it works. Leaders who develop followers grow their organization only one person at a time. But leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth because for every leader they develop, they also receive all of that leader’s followers” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 208). This is important in schools with the faculty, but especially with the students. Educational leaders who understand this can have a huge impact on turning around a school and creating a legacy. Maxwell (2007) points out those significant leaders empower and train future leaders to take over the organization when they are gone (p. 221). Educational leaders who truly care about the schools, districts, and communities that they serve will do this as well, and will truly create the leaders of tomorrow.

Therefore, excellent leadership within alternative schools is imperative for success. Furthermore, excellent leaders (school administration) will be able to use their leadership abilities to mentor and empower the youth of the school to lead for positive results.

A positive image of the administration at the Academy is depicted through the lens of the parents/guardians. Words like “supportive” and “helpful” were mentioned more than once. One parent even stated that the administration was “a blessing to the students...” (see Figure 55). The students provided their thoughts about the administration. Once again, the overall response

The administration at the Academy is...

- Somewhat supportive and understanding.
- No answer.
- Good.
- Helpful.
- A blessing to the students, because my child will learn better in a small class setting.
- Helpful and cares about my grandson's learning and staying in school.
- A great team looking out for the best interest of each student.
- Somewhat supportive and works with me when my son is in trouble.
- No comment.
- Nice.
- No answer.
- Good.
- Helpful.
- Very supportive.

Note. According to the data in Figure 55, parents/guardians' comments on administration range from "No answer" to "A blessing to the students, because my child will learn better in a small class setting."

Figure 55. Parent/guardian's thoughts about the Academy's administration.

to the administration was positive. Students deemed the administration “respectful, cool, fair, caring, and easy to get along with,” among other things. There were two students who provided negative feedback. One student said that the administration “sucks” while another stated they were “not as focused” (see Figure 56).

The faculty provides a more detailed account of the administration. Comments included, “Professional, concerned, empathetic, to students needs/situations and “Pleasant and positive trying to work with students who they have their best interest at heart.” It should be noted that there were some statements that need to be considered. One faculty member felt that the administration was “Working hard to make a difference but when administration comes up with ideas that will help or ask for funds a brick wall is put up.” Another faculty member stated that the administration was “Usually reactive instead of proactive” (see Figure 57).

The results of a quasi-experimental mixed method experiment conducted in Texas named poor student-teacher relationships as a primary factor in their inability to be successful in traditional schools. The researcher felt that, due to the varying demands placed on teachers, the ability to provide individualized attention was lacking. Students also felt that they were labeled by teachers and were subjected to the teacher’s pre-conceived notions of them. They also felt that teachers required respect from them but did not reciprocate respect to their students (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

The data revealed a generally positive view of the teachers at the Academy based on the responses of the parents/guardians. Parents/guardians stated that the teachers were “good people,” “there to help the students” and caring. Two parents/guardians said that the teachers were “okay” (see Figure 58).

The administrators are:

- Miss. G-----.
- Respectful.
- Pretty nice.
- (Blank).
- Loving.
- Great.
- Okay.
- I don't know.
- Cool.
- Good.
- Fair.
- Not as focused.
- Caring.
- Nice.
- A wonderful school to be.
- Sucks.
- I don't know.
- Very helpful in many ways.
- Helpful.
- Very nice and easy to get along with.
- Good they have things in order.

Note. According to the comments in Figure 56, student responses to thoughts about the administration ranged from “respectful” to “sucks.” One student stated that the administrators had “things in order,” while another stated that they are “not as focused.”

Figure 56. Student’s thoughts about the Academy’s administration.

The administration at the Academy is:

- Working hard to make a difference but when administration comes up with ideas that will help or ask for funds a brick wall is put up.
- Pleasant and positive trying to work with students who they have their best interest at heart.
- Needs to make some improvements and in the area following through on policy and procedure.
- Focused on the Academy students.
- Old school with old views.
- Great!!! Very Caring.
- Professional, concerned, empathetic, to students needs/situations.
- Working hard to make a difference in the lives of students who struggle academically, personally and socially.
- Helpful.
- Hard working.
- Usually reactive instead of proactive.
- The administration at the Academy is always looking for ways to better serve our students.
- In place and available.
- Committed to providing a quality education for all students in a safe environment.

Figure 57. Faculty's thoughts about the Academy's administration.

Teachers at the Academy are...

- Helping my child.
- Great.
- Okay.
- Okay; haven't had any problems.
- A great team looking out for each student's best interest.
- No answer.
- There to help the students.
- Very helpful.
- Very good people.
- Good people.
- No comment.
- Nice.
- No answer.
- Caring teachers for their students.
- Helpful.

Note. Based on the responses in Figure 58, parents/guardians comments on teachers at the Academy range from “No comment” to “A great team looking out for each student’s best interest.”

Figure 58. Parent/guardian’s thoughts about teachers at the Academy.

The parents/guardians responded as follows to the belief that teachers at the Academy understand their child. Eight percent (2 out of 24) strongly disagreed, 17% (4 out of 24) disagreed, 21% (5 out of 24) responded neutral, 33% (8 out of 24) agreed, and 21% (5 out of 24) strongly agreed. Overall, the majority of parents/guardians, 54% (13 out of 24), felt that the teachers at the Academy understood their students (see Figure 59). The students provided insight on their thoughts about the teachers. Several students used the adjective, nice, while others used positive terms such as caring, positive and loving. Two students referred to the teachers' intelligence. One student stated that the teachers were "smart" and another stated that they were "very intelligent." Negative comments included, "sucks," "crazy" and "not as helpful as I think" (see Figure 60).

The faculty provided another layer of insight on the thoughts about teachers. Comments were positive for the most part. One respondent stated that the teachers were a "diamond in the ruff." Another stated that they are "dedicated to helping kids learn." One respondent said that teachers "were "not interested in the students" (see Figure 61).

According to Almeida et al. (2010), there are seven policy elements that all states should integrate into their alternative education programs to ensure their effectiveness. One of the elements is enhanced student support services. The parents/guardians felt that the support staff is "supportive," "good," "caring" and "helpful" (see Figure 62). The student responses somewhat mirrored those of the parents/guardians. There were some negative comments, such as "looney," and "not as supportive as I would like." One student expressed a need to have them more while another stated that they were effective in calming students down (see Figure 63). The faculty stated that the support staff was an "asset to the Academy," "supportive" and "focused on creating relationships with students." One faculty member made a statement that was



Note. According to parents/guardians, 8% strongly disagree, 17% disagree, 21% are neutral, 33% agree, and 21% strongly agree that teachers at the Academy understand their students.

Figure 59. Parent/guardian's belief that teachers at the Academy understand their child.

The teachers are:

- Respectful.
- (Blank).
- Positive and caring.
- Very supportive and helpful.
- Nice to me.
- Caring people and encourage us.
- Great.
- Okay.
- I don't know.
- Good teachers and are nice people.
- Alright.
- Cool.
- Good.
- Nice and easy to get along with.
- Loving and Caring.
- Very kind and helpful.
- Nice, cool, fun, funny, respectful as long as you doing the right thing.
- Nice & Smart.
- Helpful, caring.
- Caring.
- Excellent they help you the best they can.
- Very intelligent.
- Good teachers.
- Nice.
- Friendly.
- Sucks.
- Crazy.
- Not as helpful as I think.
- Supportive.
- Amazing.
- Mr. J., Ms. S., Ms. B., Ms. L., Ms. M..
- Great teachers.
- Mean.

Note. According to the comments in Figure 60, student responses to thoughts about teachers vary from “respectful” to “not as helpful as I think.” One stated that the teachers were mean.

Figure 60. Student’s thoughts about teachers at the Academy.

Teachers at the Academy are:

- Focusing on behavior instead of instruction.
- Dedicated to helping students learn.
- Encourages, patient and knowledgeable.
- Not interested in the students.
- Good with behavior prone students.
- Supportive of students
- Professional, concerned, empathetic, to students needs/situations.
- Diamond in the ruff.
- Teachers here are always looking for ways to make learning more relevant to our students.
- Well versed and compassionate.
- Very committed.
- Working hard to get the job done through the discipline issues and social drama.
- Focused on creating relationships with students.
- Committed to providing a quality education for all students in a safe environment.

Note. Based on the comments in Figure 61, faculty responses to thoughts about the Academy's teachers range from "not interested in the students" to "Working hard to get the job done through the discipline issues and social drama."

Figure 61. Faculty's thoughts about the Academy's teachers.

The support staff at the school is...

- Good.
- Great. Support staff goes out of their way to make sure each student gets what's needed to succeed.
- Okay.
- Supportive.
- No answer.
- Good.
- Guidance counselor helps to make sure my grandson is taking classes he needs.
- Showing the students that they are there to help the student's transition better in getting their education.
- Caring.
- No comment.
- No answer.
- Supportive.
- Kind and helpful.
- Very supportive.

Note. According to the responses in Figure 62, parents/guardians' comments about the Academy's support staff range from "No answer" to "Showing the students that they are there to help the students transition better in getting their education."

Figure 62. Parent/guardian's thoughts about the Academy's support staff.

The support staff is:

- Also helpful.
- (Blank).
- Awesome.
- Great.
- Okay.
- I don't know.
- Supportive.
- Looney.
- Ms. F., Dr. F., Mr. D., Ms. G., Mr. W..
- Same as teachers.
- Good.
- Highly supportive.
- Very strong and helpful.
- Helpful, caring.
- Not as supportive as I would like.
- Caring.
- Sucks.
- Great support staff.
- Okay, need more help.
- Good.
- Very nice and easy to get along with.
- Good staff.
- Okay, need them more.
- Very helpful when it comes to calming a student down.

Note. Based on the comments in Figure 63, student's thoughts about the support staff range from "no answer" to "sucks." Overall, the students stated that the support staff was helpful and caring.

Figure 63. Student's thoughts about the Academy's support staff.

contradictory to the majority of the responses. The response was the faculty was “Handicapped when the guidance refuses to do her job. and really doesn't do much for the students. The last thing students want to hear it how they will fail and being talked down to” (see Figure 64).

School Culture and Climate

Connecting with people and building relationships has a profound impact on the climate of an organization. Great leaders are always pursuing potential candidates who possess the aptitude to strengthen their organizations. They often reference certain factors when determining who would be the best fit to meet the needs of those being served: attitude, generation, background, values, life experience, and leadership ability (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 93-96). Important questions to examine as educational leaders are: Who is naturally attracted to each other, who have moved on and who have remained due to the leadership, and who will follow the leader when they go? These questions will help determine the law of magnetism as it applies to students in the school and the connections that they make daily. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 102). Students are especially concerned about who cares about them and once they have a sense of care, they will bring one into their inner circle.

The parents/guardians shared their thoughts on the perfect school climate. Of the respondents, three parents/guardians felt that respect was a component of a perfect school climate. Other responses included, “When the students are focus[ed] on their work and not disrupting class” and “one where students are not fighting all the time and teachers are teaching more, and all assignments are not on the computer” (see Figure 65). According to the data, parents/guardians did not feel that there is a positive school climate at the Academy. The parent/guardian’s responses to whether there was a positive school climate at the Academy were

The support staff at the Academy is:

- Handicapped when the guidance refuses to do her job. and really doesn't do much for the students. The last thing students want to hear it how they will fail and being talked down to.
- Very supportive.
- The support staff always works to assist students with issues and problems they may have as well as to develop trusting relationships with students.
- Helpful trying to make sure they make it a welcoming environment.
- Is limited.
- An asset to the Academy.
- Supportive of the student's needs.
- Professional, concerned, empathetic, to student's needs/situations.
- Are committed.
- Focusing on behavior instead of instruction.
- Committed to providing a quality education for all students in a safe environment.
- Focused on creating relationships with students.
- Very helpful and friendly.
- Okay.

Note. According to the comments in Figure 64, faculty responses to thoughts of support staff range from “is limited” to “Committed to providing a quality education for all students in a safe environment. One response was critical of the guidance counselor’s attitude toward the faculty and students.

Figure 64. Faculty’s thoughts about the Academy’s support staff.

The perfect school climate is...

- I don't know.
- no answer.
- ?
- When the students are focus on their work and not disrupting the class.
- One where students and teachers respect each other.
- Honor, Love & Respect.
- No comment.
- Everyone respecting each other.
- No answer.
- I don't know how to answer this question.
- kids learning.
- Don't understand!
- One where students are not fighting all the time and teachers are teaching more, and all assignments are not on the computer.
- What?

Note. As shown in Figure 65 parents/guardians have varying opinions on a perfect school climate. The comments for this particular question on the survey range from “No Answer” to “One where students and teachers respect each other.” Respect was a recurring answer.

Figure 65. Parent/guardian’s thoughts on the perfect school climate.

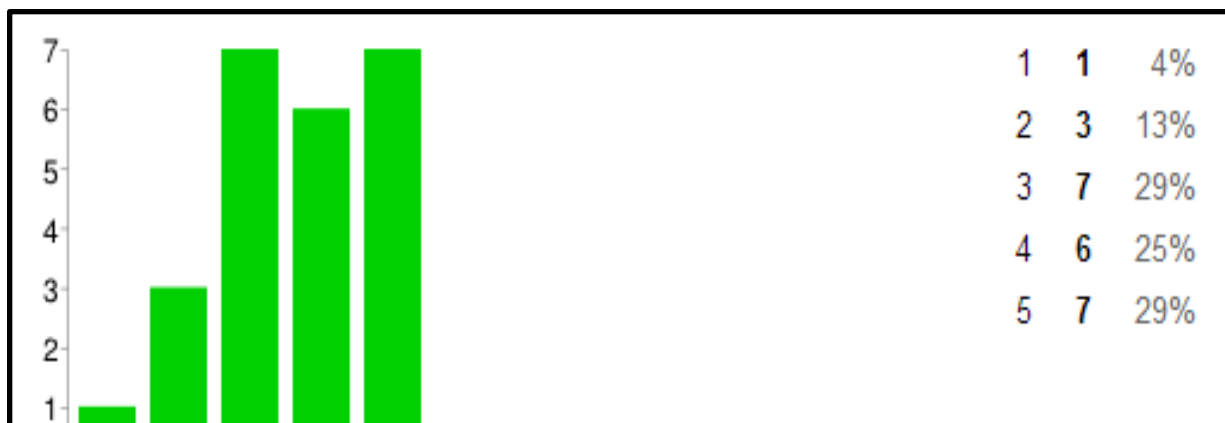
as follows: 13% (3 out of 24) strongly disagreed, 38% (9 out of 24) disagreed, 33% (8 out of 24) responded neutral, 8% (2 out of 24) agreed and 8% (2 out of 24) strongly agreed (see Figure 66). While parents/guardians did not feel that there was a positive school climate, the majority of parents/guardians believed that the staff members care about their children (see Figure 67). The responses were as follows: 4% (1 out of 24) strongly disagreed, 13% (3 out of 24) disagreed, 29% (7 out of 24) responded “neutral”, 25% (6 out of 24) agreed, and 29% (7 out of 24) that the staff members care about their children. The majority of parents/guardians also felt that the Academy is meeting the needs of their child, by giving the following responses: 8% (2 out of 24) strongly disagreed, 17% (4 out of 24) disagreed, 25% (6 out of 24) responded “neutral”, 38% (9 out of 24) agreed, and 13% (3 out of 24) strongly agreed (see Figure 68). While the majority of the parents/guardians believed that their child’s needs are being met at the Academy, 51% of the responding parents/guardians wished their children attended another school. Their responses were as follows: 25% (6 out of 24) strongly disagreed, 8% (2 out of 24) disagreed, 17% (4 out of 24) responded “neutral”, 13% (3 out of 24) agreed, and 38% (9 out of 24) strongly agreed (see Figure 69).

Students revealed what they thought the perfect school climate would look like. Responses included, “positive attitudes,” one with [a] supportive team and cares about their students,” “the main high school,” and “helping all kids” (see Figure 70). Students felt that there is a positive school climate at the Academy, a notion that is vastly different from the parents/guardians (see Figure 71). Students rendered a very clear picture that they felt teachers and administrators at the Academy got along, with only 2% (1 out of 43) strongly disagreeing and 2% (1 out of 43) disagreeing with the statement “I think the teachers and administrators at the Academy get along” (see Figure 72).



Note. As shown in Figure 66, 51% of parents/guardians disagree that there is a positive school climate at the Academy. Thirty-three percent are neutral in their feelings and only 16% agree that there is a positive school climate.

Figure 66. Parent/guardian's perception of the Academy's school climate.



Note. According to Figure 67, 29% of parents/guardians strongly agree that the staff members care about all students. Twenty-five percent agree, 29% are neutral, 13% disagree, and 4% strongly disagree that the staff members care about all students.

Figure 67. Parent/guardian's belief that the Academy's staff members care about all students.



Note. As shown in Figure 68, 13% of parents/guardians strongly agree that the Academy is meeting the needs of their child. Thirty-eight percent agree, 25% are neutral, 17% disagree, and 8% strongly disagree that the Academy is meeting the needs of their child.

Figure 68. Parent/guardian's belief that the Academy is meeting the needs of their child.



Note. In Figure 69, 38% of responding parents/guardians strongly agree that they wish their child could go to a different school. Thirteen percent agree, 17% are neutral, 8% disagree, and 25% strongly disagree that they wish their child could go to a different school.

Figure 69. Parent/guardian's desire for their child to attend another school.

The perfect school climate is:

- Sunny days.
- (Blank).
- About me and other students.
- Great.
- I don't know.
- Positive attitudes.
- ?
- One with as supportive team and cares about their students.
- When you're having fun and learning.
- A caring one.
- The main high school.
- Helping all the kids.
- None.
- No.
- Quite.
- The Academy.
- Family.
- Small environment.
- Warm.
- Respectful and caring.
- Safe and .
- The main high school and the Academy.
- 81.
- Boring.
- Safe.
- Not really for sure.
- Safe and calm.
- The Academy.
- Going and get over with.
- Helping all students learn.
- I hate the Academy.
- When students stay focus and learn more.
- Any student that wants to learn.
- Learning.

Note. Figure 70 provides student responses to their idea of the perfect school climate. There was an array of answers, ranging from “Not really for sure” to “I hate the Academy.” Two respondents thought that the main high school was the perfect climate and two students stated “safe” as a characteristic of a perfect school climate.

Figure 70. Student responses to what the perfect school climate would look like.



Note. Fifty-four percent of the responding students agree that there is a positive school climate at the Academy. Thirty percent responded “neutral,” 7% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed that there is a positive school climate at the Academy.

Figure 71. Student’s belief that the Academy has a positive school climate.

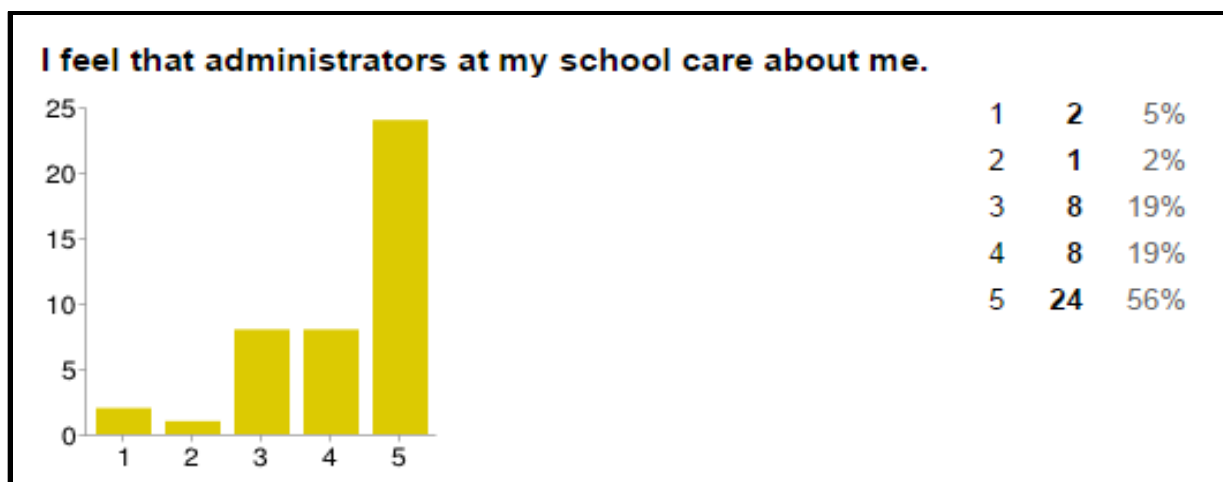


Note. Fifty-eight percent of the student respondents strongly agree that the teachers and the administrators at the Academy get along. Only 4% disagree that teachers and administrators at the Academy get along.

Figure 72. Student's thoughts about the Academy's teachers and administrators getting along.

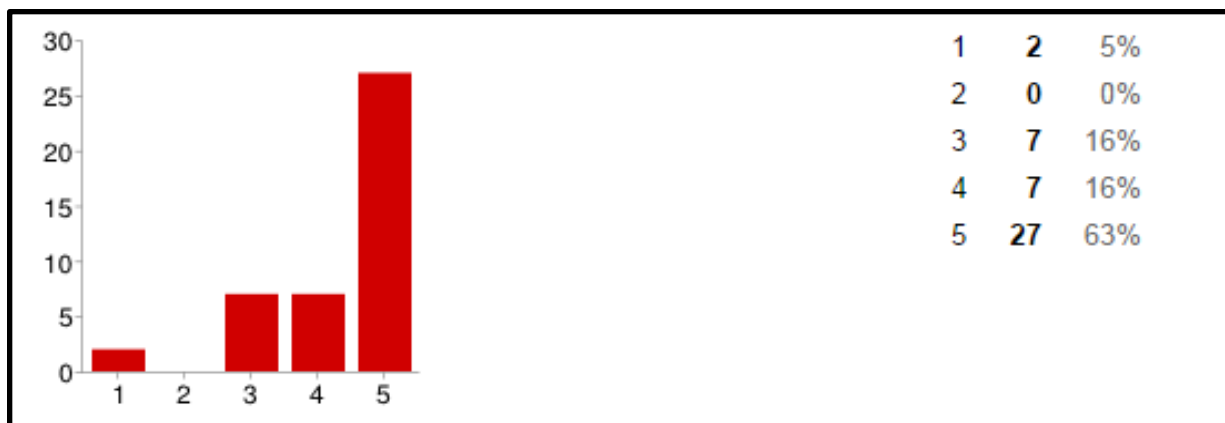
Students were provided the opportunity to disclose their feelings about whether the administration, teachers, staff members and support staff cared about them. The majority of students strongly agreed that all faculty and staff members at the Academy care about them. Fifty-six percent (24 out of 43) of students strongly agreed that the administrators care about them (see Figure 73). Sixty-three percent (27 out of 43) of students strongly agreed that their teachers care about them (see Figure 74). Fifty-six percent (24 out of 43) of students strongly disagreed with the statement, “Teachers at the Academy do not want to be here” (see Figure 75). Forty-seven percent of students strongly agreed that the Academy’s staff cares about them (see Figure 76) and 58% (25 out of 43) of students strongly agreed that the support staff cares about them (see Figure 77). The teachers at the Academy had the highest response from the students regarding their care for the students. Regarding students in general respecting adults, the majority of responding students, 51% (22 out of 43), responded “neutral”; however, when responding to the statement, “I respect the adults at the Academy,” 56% strongly agreed that they do, 23% agreed and 14% responded “neutral” (see Figure 78).

Respect, another important component of positive school climate, was addressed. When students were asked to respond to their peers’ respect for adults at the Academy, the majority of them, 51% (22 out of 43) responded “neutral.” On the other hand, when asked to respond to the statement, “I respect the adults at the Academy,” 56% (24 out of 43) answered, “strongly agree” and 23% (10 out of 43) answered, “agree.” Only 14% (6 out of 43) responded “neutral” (see Figure 78). Concerning administrative student support, 49% (21 out of 43) of responding students replied, “strongly agree” to the statement, “The administrators at the Academy encourage the students to be successful.” Nineteen percent (8 out of 43) replied, “agree” and 28% (12 out of 43) replied “neutral” (see Figure 79). An account of the effectiveness of the



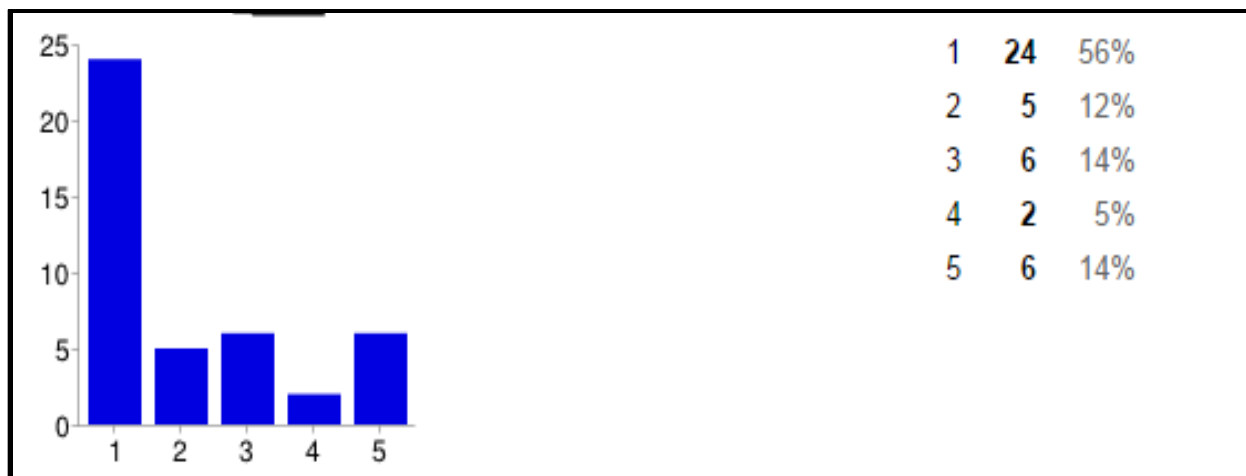
Note. Overall, students feel that the administrators at the Academy care about them, with 56% responding “strongly agree” and 19% responding “agree.” Seven percent did not feel that the administrators cared and 19% responded “neutral.”

Figure 73. Student’s feelings that the Academy’s administrators care about them.



Note. Nearly all students feel that the teachers care about them, with 79% responding “strongly agree/agree” that their teachers care about them.

Figure 74. Student’s feelings that the Academy’s teachers care about them.



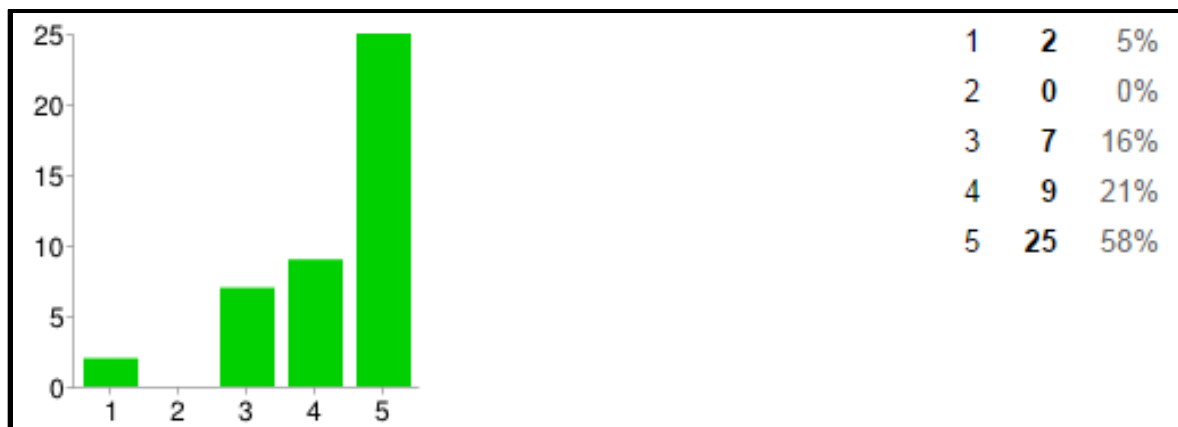
Note. Fifty-six percent of responding students strongly disagree that the Academy’s teachers do not want to be at the Academy. Fourteen percent of responding students strongly disagree and feel that the teachers do not want to be at the Academy.

Figure 75. Student’s response to the statement, “teachers at the Academy do not want to be here.”



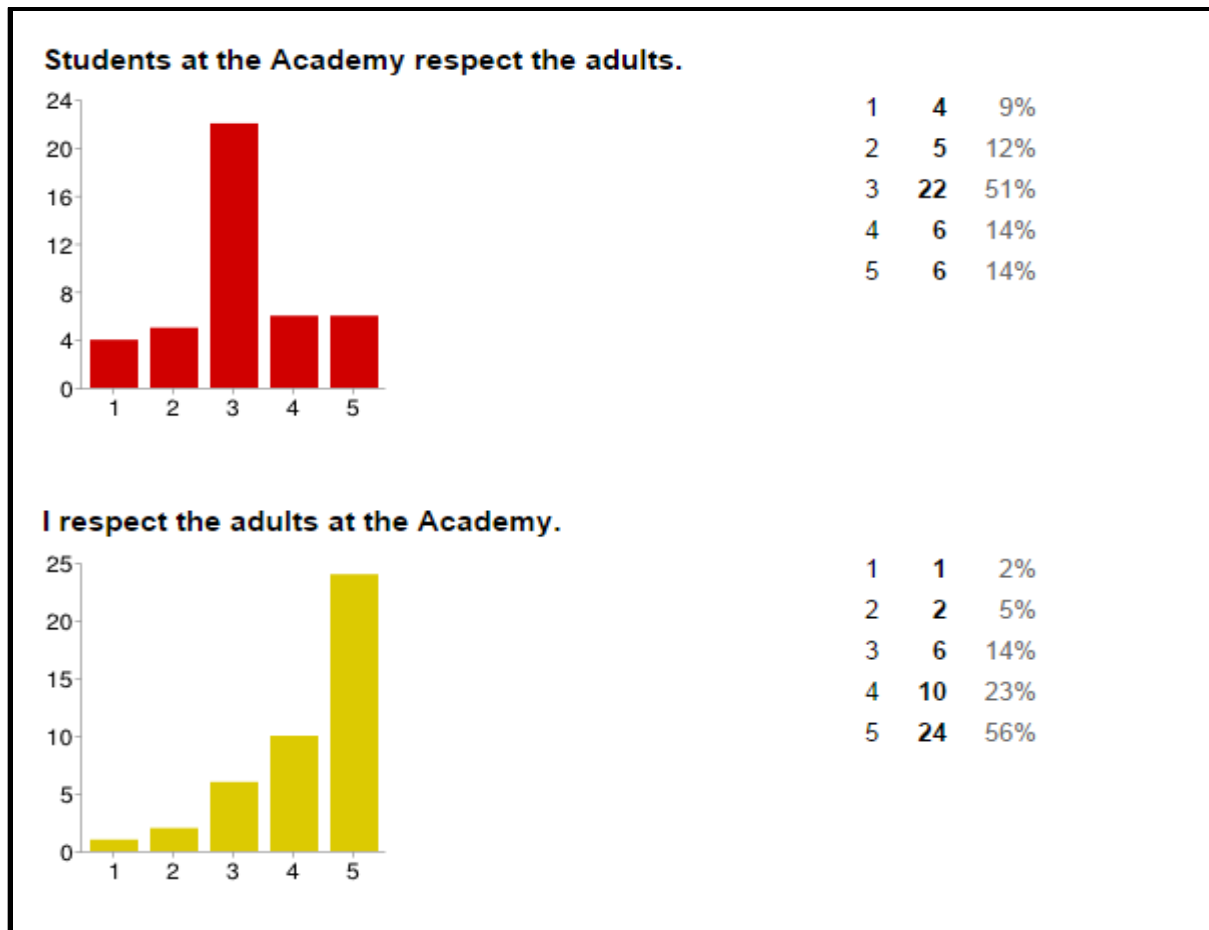
Note. None of the respondents strongly disagree to the statement; “I believe that the Academy staff members care about me as a student.” The majority of the students agree to the statement, with 47% responding “strongly agree,” and 26% responding “agree.”

Figure 76. Student’s belief that the Academy’s staff members care about them as a student.



Note. Fifty-eight percent of the responding students “strongly agree” that the support staff at the Academy cares about them. Twenty-one percent “agree” and 16% are neutral. Only 2% of responding students feel that the support staff does not care about them.

Figure 77. Student’s belief that the Academy’s support staff cares about them.



Note. Slightly more than half of the students, 51%, responded with “neutral” when asked if students respected adults at the Academy, with 22% responding “strongly disagree” to “disagree” and 28% responding “agree” to “strongly agree.” However, the majority, 93%, rated between “neutral” to “strongly agree” regarding whether they personally respected the adults at the Academy.

Figure 78. Student’s thoughts about respect.



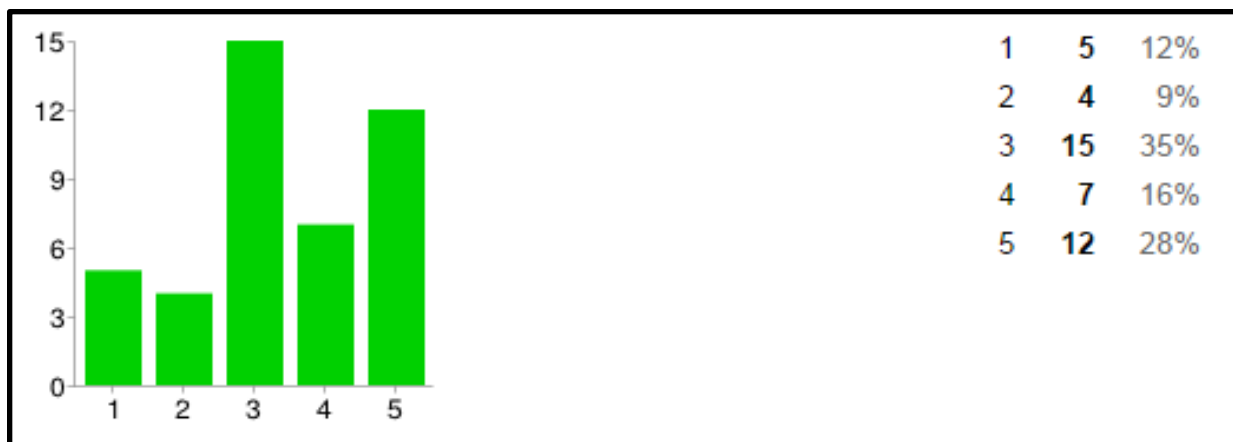
Note. Sixty-eight percent of the responding students state that the administrators at the Academy encourage them to be successful (49% strongly agree and 19% agree). Only 2% of the responding students responded “strongly disagree.” 28% responded “neutral.”

Figure 79. Student’s thoughts about the Academy’s administrators’ encouragement of students.

Academy was given from the responding students' perspectives. Most felt that the Academy was meeting their needs as a student, with 35% (15 out of 43) responding "neutral," 16% (7 out of 43) responding "agree," and 28% (12 out of 43) responding "strongly agree" to the statement, "I believe that the Academy is meeting my needs as a student" (see Figure 80).

Brookover et al. (1982) state "faculty and administration must share the responsibility for creating an orderly learning climate in which academic pursuits are not disrupted." Goodwin and Miller (2012) make the claim that everyone, from the principal on down, is expected to model and encourage appropriate behavior in *For Positive Behavior, Involve Peers*. They state that, "The best approaches to behavior management don't simply zero in on problems after they occur but proactively enlist everyone in the school to establish and reinforce clear expectations for student behavior" (Goodwin & Miller, 2012). The authors state that the following have roles for establishing positive behavior in a school: the administrator's role is creating an oasis of safety, the teacher's role is establishing a positive classroom culture, and the student's role is providing peer support (Goodwin & Miller, 2012). Goodwin and Miller (2012) go on to state that, "Research suggests that students who challenge us require a mix of supports," and that "Student behavior can be improved by creating a positive peer culture." This is essential in an alternative school setting.

Faculty members provided a picture of what they felt was a perfect school climate. Some of the responses were, "students motivated by their own performance," "the school administrator is strong, competent and innovative..." "one that always striving to grow to continue to meet the needs of the students," and "I believe the perfect school climate would be one where students feel safe, inspired to learn and achieve, supported. A climate of high expectations, not only in



Note. Of the responding students, 35% responded “neutral” concerning the Academy meeting their needs as a student. Twenty-eight percent strongly agree that their needs as a student are being met. Sixteen percent agree. Twelve percent of responding students strongly disagree, while 9% disagree.

Figure 80. Student’s belief that the Academy is meeting their needs as a student.

academics but in behavior, integrity and in morals.” Overall, the faculty felt that a climate where students’ needs are being met is the ideal school climate (see Figure 81).

Twenty-one percent (3 out of 14) of the faculty strongly agreed and 43% (6 out of 14) agreed that there is a positive climate at the Academy (see Figure 82). Faculty members commented on their camaraderie and collaboration. Forty-three percent (6 out of 14) of the responding faculty strongly agreed and 29% (4 out of 14) agreed that the teachers and administrators get along, with 29% (4 out of 14) responding “neutral” (see Figure 83). An overwhelming 93% of responding faculty strongly disagreed/disagreed with the statement “Teachers at the Academy do not work together,” with 64% (9 out of 14) responding “strongly disagree” and 29% (4 out of 14) responding “disagree” (see Figure 84). One hundred percent of the responding faculty reported that they enjoyed going to work (see Figure 85).

Overall, the responding faculty felt that the administrators, teachers, staff members, and support staff care about the Academy students. All faculty members responded “neutral,” “agree” or “strongly agree” to the statements of care (see Figures 86-89); however, one faculty member responded, “disagree” to the statement, “I believe that the Academy staff members care about all students” (see Figure 88).

Regarding mutual respect, the majority of the responding faculty, 64% (9 out of 14), answered “neutral” in their response to the statement, “Students at the Academy respect adults,” while 29% (4 out of 14) agreed (see Figure 90). When asked if they respect the students at the Academy, 57% (8 out of 14) of the responding faculty answered “strongly agree,” 36% (5 out of 14) answered “agree,” and 7% (1 out of 14) answered “neutral”(see Figure 91). Concerning the effectiveness of the Academy, 57% percent of the responding faculty believed the Academy is meeting the needs of students, with 21% (3 out of 14) answering “strongly agree” and 36% (5

The perfect school climate is:

- Clean, respectful, disciplined, encouraging, and supportive.
- One where teachers and students want to improve.
- Mutual respect among students and staff and a willingness to try.
- The perfect school climate is when the students attend class and everyone is working together.
- One that always striving to grow to continue to meet the needs of the students.
- Students motivated by their own performance.
- warm, harmonious, flexible and creative.
- Is where the school administrator is strong, competent and innovative. He/she leads by example.
- One where students and teachers trust one another and work towards common goals.
- Learning.
- I believe the perfect school climate would be one where students feel safe, inspired to learn and achieve, supported. A climate of high expectations, not only in academics but in behavior, integrity and in morals.
- One of mutual respect and a caring environment.
- Safe caring and secure one.
- All students accomplishing their goals.

Note. According to the comments in Figure 81, faculty responses for the perfect climate range from “One where students and teachers trust one another and work towards common goals to “One of mutual respect and a caring environment.” Other terms used by the faculty to describe the “perfect school climate” were “safe,” “harmonious,” “flexible,” and “caring.”

Figure 81. Faculty response to their perception of the perfect school climate.



Note. The data in Figure 82 reflects that the majority of the faculty, 64% responded “strongly agree/agree” that there is a positive school climate at the Academy.

Figure 82. Faculty’s belief that the Academy has a positive school climate.



Note. As seen in Figure 83, 43% of the faculty responded with “strongly agree” that teachers and administrators get along at the Academy. Twenty-nine percent responded both with “neutral/agree” to the same question.

Figure 83. Faculty’s belief that the Academy’s teachers and administrators get along.



Note. As seen in Figure 84, almost the entire faculty believes that teachers work together at the Academy. Sixty-four percent strongly disagree and 29% disagree with the statement, “Teachers at the Academy do not work together.” Seven percent responded “neutral” and no one agreed with the statement.

Figure 84. Faculty’s thoughts about teacher collaboration.



Note. One hundred percent of the staff agreed that they enjoyed coming to work.

Figure 85. Faculty's enjoyment of coming to work.



Note. Based on the data in Figure 86, 93% of the faculty responded with “strongly agree/agree” that they perceive that administrators care about all students.

Figure 86. Faculty’s feelings about the Academy’s administrators’ care for all students.



Note. In Figure 87, 79% of faculty responded that they believe all teachers care about students responding with “strongly agree/agree.”

Figure 87. Faculty’s response to the Academy’s teachers’ care for all students.



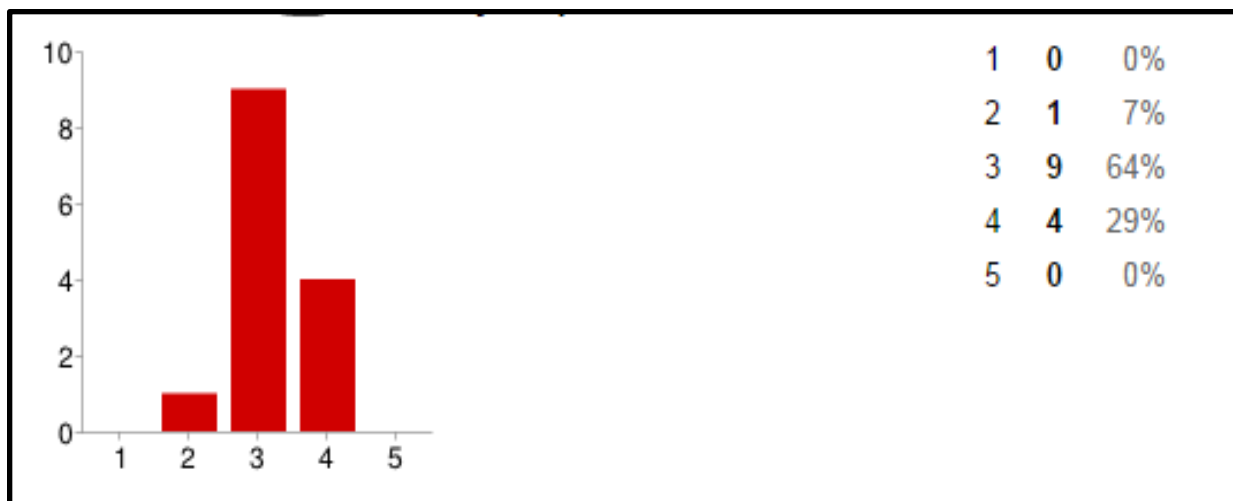
Note. Based on the data in Figure 88, 86% of faculty believes staff members care about all students. One responding faculty member was “neutral” and one responded “disagree” to the statement, “I believe that the Academy staff members care about all students.”

Figure 88. Faculty’s response to the Academy’s staff members’ care for all students.



Note. As seen in Figure 89, 86% percent of faculty feels that support staff at the Academy care about all students. Fourteen percent rated their response at a 3 (“neutral”).

Figure 89. Faculty’s response to the Academy’s support staff’s care for all students.



Note. As shown in Figure 90, most faculty responded with a mid-range 3 “neutral” with 64% whether students at the Academy respect adults. Twenty-nine percent responded with a 4 “agree.”

Figure 90. Faculty’s thoughts about student’s respect for adults at the Academy.



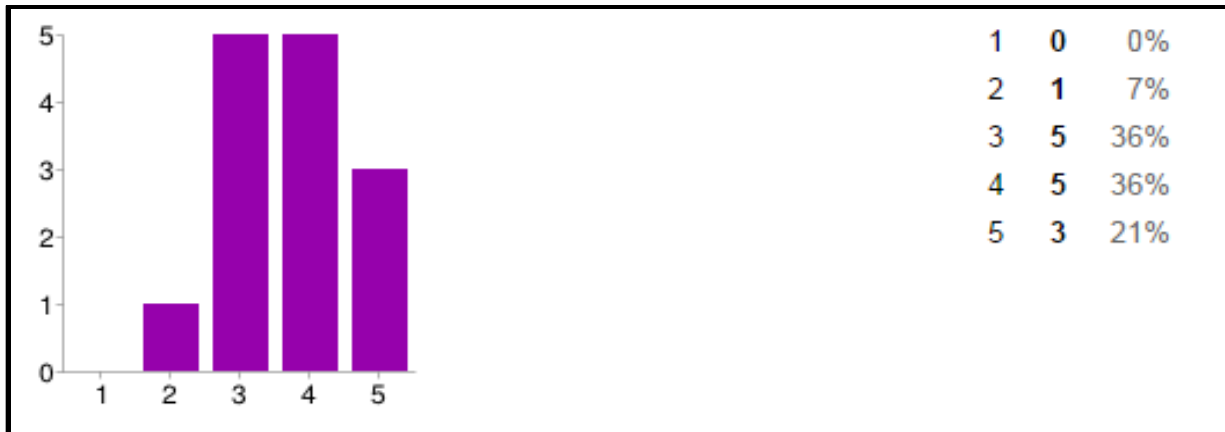
Note. According to the responses in Figure 91, a high percentage, 93%, of faculty responded that they respect students. Seven percent of the faculty responded at a 3 (neutral) in regards to respecting students at the school.

Figure 91. Faculty's response to their respect for students at the Academy.

out of 14) answering “agree.” Thirty-six percent (5 out of 14) responded “neutral” and 7% (1 out of 14) did not believe the Academy is meeting the needs of the students that attend (see Figure 92).

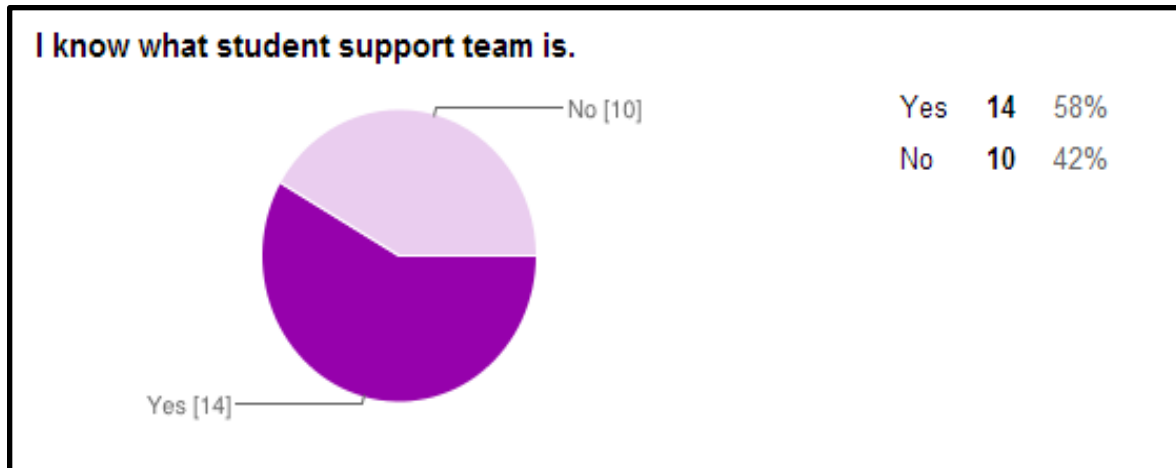
Student Support

William Sterrett (2012) seeks to answer the question, “What can school leaders do to support teachers in building stronger relationships with students?” in *From Discipline to Relationships*. He states that, “In our evolving world of education, one thing remains constant: our success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students” (Sterrett, 2012). Sterrett (2012) offers personal examples from his time as a principal to reduce discipline by building relationships and “creating classroom communities,” while providing educators with the support and professional development needed to accomplish this. “Moving from a focus on discipline to a focus on relationships has implications for all stakeholders. For students it clearly sends the message, you belong here...For parents/guardians, the implications are enhanced communication and a greater focus on their student as an individual” (Sterrett, 2012). The majority of responding parents/guardians, 58% (14 out of 24) knew what a student support team is (see Figure 93). The same percentage of parents stated that a student support team had worked with their child to help them be successful (see Figure 94). Coincidentally, 54% (13 out of 24) of responding parents/guardians stated that they had not received information from the Academy on student support teams (see Figure 95). It could be deduced that some of the responding parents whose students had been served by a student support team at the Academy had obtained information about student support teams from a school other than the Academy. Again, 54% (13 out of 24) responded “neutral” when asked if the guidance counselor provided useful information to them about their child. The other responses were as follows: 0% (0 out of 24) strongly



Note. As shown in Figure 92, 57% percent of faculty believes the Academy is meeting the needs of students. Thirty-six percent are neutral and 7% do not believe the Academy is meeting the needs of the students that attend the school.

Figure 92. Faculty's belief that the Academy is meeting the needs of the students.



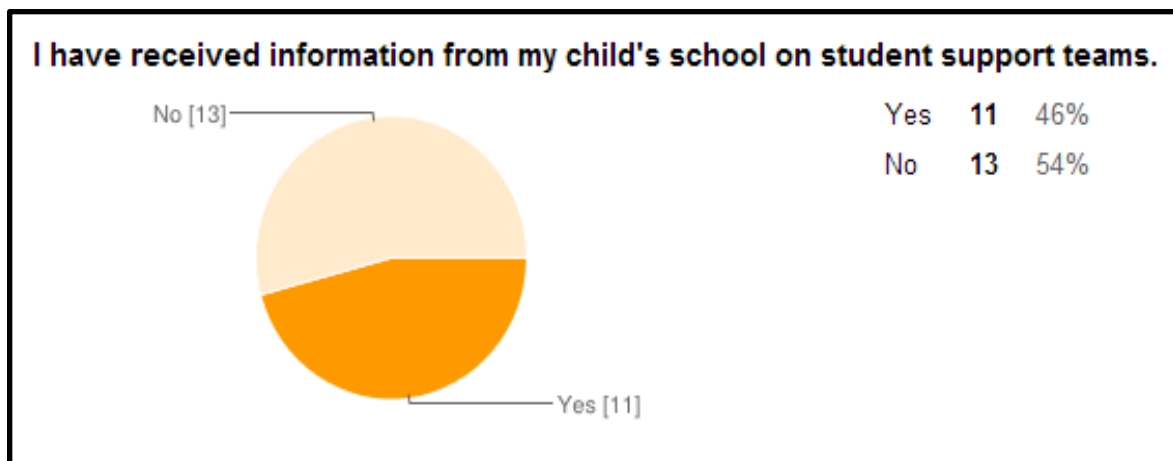
Note. Just over half of the parents/guardians, 58%, know what a student support team is.

Figure 93. Parent/guardian's knowledge of student support teams.



Note. Fifty-eight percent of parents/guardians stated that a student support team has worked with their child to help the child be successful.

Figure 94. Parent/guardian's response to the Academy's student support team.



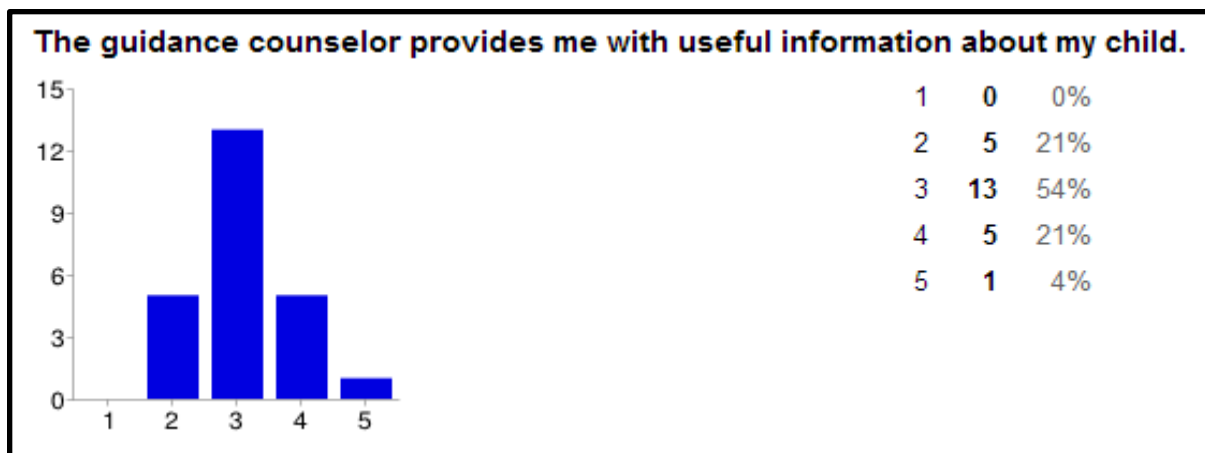
Note. Fifty-four percent of parents/guardians shared that they have not received information on student support teams.

Figure 95. Parent/guardian's receipt of information on student support teams.

disagreed, 21% (5 out of 24) disagreed, 21% (5 out of 24) agreed, and 4% (1 out of 24) strongly agreed that the guidance counselor provided useful information to them about their child (see Figure 96) .

A student handbook allows the parents and students to understand the rules, regulations, and procedures of a school. They may be issued upon enrollment to afford new enrollees an opportunity to obtain a picture of the organizational structure of the school. When asked if the Academy's student handbook had been thoroughly reviewed with them, the parents/guardians responded accordingly, 8% (2 out of 24) strongly disagreed, 29% (7 out of 24) disagreed, 33% (8 out of 24) responded "neutral," 8% (2 out of 24) agreed, and 21% (5 out of 24) strongly agreed (see Figure 97). Based on this information, the researcher determined that the enrollment/intake process needed to be reviewed.

Sixty-seven percent (29 out of 43) of responding students knew what a student support team was (see Figure 98) and 56% (24 out of 43) strongly agreed that their guidance counselor knew them and was helpful (see Figure 99). Fifty-one percent (22 out of 43) strongly agreed and 19% (8 out of 43) agreed that the student handbook was thoroughly reviewed with them (see Figure 100). One hundred percent (14 out of 14) of the responding faculty knew what a student support team is and 71% (10 out of 14) have actually served as a member of the student support team. Sixty-four percent (9 out of 14) of the responding faculty had received professional development on student support teams (see Figure 101). Fifty percent (7 out of 14) of the responding faculty responded "neutral" to the statement, "The guidance counselor provides faculty with useful information about all students. Only two of the responding faculty members disagreed with the statement, with one responding "strongly disagree" and one responding "disagree" (see Figure 102).



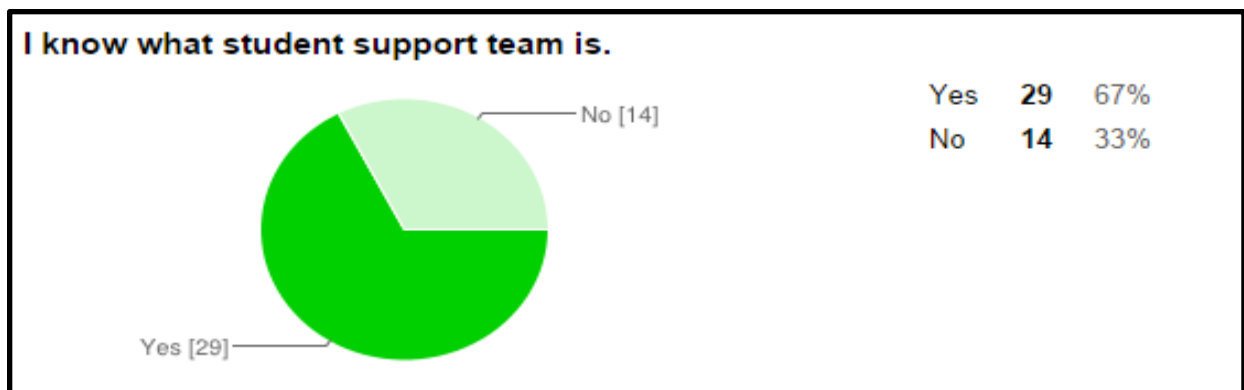
Note. The majority of responding parents/guardians, 54%, responded “neutral” when asked if the guidance counselor provides them with useful information about their child. Twenty-five percent agree that the guidance counselor does, with 21% responding “agree” and 4% responding, “strongly agree.”

Figure 96. Parent/guardian’s thoughts about the Academy’s guidance counselor.



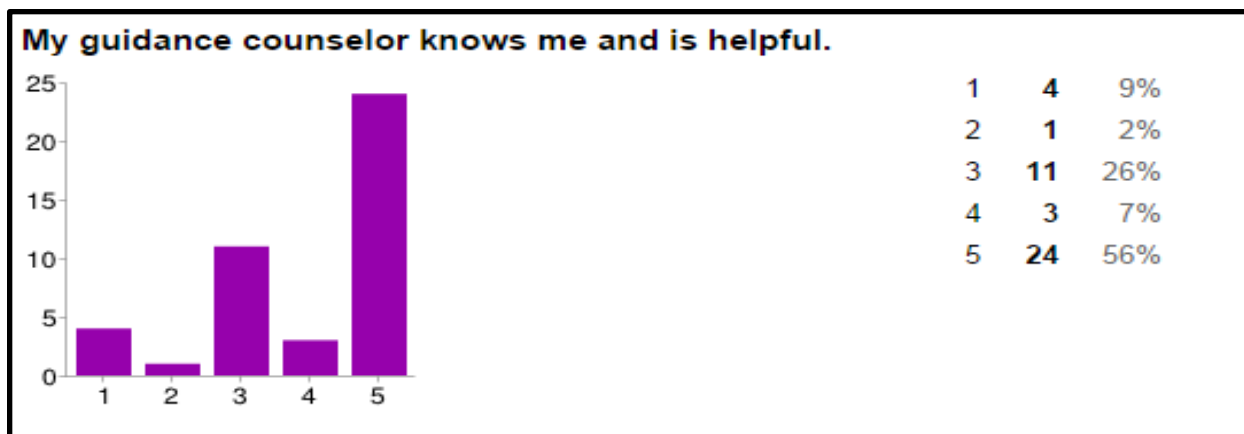
Note. Most parents/guardians, 71%, responded with a rating of 1 to 3 (“strongly disagree” to “neutral”) that the student handbook was thoroughly reviewed with them.

Figure 97. Parent/guardian’s knowledge of the student handbook.



Note. Sixty-seven percent of responding students know what a student support team is.

Figure 98. Student's knowledge of student support teams.



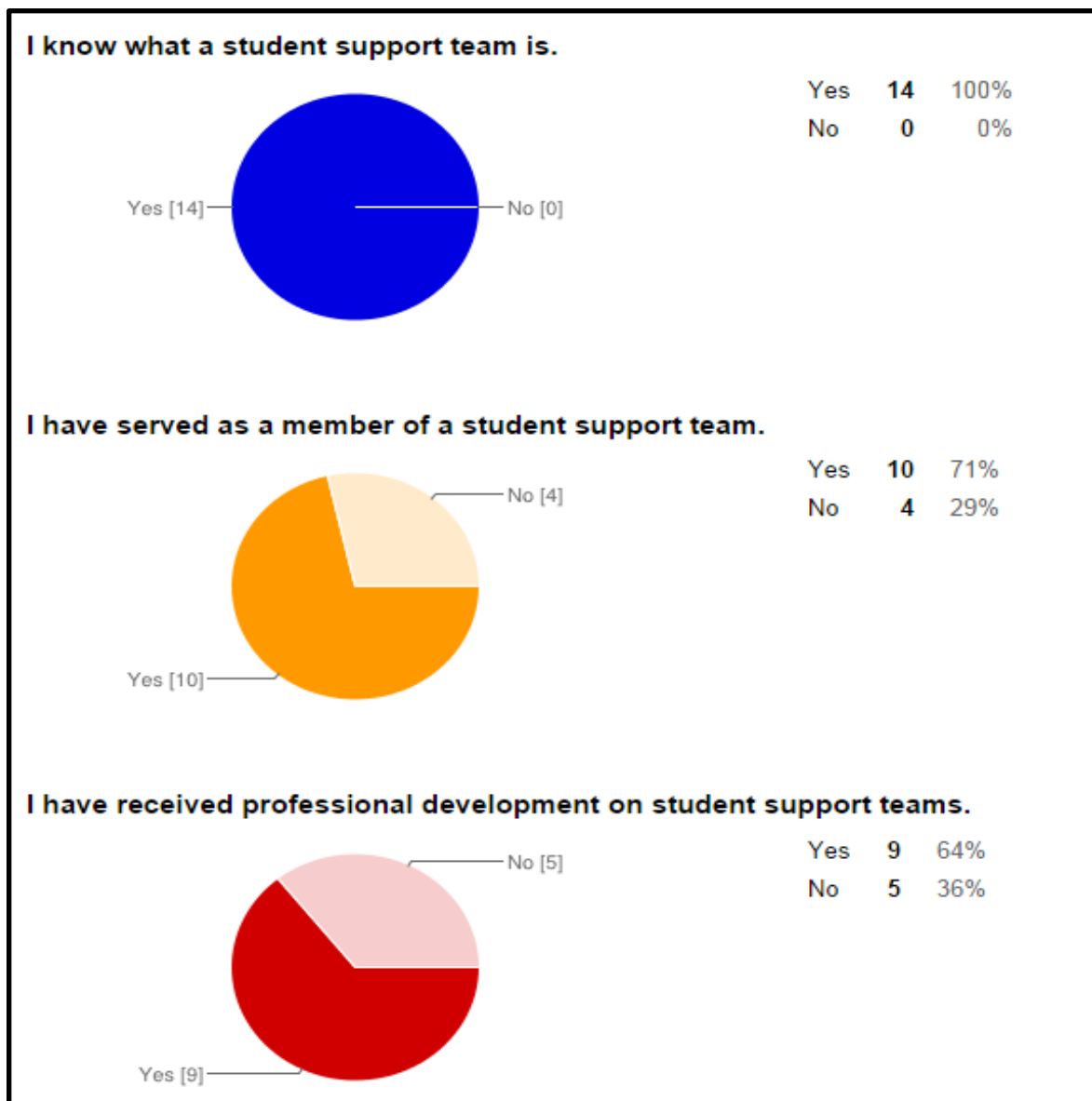
Note. Nine percent of responding students “strongly disagree” that their guidance counselor knows them and is helpful. Two percent “disagree” and 26% are “neutral.” Seven percent “agree” that the guidance counselor knows them and is helpful and 56% “strongly agree.”

Figure 99. Student’s thoughts about the helpfulness of their guidance counselor.



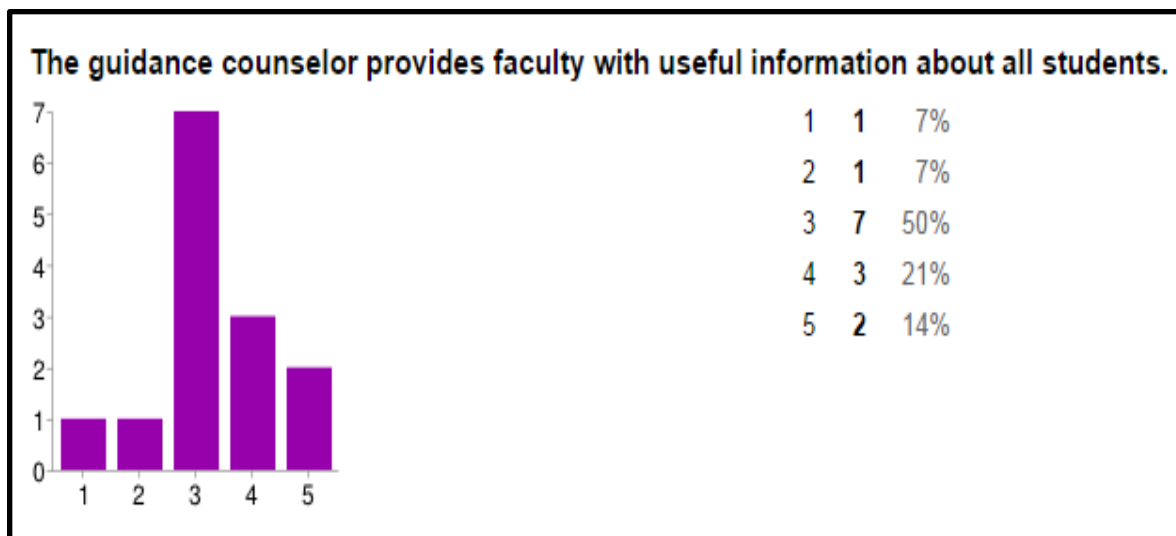
Note. Most students reported that the student handbook was thoroughly reviewed with them, with 51% responding “strongly agree” and 19% responding “agree.” Sixteen percent of responding students responded “neutral.”

Figure 100. Student’s knowledge of the student handbook.



Note. Figure 101 depicts the responding faculty's knowledge of student support teams, service as a member of a support team and professional development received on student support teams. One hundred percent of the responding faculty knows what a student support team is. Seventy-one percent of the responding faculty has served as a member of a student support team and 64% have received professional development on student support teams.

Figure 101. Faculty responses about student support teams.



Note. According to the data in Figure 102, only 35% of faculty “agree/strongly agree” that the guidance counselor provides helpful information regarding students to the faculty. Fifty percent responded “neutral.”

Figure 102. Faculty’s thoughts about the Academy’s guidance counselor.

Components of Successful Alternative School/Program Models

There are certain components that are prevalent in successful alternative schools. Some of those components include a low teacher-student ratio, strong and consistent leadership, highly qualified teachers and staff, a shared vision, strong district support, and research-based instructional practices that foster for real-world connections. There are some alternative school models that have proven effective for at-risk students (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

In Buffalo, New York, the City-As-School (CAS) program assigns students to various sites to serve as interns. Students work to earn academic credits. The type of work done determines the credits; i.e. students receive an English credit for working in communications. Students alternate sites throughout the semester. While working at their various sites, students are also required to complete his or her Learning Experience Activity Packet (LEAP). This packet encompasses individualized goals and activities specific to each internship experience. Students have program teachers and supervisors who monitor their progress. Students attend weekly meetings at CAS offices. The offices are strategically placed on a college campus to stimulate the students to further pursue their educational goals at an institution of higher learning (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996). This program acquired tremendous support from the community. Notable changes in the students were realized, to include motivation to learn and a reduction in adverse behavior. Sixty-five percent of the students were able to maintain 100% attendance over a 2-year span, satisfy their internship requirements, and earn their high school diplomas (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

The Community Academy (CA) is located in Boston, Massachusetts. This program “uses a cognitive approach that focuses on modifying inappropriate behavior and enhancing academic

potential” (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996). This program’s focus is a low teacher-student ratio, small class sizes, and parental involvement. Students are afforded the opportunity to engage in a vocational program of study or an advanced placement program of study to earn dual enrollment credits at the local colleges or universities (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

As noted with CAS, there is a strong community support system, with local businesses and social service entities providing services to the students enrolled in the program. There is a strong academic component. Students are placed in rigorous classes with highly qualified staff who differentiate instruction to advance students to grade-level performance. Regarding the social-emotional component of the educational experience, students are mandated to participate in counseling sessions with an on-site Psychologist. The focus of the sessions is personal development. Students are able to access the Psychologist if additional sessions are needed. There are also substance abuse counselors available to provide services to students both as a group and on an individual basis. Any student in need of intensive counseling is referred to an outside agency. The students are observed and their success is documented. After only a year of a two-year program, 45% of the students are deemed ready to return to their traditional school setting. More than 25% of the students demonstrate the ability to complete college-level work before returning to their traditional school and less than 15% of the students are unable to successfully complete the program (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

The Borough Academies are located in Buffalo, New York and serve students throughout the Metropolitan area. The Borough Academies’ primary goal is to cultivate positive behavior skills within students and present them with the opportunity to obtain a job or attend college. Students are afforded the opportunity to receive credits through vocational internships. The

premise of the program is to utilize positive reinforcement and flexibility to affect the behaviors of the students being served. Students are never told what they cannot do; they are only told what they can do. Teachers are expected to establish realistic goals for the students (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

Students are taught behavior management skills in addition to academic skills. The principal strongly believes that students will be viable members of society if they are able to properly manage their behaviors. The program utilizes academics, guidance, and vocation (internships) to produce high school graduates. There is a flexible scheduling program, “free options,” that allows students to alter their class schedules from day to day. Students are able to work at their own pace and earn high school credits based on their work ethic. The Borough Academies has an 86% graduation rate, with many of the graduates pursuing postsecondary education (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

Finally, AIM High School, located in the Williamsville New York Central School District, has proven successful in meeting the needs of at-risk students unable to find success in a traditional school setting. The alternative instructional model (AIM) is a program, not a school, which has been responsible for influencing more than 75% of its graduates to pursue postsecondary education (Grobe, 2002).

The AIM program is comprised of teachers who are committed to meeting the various academic and social-emotional needs of its students. The students are confident that their teachers care about them and will work with them to reach their personal and academic goals. Since AIM is a program, students are still eligible to participate in extracurricular activities at their traditional home schools (Grobe, 2002).

The students are held to the same academic, behavioral and attendance standards

established in the traditional high school; however, the research-based educational strategies implemented at AIM are strategically designed to enrich the learning and personal development of the students. Some of the strategies are individualized instruction, continuous progress, a later start time, vocational opportunities, self-directed summer school, community-based projects, after-school tutoring, and field trips. The program also has a student wellness program. AIM is successful because the faculty and staff genuinely believe in each of the student's ability to succeed. The students are exposed to a positive school climate that fosters the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional growth and development of each student (Grobe, 2002).

There are some common components in each of the aforementioned models that have proven to positively impact students and increase graduation rates and academic proficiency. Each model was comprised of highly qualified teachers committed to the success of each student. Community involvement was another common theme. Each model offered students the opportunity to broaden their horizons by providing them exposure to various vocational opportunities within their individual communities. Intense focus on the social-emotional development of the students was also realized in each model. Flexibility in scheduling and instructional strategies and methods was also a significant component of each model. Finally, consistent enforcement of the vision and mission of the school was evidenced in each model. Each model had high expectations of the staff, students, and community members. There was buy-in by all stakeholders, which proved effective for the at-risk students being served.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in southeastern North Carolina. Students "at-risk"

encompasses many factors that impact this student population. To ascertain a complete picture, the various facets of an alternative school setting were explored to provide insight into how to best serve this population of students. The researcher's focus was the organizational structure of the alternative school being studied. Factors such as stakeholders' perceptions of the school--its leadership and the LEA, school culture and climate and student-support are areas that are all interrelated and have a great impact on each other and the success of students. They must all be considered in order to research successful components of schools that serve non-traditional learners.

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were used to gain insight into the alternative high school in southeastern North Carolina that serves non-traditional students. The intent of the researcher was to identify key elements that needed to be implemented and enforced to increase academic performance and graduation rates. Quantitative research included descriptive statistics and compilation of the data collected from the survey results. Students, parents/guardians, faculty, staff, and administrators participated in the study. All groups were asked questions related to the organizational structure of the Academy. The faculty/staff demonstrated an understanding of what would be an appropriate structure for students. There were conflicting accounts of the implementation and/or effectiveness of those components at the Academy. Parents/guardians and students also provided a slightly different perspective regarding the effectiveness of the procedures currently in place. It is this researcher's opinion that the survey participants defaulted to "neutral" as a response to questions they were unclear or uncertain about.

Raywid (1999) indicated that the sole purpose of an alternative school was to provide support for students not being successful in comprehensive high schools in the areas of academic

credit, career exploration activities, or vocational work experience, and extended teacher/peer support in an alternative setting where the ultimate goal is that of obtaining a high school diploma. The areas identified as support measures are coupled with methods that will motivate and inspire at-risk students. The motivation methods identified attempted to:

1. reduce the alienation and improve the self-concept of at-risk students,
2. provide at-risk students with increased access to desirable social roles,
3. increase community and parental participation in the education of at-risk students,
4. provide a flexible and integrated academic and vocationally oriented curriculum that emphasizes the importance of school in preparing for later life,
5. provide students with a success-oriented program to obtain academic and employability skills in a school environment,
6. provide a competency-based, self-paced, program with clear quantifiable objectives.

Instruction will be provided in a variety of ways best suited to the individual student's needs, and

7. foster within students the responsibility for their own learning and the expectation that they will take an active role in setting their own goals.

The data provided insight on whether these strategies were effectively implemented in the organizational structure of the Academy of focus in an effort to answer the question:

To what extent if any, were the alternative learning program standards implemented within the organizational structure to impact student performance?

1. The majority of responding parents, 58% (14 out of 24) responded "neutral" when asked if the Academy's organizational structure impacted student performance (see Figure 42). It was the opinion of this researcher that many of the responding parents

- were unaware of what “organizational structure” actually meant. This conclusion was gathered based on the responses given where parents were asked to cite how the Academy used organizational structure to impact student performance (see Figure 43).
2. The majority of responding students, 52% (22 out of 43), felt that the Academy’s organizational structure impacted student performance.
 3. The majority of responding faculty, 57% (8 out of 14) felt that the organizational structure impacted student performance.
 4. There was a disparity between the perceptions of the parents/guardians and the students and faculty regarding the organizational structure’s impact on student performance. This researcher recognized that the term “organizational structure” should have been operationalized for those not familiar with educational jargon.
 5. The data suggested that, overall, the students and faculty felt that the Academy was a good school.
 6. The majority of responding parents/guardians, 54% (13 out of 24), reported that they were confident in the Academy.
 7. While the faculty responded favorably about the Academy, the data revealed that 57% (8 out of 14) of the faculty did not feel that the Academy was a respected school in the county and also felt that the school was a dumping ground for students.
 8. Regarding school climate, the data suggested that the responding parents/guardians did not feel that there was a positive school climate at the Academy. On the contrary,

- the majority of responding students and faculty felt that there was a positive school climate at the Academy.
9. While the majority of the responding parents/guardians did not feel that the Academy had a positive school climate, they believed that the staff members cared about their children.
 10. Concerning the effectiveness of the Academy, the majority of responding parents/guardians, felt that the Academy was meeting the needs of their child. The majority of the responding students and faculty responded accordingly. While the majority of the responding parents/guardians shared in that belief, most of them wished their children could go to another school. It is the opinion of this researcher that parents subscribe to the stigma that alternative school automatically means bad; therefore, most parents/guardians do not want their child at an alternative school regardless of its positive impact because they allow the perceived image and negative stigma associated with the term “alternative school” to eclipse the positive impact it may have.
 11. The majority of the responding students stated that the administrators at the Academy encouraged them to be successful.
 12. The majority of responding parents/guardians and students knew what a student support team was and stated that a student support team had worked with their child to help the child be successful. While students had received services from a student support team, the Academy did not provide information regarding the student support team to the parents/guardians, according to the majority of them.
 13. The entire faculty knew what a student support team was. The majority of the faculty

had received professional development on student support teams and had served as a member.

14. The majority of responding parents/guardians responded neutral when asked if the guidance counselor provided useful information to them regarding their child. The majority of the faculty responded likewise.

NCDPI implemented standards that should be implemented with fidelity in all alternative schools—clear mission, leadership, culture and climate, professional development, parent/community involvement, curriculum and instruction, and monitoring and assessment (NCDPI, 2006). One of the Academy’s administrators stated that the Academy’s mission is “to equip students with necessary skills to improve academic performance and behaviors so that they may function successfully in school and the community.” The data did not reveal how or if the Academy’s mission was communicated to stakeholders in a clear, concise manner. The responding participants spoke favorably of the Academy’s leadership. It should be noted that the effectiveness of an instructional leader cannot be determined by likeability. The primary job of the building principal is to serve as the instructional leader.

As a practicing school administrator, it is understood that instructional leadership can sometimes be overshadowed by the managerial nature of job, however, it is the responsibility of the building principal to ensure that rigorous, engaging, meaningful teaching is occurring in every class every day. It is also the responsibility of the building administrator to hire highly qualified staff with a commitment to the education of all children. The instructional leader should ensure that every teacher is provided with the professional development needed to build their capacity, thus providing meaningful learning experiences for the students they serve.

The data suggests the students enrolled in the Academy had caring, sustained

relationships with the administrators and teachers. The data also illustrated the existence of a family-like atmosphere at the Academy. The faculty had been extended professional development opportunities with many reporting that they had received professional development on student support teams. It is the opinion of the researcher that the faculty was offered other professional development opportunities.

There seemed to be a lack of interaction between the Academy and the community, with no established working relationships with businesses within the community. The data also revealed that only 33% (8 out of 24) of responding parents/guardians felt that the Academy was a respected school in the community. This data spoke volumes to the overall stigma attached to the school. The data did not indicate strong parental involvement nor community service initiatives. Effective alternative schools/programs established sustained relationships within the community in which the students lived, which decreased adverse behavior and increased student achievement (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

Regarding curriculum and instruction, the Academy's teacher-student ratio was reported as 1:5, which is an ideal environment to foster individualized instruction and academic rigor; however, delivery of classroom instruction was noted as "teacher-led and directed," a practice that, in the opinion of the researcher, does not foster an environment of individualized instruction or academic rigor. In addition, vocational courses or vocational work experiences were not offered to students. Students were not even afforded the opportunity to take the ACT WorkKeys assessment, which is designed to help students better understand the skills they would need to build upon to acquire competitive jobs. While parents, students, and teachers reported that the Academy was meeting the needs of the students, the EOG/EOC data displayed the lack of student achievement and growth on state assessments which caused the researcher to question

whether parents, students, and teachers deemed academic rigor or career opportunities a need in the alternative setting. The data did not account for academic rigor or the effective implementation of the Common Core/Essential Standards curriculum.

Strategies such as goal setting and an engaging school and community setting were not depicted in the data. The absence of “goal-setting” could be due to the lack of detail provided regarding the “support” given by the student support team. The data revealed that the Academy only had one guidance counselor who, according to an Administrator, “provides support and assistance to students who are nearing graduation.” A comprehensive support system for students, an essential component of effective alternative schools, was not depicted in the data.

Finally, an effective transition/orientation process between the school of origin and the Academy was not evidenced in the data. According to board policy, students attending an alternative school may be referred to school on a voluntary or an involuntary basis. The following is the transfer process for students:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:
 - a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,
 - b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and
 - c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

One of the Academy’s administrators stated, “parents are required to participate in the

orientation of students during intake at the Academy; additionally parents participate in the exit transition meetings,” yet only 28% of parents/guardians stated that the student handbook was thoroughly reviewed with them (see Figure 97). This data spawned a question in the researcher’s mind concerning the effectiveness of the transfer/orientation process, the support given to parents and students during transition between the Academy and the school of origin, and the level of parental involvement and knowledge of the fundamentals of the Academy.

Based on the open-ended structured questionnaires and the surveys administered to parent/guardians, students, and faculty at the Academy being studied, the following questions were generated by the researcher because they provided insight on the organizational structure currently in place and its effectiveness:

1. To what extent are parents/guardians, students, and faculty aware of the organizational structure currently in place at the Academy?
2. To what extent is support provided to parents/guardians, students, and faculty in addressing the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of the students?
3. To what extent does the organizational structure of the alternative school meet the needs of at risk students?

Data specific to recognizing the organizational structure of the Academy, support provided to students enrolled, and the effectiveness of the Academy on at-risk students is provided along with my personal comments as a practicing school administrator.

To what extent are parents/guardians, students, and faculty aware of the organizational structure currently in place at the Academy? According to Green and Cypress (2009), “the structure of the organization has to facilitate the change initiative. When an appropriate structure is in place, everyone is aware of who does what, when it is to be done, and

who is accountable for the results.” Organizational structure involves leadership, culture and climate, resource allocation, programs, physical structure, and support systems of an organization (Baldy et al., 2014). In an article entitled “The Four Keys to Helping At-Risk Kids,” Maurice Elias, professor at Rutgers University, identified strategies that provide support and positively impact at-risk students (Elias, 2009). These strategies are caring, sustained relationships, reachable goals, realistic, hopeful pathways and engaging school and community settings. The data provides insight on whether these strategies are effectively implemented in the organizational structure of the Academy of focus.

One administrator at the Academy stated that the mission and goals of the Academy were “to equip students with necessary skills to improve academic performance and behaviors so that they may function successfully in school and the community.” The administrator stated that the Academy provides “core academic instruction, small school environment, 1:5 teacher-student ratio, on-line classes, and health and physical education classes “to “students who are at-risk of failing and/or dropping out of school.” The administrator also stated that the Academy is “in concert with the main high school” and “enrolls and exit[s] students based of established school board policies.” The “students are enrolled in 4 blocked courses, usually two academic and two elective courses per semester.” The instruction at the Academy is “teacher-led and teacher directed.” According to the administrator, the Academy “participates in the state accountability system as other high schools” and states that all of the Academy’s employees are highly qualified instructors who meet the standard of “Accomplished” in each area of teacher evaluation (see Figure 35).

Another administrator revealed in their questionnaire that the structure of a charter school would be the “perfect” school for youth who may not find the traditional school setting to be the

best fit for them. The administrator stated “a charter school is approved to operate outside the general rules for public schools and provide service to students but would not be restricted to the structural constraints that public schools have.” The administrator expressed “charter schools can benefit students because they offer new and different ideas to address a particular population of students or a particular level of learning. Also, charter schools do not have the same regulations that apply to public schools” (see Figure 34).

The community member’s questionnaire cited components such as vocational classes, staff with high expectations and “knowledge of effective strategies that work,” a licensed therapist, on the job training, staff “trained with dealing and meeting special needs of this population,” “flexible hours for students (8-8),” “self-pace with close monitoring of pace,” and a full curriculum as the design of the “perfect” school for youth who may not find the “traditional” school setting to be the best fit. The community member felt the Academy needed “more focus on academics, with necessary support” (see Figure 36). Most parents/guardians, 71% (17 out of 24), responded with a rating of 1 to 3 (“strongly disagree” to “neutral”) that the student handbook was thoroughly reviewed with them (see Figure 97).

The data suggested that all of the parents/guardians, students, and faculty are not aware of the organizational structure of the Academy of focus. It could be assumed that some of the responding subjects were unaware of what an organizational structure actually was. There is not an organizational structure unique to the Academy; it is merely a school that enrolls and exits students “in concert with the main high school” (see Figure 35). The Academy does not need to be a mere extension of the high school in a different geographical location. A specific organizational structure that effectively serves students who were not successful in the main high school should be established and implemented. The procedures should be detailed in writing and

should be reviewed and explained to and executed by all members of the faculty/staff, parents, and students. The organizational structure should be clear and concise and should not be an exact replication of the main high school.

The administrators who answered the open-ended structured questionnaire were able to cite practices and procedures that should be extant and implemented in the “perfect” school for youth who may not find the “traditional” school setting to be the best fit. The practices and procedures cited were apparently not implemented at the Academy. If one can cite what should be present to impact student achievement, one should effect change to see it come to fruition.

To what extent is support provided to parents/guardians, students, and faculty in addressing the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of the students? Regarding support offered to students, the administrator stated “the Academy has one guidance counselor who provides support and assistance to students who are nearing graduation” (see Figure 35). Some responses from parents/guardians about the support staff were, “guidance counselor helps to make sure my grandson is taking classes he needs,” “showing the students that they are there to help the students transition better in getting their education,” “caring,” “supportive,” “kind and helpful,” and “very supportive” (see Figure 62). Some responses from students were, “great support staff,” “okay, need more help,” “very nice and easy to get along with,” “okay, need them more,” and “very helpful when it comes to calming a student down” (see Figure 63). The faculty gave their thoughts on the support staff at the Academy. All of the comments were relatively positive; however, one faculty member stated that the support staff is “handicapped when the guidance refuses to do her job and really doesn’t do much for the students. The last thing students want to hear [is] how they will fail and being talked down to.” Other faculty comments about the support staff were “very supportive,” “always works to assist students with issues and

problems they may have as well as to develop trusting relationships with students,” “is limited,” “are committed” (see Figure 64).

Just over half of the parents/guardians, 58% (14 out of 24), knew what a student support team was (see Figure 93). Fifty-eight percent (14 out of 24) of responding parents/guardians stated that a student support team has worked with their child to help the child be successful (see Figure 94). While 58% (14 out of 24) of the parents/guardians stated that a student support team had worked with their child to help the child be successful, 54% (13 out of 24) of parents/guardians shared that they had not received information on student support teams (see Figure 95). The majority of responding parents/guardians, 54% (13 out of 24), responded “neutral” when asked if the guidance counselor provided them with useful information about their child (see Figure 96).

Sixty-seven percent (29 out of 43) of responding students knew what a student support team was (see Figure 98). Most students reported that the student handbook was thoroughly reviewed with them, with 51% (22 out of 43) responding “strongly agree” and 19% (8 out of 43) responding “agree” (see Figure 100). Only 9% (4 out of 43) of responding students strongly disagreed and 2% (1 out of 43) disagreed that their guidance counselor knew them and was helpful (see Figure 99).

One hundred percent (14 out of 14) of the responding faculty knew what a student support team was. Seventy-one percent (10 out of 14) of the responding faculty had served as a member of a student support team and 64% (9 out of 14) had received professional development on student support teams (see Figure 101). Only 35% (5 out of 14) of faculty agreed/strongly agreed that the guidance counselor provided helpful information regarding students to the faculty. Fifty percent (7 out of 14) responded “neutral” (see Figure 102).

The Academy only has one guidance counselor on staff to assist students. Based on the responses given by the study participants, the primary focus of the counselor is scheduling and graduation requirements. Miller (2006) identified that alternative schools were born from an attempt to provide support and assistance to students that were not successful in a traditional setting. While scheduling is an important function of the guidance counselor, the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of the students must be systematically addressed. As seen in other alternative school/program models (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996), a licensed psychologist and/or therapist should be on hand to address the mitigating factors that influence the lives of many of the students enrolled in the Academy. Failure to properly address the social-emotional needs of the students is failing the student.

The majority of the faculty at the Academy had not received helpful information about the students they served. One could deduce that the helpful information transcends mere academics. Students attending the Academy have shown that they are not able to be successful in a traditional school setting; therefore, the services provided to them should not be traditional. Support groups that address the social factors influencing their behavior should be established and offered to students. Students should be afforded the opportunity to receive in-depth social, emotional, and behavioral support from licensed professionals in the alternative setting. The support should also be extended to their parents as needed.

To what extent does the organizational structure of the alternative school meet the needs of at-risk students? According to Policy Code: 3470/4305, the following have been identified by the school district in southeastern North Carolina as purposes for an alternative educational setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in

the regular educational setting,

2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,
3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and
4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.

According to the data, the Academy's graduation rate is lower than the district and the state (see Figure 17 and Figure 18). Twenty-nine percent (7 out of 24) of parents/guardians agreed that organizational structure impacted student performance. Fifty-eight percent (14 out of 24) responded "neutral" regarding its impact and 12% (3 out of 24) felt that it did not impact student performance (see Figure 42). The majority of the responding students enrolled in the Academy, 52% (22 out of 43), felt that the organizational structure in place impacted student achievement (see Figure 44).

The parents/guardians of students attending the Academy were provided the opportunity to respond to their knowledge of the Academy's use of an organizational structure to impact student performance. Of the 11 responses recorded, only 3 seemed to have an understanding of organizational structure. Those parents felt that small classes, keeping students on task and focused, and enforcing strict rules impacted student performance (see Figure 43). The students reported factors such as strict enforcement of rules, taking time with students, proper scheduling of classes, the faculty and staff, experienced teachers, virtual learning, and fair treatment of students as components of the organizational structure in place (see Figure 45).

Only 13% (3 out of 24) of parents/guardians strongly agreed that the Academy is meeting

the needs of their child. Thirty-eight percent (9 out of 24) agreed, 25% (6 out of 24) responded “neutral,” 17% (4 out of 24) disagreed and 8% (2 out of 24) strongly disagreed that the Academy is meeting the needs of their child (see Figure 68). Of the responding students, 35% (15 out of 43) responded “neutral” concerning the Academy meeting their needs as a student. Twenty-eight percent (12 out of 43) strongly agreed that their needs as a student were being met, 16% (7 out of 43) agreed, 12% (5 out of 43) strongly disagreed, and 9% (4 out of 43) disagreed (see Figure 80). Fifty-seven percent (8 out of 14) percent of faculty believed the Academy is meeting the needs of students. Thirty-six percent (5 out of 14) responded “neutral” and 7% (1 out of 14) did not believe the Academy is meeting the needs of the students that attend the school (see Figure 92).

Fifty-seven percent (8 out of 14) of the faculty reported that the organizational structure impacted student performance, 36% (5 out of 14) of the faculty was neutral and 14% (2 out of 14) of the faculty felt that the structure in place did not impact student achievement (see Figure 46). Four members of the responding faculty were unsure if the Academy used an organizational structure to impact student performance. Other responses suggested that teachers and administration working together impacted student performance. One faculty member felt “that the organizational structure and collaboration between student, teacher, counselor and administration here has a strong positive impact on students’ performance” (see Figure 47).

The students and faculty were relatively consistent in their thoughts that the Academy was a good place to work and learn, however, parents gave contradictory accounts about the Academy. Thirty-eight percent (9 out of 24) of responding parents/guardians strongly agreed that they wish their child could go to a different school. Thirteen percent (3 out of 24) agreed, 17% (4 out of 24) responded “neutral,” 8% (2 out of 24) disagreed and 25% (6 out of 24) strongly disagreed that they wish their child could go to a different school (see Figure 69). When

asked if the school is a “dumping ground” for bad students, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 17% (4 out of 24) “strongly disagree,” 12% (3 out of 24) “agree,” 38% (9 out of 24) neutral, 12% (3 out of 24) “agree,” and 21% (5 out of 24) “strongly agree”(see Figure 38). Moreover, while the faculty responded favorably about the Academy in most responses, the data revealed that 57% (8 out of 14) of the faculty did not feel that the Academy is a respected school in the county (see Figure 53). They also felt that the school is a dumping ground for students, with 57% (8 out of 14) agreeing with the statement, “I feel like the Academy is a “dumping ground” for “bad” students (see Figure 54).

While the majority of parents/guardians, students, and faculty stated that the organizational structure of the Academy impacted student performance and the Academy was meeting the needs of the students, the data clearly indicated that there were failures within the current model, methods, strategies, and practices that have been in place at the Academy (see Figures 8-20). All tested areas were significantly low. There was no significant achievement gap between any of the subgroups at the Academy, mainly due to the fact that all subgroups performed poorly. In addition, the Academy did not meet expected growth.

It is admirable to know that the students like their teachers and the teachers like coming to work but, at the end of the day, academic proficiency and growth are indicators of meeting the needs of at-risk students. Teachers need to provide instruction that fosters a learning environment where students make connections and demonstrate academic growth. “Educators are able to make data-informed instructional decisions to ensure academic growth and achievement of all students by using EVAAS” (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/>, 2013). While all teachers in North Carolina are held to the Common

Core/Essential Standards curriculum, differentiation of the curriculum must be demonstrated, especially for at-risk students.

The administrator stated that all teachers on staff at the Academy had received a rating of “Accomplished” in each area of the teacher evaluation and the instruction provided at the Academy was “teacher-led and teacher directed” (see Figure 35). In a 21st century world, students must be exposed to 21st century teaching and learning, which is the exact opposite of teacher-led and teacher directed. In addition, “Accomplished” teachers should be making a significant impact on student achievement, which should be evidenced in the state accountability model.

There was no indication from any of the data that students were exposed to community service initiatives. The community member stated that the county/school system could “collaborate with community resources, law enforcement, mental health facilities, and juvenile services” to increase community support and exposure (see Figure 36). In *The Resilience Revolution*, Larry K. Brendtro and Scott J. Larson (2006) stated that, “the core pathology of modern society lies in the loss of a sense of shared community (p. 131). Students need to feel a sense of community and should be required to serve the community in a positive role, all the while obtaining skills that would prove beneficial in their quest to become a productive student and citizen.

The school district in southeastern North Carolina addressed school improvement plans in their board policies. Each school has the responsibility of creating a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to address all educational goals established by the Board of Education. This plan should include objectives, strategies, action steps, and a budget to ensure that students are receiving the necessary education within their schools to be college and career ready (NCSBA

Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-A rural southeastern Schools Board of Education Policy Manual). Students expressed a desire for extra-curricular activities and vocational courses and felt that virtual learning opportunities impacted their learning. The course offerings need to be revisited to ensure that students are afforded the opportunity for virtual and vocational courses, a practice that is palpable in successful alternative models (Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools, 1996).

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

The Academy of focus in this study had implemented some elements of the alternative learning program standards within the organizational structure; however, the student achievement data and graduation rates of those enrolled in the Academy suggests that the organizational structure currently in place needs to be revisited. While participants in the study felt that the Academy was meeting the needs of its students, the organizational structure in the current model has proven that the holistic needs of the students are not being met due to the lack of a clear mission and community/parental involvement, the curriculum and instruction currently offered to students, and the monitoring and assessment of students—particularly with regard to the support system currently in place.

The support and curriculum offered to at-risk students enrolled in the Academy must be revisited and modified to maximize the potential of the students and traditional methods that caused them to be unsuccessful in the traditional school setting should be abandoned. The insistence of parental involvement and the implementation of community-based service projects must also be considered and implemented. The establishment of an organized enrollment and withdrawal process must transpire to efficiently communicate the mission, goals, and expectations of the Academy and determine the readiness of students to return to a traditional

setting. Further research is needed on effective transition/reintegration programs between alternative schools and traditional schools, or schools of origin, with a focus on the assessment of the at-risk student's academic and social-emotional preparedness to return to the traditional educational setting and the traditional school's readiness to receive them. In addition, further research is needed on innovative methods used to increase parental involvement in alternative school settings. Finally, further research is needed on the effectiveness of alternative education programs versus alternative schools, as it relates to academic growth, achievement, and behavior modification.

The following recommendations are being made to the LEA and/or Academy's administration:

- Seek funding to increase the amount of social-emotional support provided for students (i.e. licensed psychologist/therapist, school social worker, additional guidance counselor)
- Seek funding to attract highly-qualified teachers who have demonstrated high student academic growth through Teacher Value Added data found in EVAAS and exhibit a desire to work with the student population served at the Academy
- Develop a comprehensive orientation/intake process for students enrolling in the Academy that involves parents/guardians
 - Establish a program that properly orients students to the Academy, assesses their academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as their social/behavioral needs, and allows them to establish attainable goals for themselves during their tenure at the Academy

- Collaborate with the local high school to establish a plan of support for all students returning to the traditional school setting
- Implement a PEP (Personalized Education Plan) for each student upon arrival
- Increase the focus on academics rather than behavior modification—building principal assume the role of Instructional Leader
 - Assess the implementation of the Common Core/Essential Standards curriculum by all teachers and provide Professional Development as needed for teachers
 - Ensure that all teachers are able to effectively use EVAAS to impact student growth and achievement
- Develop a clear and concise mission and communicate it effectively to all stakeholders
- Seek participation from local businesses to provide internships/work experiences for students desiring to enter the workforce rather than attend an institution of higher learning
- Seek community service projects/opportunities for students as a part of their curriculum
- Seek innovative ways to increase parental support/involvement
- Provide vocational courses for students
- Administer satisfaction surveys to stakeholders to gauge the perception of the Academy and seek feedback on strategies that would improve the image and perception of the school

Students must be held accountable for their learning and academic success but must be provided the necessary tools to accomplish that feat. Matthew 9:17 (NIV) states, “Neither do

people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." We cannot remove students from the traditional setting and place them in a new setting, all the while maintaining the same traditional views and practices of the traditional setting. Doing so could result in the detriment of the at-risk student-- a practice that needs to come to an end.

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APPENDIX A: ALP STANDARDS & LEGISLATION ALIGNMENT

Created by NCDPI, aligns the seven standards with legislation adopted and approved in 1999.

#	Standard	Component	General Statute
1	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	<i>Establish the program's mission, goals, and expected outcomes</i>	115C12(24)
2	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Identify the target population</i>	115C12(24)
3	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Develop process for assigning and enrolling students into the alternative program</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48 (b) 115C-397.1
4	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Access to the documentation used to establish the need for the assignment</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
5	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Provide the steps in the appeals process to the parent</i>	115C12(24)
6	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Identify the documents to be transferred to the alternative program;</i>	115C12(24)
7	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Indicate how students are transported to the program</i>	115C12(24)
8	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Curriculum & Instruction	<i>Describe the curricular, instructional day, and courses to be offered</i>	115C12(24)
9	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Ensure a safe, orderly, caring, and inviting environment</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
10	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Primarily provide choice in enrollment</i>	115C12(24)

11	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Provide for active parent/guardian participation in the assignment decision</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48 (3)(b)
12	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Include least one representative to participate in the assignment decision for enrollment</i>	115C12(24)
13	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Access to and utilize information from the referring entity that identifies previous interventions, strategies, or actions taken</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48 (b)
14	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Access to student information data prior to the arrival of the student</i>	115C12(24)
15	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Implement effective preparation and plans to increase positive student outcomes</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
16	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Effective in-take procedures that address the preparation and plans for the student</i>	115C12(24)
17	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Effective transition procedures that address the preparation and plans for the student</i>	115C12(24)
18	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Strongly encourage the participation of parents in the enrollment and transition phases</i>	115C12(24)
19	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development	<i>Highly qualified and effective faculty and staff</i>	115C-47(32a) 115C-105.47(a)
20	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Sufficient faculty and staff to carry-out the mission of the program</i>	115C-47(32a)
21	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Small student to teacher ratio, 10:1 or smaller, but not more than 15:1</i>	ALP Policy & Procedures Document for Grades K- 12

			Adopted September 2003
22	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Minimal disparity in the percent of exceptional children in comparison to the district</i>	ALP Policy & Procedures Document for Grades K-12 Adopted September 2003
23	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development	<i>Ensure that special education and related services for students with disabilities are provided according to the student's individualized education program</i>	IDEA 115C-113
24	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Encouraged to have teacher assistants in classes with more than ten students</i>	115C12(24)
25	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	<i>Encouraged to have teacher assistants assigned to all courses that have EOGs/EOCs, or other competency-based tests that are required by the State for promotion or graduation</i>	115C12(24)
26	Clear Mission Leadership Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Use the North Carolina Standard Course of Study as the primary framework for instruction</i>	115C12(24)
27	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	<i>Flexibility in implementing strategies and methods that positively impact the delivery of curriculum and instruction, and student growth and development</i>	115C12(24)
28	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	<i>Supplement the curriculum and instruction with life skills, character education, conflict management, and career preparation</i>	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
29	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Positive and effective whole school systems for student management</i>	115C12(24)
30	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	<i>Learning environments that promote high expectations and encourages learning</i>	115C12(24) 115C-47(32a)
31	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development	<i>Access to continuous growth and development opportunities for faculty and staff</i>	115C12(24) 115C-47(32a)
32	Clear Mission	<i>Provide staff, parents, and students with</i>	115C12(24)

	Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	<i>copies of the handbook that includes the policies, procedures, and standards of the school or program</i>	
33	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Cultivate a collaborative and supportive relationship with referring agencies and encourage them to maintain a demonstrated investment in the success of the students and the program</i>	115C12(24)
34	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Cultivate a collaborative and supportive relationship with parents that enhance the success of the students and the program</i>	115C-105.48(3b)
35	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	<i>Cultivate a collaborative and supportive relationship with the community that enhances the success of the students and the program</i>	115C12(24)
36	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Evaluate their programs and procedures to ensure the on-going effectiveness of the program and success of the students</i>	115C12(24)
37	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	<i>Evaluate the effectiveness of their programs based on: the mission and goals; school/program improvement plan; school/program safety/crisis plan; needs assessment; parent, student, staff surveys; assessment of student outcomes; assessment of program outcomes; and, ABC's Accountability Model for Alternative Schools</i>	115C12(24) 115C-47(32a)

APPENDIX B: NCDPI DROPOUT DEFINATION

NCDPI (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf>) definition of dropout for the purposes of data collection and reporting by local education agencies.

Dropout Definition

Event rates measure the proportion of students who drop out in a single reporting year.

The method used in North Carolina to count dropouts is called an event count. It counts the number of dropouts during a school year, beginning on the first day of the academic year and ending on the last day of the subsequent summer vacation.

All school systems and schools in North Carolina are to use the following definition for a dropout. To ensure accuracy and consistency in reporting dropouts, dropout prevention coordinators should become thoroughly familiar with the definition and its interpretations based on state laws and policies.

Note: Throughout this manual, "current year" refers to the 2013-14 school year, and "reporting year" refers to the 2012-13 school year.

Definition

A "dropout" is an individual who

- was enrolled in school at some time during the reporting year;
- was not enrolled on day 20 of the current year;
- has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program; and does not meet any of the following reporting exclusions:
 1. transferred to another public school district, private school, home school or state/district approved educational program (not including programs at community colleges),
 2. temporarily absent due to suspension or school approved illness, or
 3. death.

The private school and home school exclusions apply to students transferring to schools registered with the NC Department of Non-Public Education. See page 4 for details on the home school exclusion.

APPENDIX C: NCDPI DROPOUT CALCULATION STEPS

NCDPI (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf>) method for calculating the dropout rate.

Calculating the Dropout Rate

For its annual report the DPI calculates dropout rates for grades 1-13, 7-13, and 9-13. The calculation for North Carolina's dropout rate has been greatly simplified. The 9-13 rate is calculated as follows.

STEP 1: Include all cases of reported dropouts (grades 9-13) in the numerator.

STEP 2: To determine the denominator,

- include the twentieth day membership for the reporting (previous) year;
- add the number of reported dropouts (same as used in the numerator).

STEP 3: Calculate a rate by dividing the numerator by the denominator; round off to the nearest one hundredth for a grade 9-13 dropout rate.

$$\frac{\text{Total Number of Dropouts}}{\text{20th Day Membership (reporting yr.)} + \text{Total Number of Dropouts}}$$

Example

School System A documented 200 grade 9-13 dropouts for the reporting year 2012-13. The first month membership for the reporting year was 5,000 students in grades 9-13.

To compute the rate, state the fraction:

Numerator = 200

Denominator = 5,000 + 200 = 5,200

Solve: Divide the Numerator by the Denominator:

$200 / 5,200 = 3.846\%$, or rounded to nearest one hundredth, **3.85%**.

**APPENDIX D: NC GENERAL STATUTES FOR ALTERNATIVE
SCHOOLS/ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS AND MAINTAINING SAFE
AND ORDERLY SCHOOLS**

Article 8C. Local Plans For Alternative Schools/Alternative Learning Programs and Maintaining Safe and Orderly Schools.

Article 8C.

**Local Plans For Alternative Schools/Alternative Learning Programs and
Maintaining Safe and Orderly Schools.**

§ 115C-105.45. Legislative findings.

The General Assembly finds that all schools should be safe, secure, and orderly. If students are to aim for academic excellence, it is imperative that there is a climate of respect in every school and that every school is free of disruption, drugs, violence, and weapons. All schools must have plans, policies, and procedures for dealing with disorderly and disruptive behavior.

All schools and school units must have effective measures for assisting students who are at risk of academic failure or of engaging in disruptive and disorderly behavior. (1997-443, s. 8.29(r)(1).)

§ 115C-105.46. State Board of Education responsibilities.

In order to implement this Article, the State Board of Education:

(1) through (4) Repealed by Session Laws 2011-145, s. 7.13(y), effective July 1, 2011.

(5) Shall adopt policies that define who is an at-risk student. (1997-443, s. 8.29(r)(1); 1999-397, s. 2; 2000-140, s. 22; 2011-145, s. 7.13(y).)

§ 115C-105.47: Repealed by Session Laws 2011-145, s. 7.13(z), effective July 1, 2011.

§ 115C-105.47A. Proposals to establish alternative learning programs or alternative schools.

(a) Before establishing any alternative learning program or alternative school, the local board of education shall develop a proposal to implement the program or school that includes all of the following:

(1) The educational and behavioral goals for students assigned to the program or school.

(2) The policies and procedures for the operation of the program or school based on the State Board's standards adopted under G.S. 115C-12(24). The policies and procedures shall address the assignment of students to the program or school.

(3) Identified strategies that will be used to improve student achievement and behavior.

(4) Documentation that similar programs and schools in or out of the State, or both, have demonstrated success in improving the academic achievement and behavior of students assigned to them.

(5) The estimated actual cost of operating the program or school. To the extent practicable, this shall include the cost of:

a. Staffing the program or school with teachers who have at least four years'

teaching experience and who have received an overall rating of at least above standard on a formal evaluation and are certified in the areas and grade levels being taught;

b. Providing optimum learning environments, resources and materials, and high quality, ongoing professional development that will ensure students who are placed in the program or school are provided enhanced educational opportunities in order to achieve their full potential;

c. Providing support personnel, including school counselors, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, nurses, and other professionals to help students and their families work out complex issues and problems;

d. Maintaining safe and orderly learning environments; and

e. Providing transitional supports for students exiting the program or school and re-entering the referring school.

(6) Documented support of school personnel and the community for the implementation of the program or school.

(b) After the local board completes the proposal under subsection (a) of this section, the board shall submit the proposal to the State Board of Education for its review. The State Board shall review the proposal expeditiously and, if appropriate, may offer recommendations to modify the proposal. The local board shall consider any recommendations made by the State Board before implementing the alternative learning program or alternative school. (2005-446, s. 2.)

§ 115C-105.48. Placement of students in alternative schools/alternative learning programs.

(a) Prior to referring a student to an alternative school or an alternative learning program, the referring school shall:

(1) Document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly.

(2) Provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative school or an alternative learning program.

(3) Provide to the alternative school or alternative learning program all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

(b) When a student is placed in an alternative school or an alternative learning program, the appropriate staff of the alternative school or alternative learning program shall meet to review the records forwarded by the referring school and to determine what support services and intervention strategies are recommended for the student. The parents shall be encouraged to provide input regarding the student's needs. (1999-397, s. 2.)

§§ 115C-105.49 through 115C-105.52. Reserved for future codification purposes.

APPENDIX E: LEA BOARD POLICIES

Detailed chart of discipline related policies for the county in rural North Carolina.

County Board Policies	Summary of Policies
<p><u>Policy Code: 1510/4200/7270</u> <u>School Safety</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>Safe schools are necessary to evoke positive change academically and socially with ALL students. Schools will enforce and implement the necessary precautions to maintain safety within the school for learning to take place.</p> <p>Safety measures must be in placed and honored throughout the school day to establish an effective school climate. Supervision of visitors, safety of school buildings and grounds, processes to address potential safety concerns and emergencies(school rules, training for staff and faculty, safety equipment, suspicious behavior, registered sex offenders and student behavior standards) are all measures that should be addressed in safe schools plan.</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 1710/4021/7230</u> <u>Prohibition Against</u> <u>Discrimination, Harassment</u> <u>and Bullying</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>The board does not recognize or allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age and will provide equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups as required by law. Furthermore, the board does not permit any form of unlawful discrimination, harassment, or bullying in any of its educational or employment activities or programs.</p> <p>Prohibited Behaviors and Consequences:</p> <p>1. Discrimination: any act or failure to act that unreasonably and unfavorably differentiates treatment of others based solely on their membership in a socially distinct group or category, such as race, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, age or disability--intentional or unintentional</p> <p>Harassment and Bullying: any pattern of gestures or written, electronic, or verbal communications, or any physical act or any threatening communication that:</p> <p>a. places a student or school employee in actual and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property; or</p> <p>b. creates or is certain to create a hostile environment by substantially interfering with or impairing a student's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits</p>

	<p>“Hostile environment” means that the victim subjectively views the conduct as harassment or bullying and that the conduct is objectively severe or pervasive enough that a reasonable person would agree that it is harassment or bullying. A hostile environment may be created through pervasive or persistent misbehavior or a single incident, if sufficiently severe.</p> <p>Harassment may include sexual or gender-based harassment that can happen between co-workers, fellow students, supervisors and subordinates, employees and students and between non-employees, including visitors, and employees or students.</p> <p>2. Retaliation: not permitted for reporting or intending to report a violation against the established policy. If it is determined that retaliation has taken place the appropriate consequences will be put in place by superintendent.</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4300 Student Behavior Policies</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>Student Behavior policies are created to ensure a caring, safe and supportive environment within schools to provide opportunities for students to obtain and understand educational goals and objectives. Furthermore, the behavior policies establish an expectation of behavior, principles designed for these expectations and consequences for a undesired behavior.</p> <p>Students must comply with the Student Code of Conduct as it relates to minor and major behavioral challenges that occur within the school system. The code of conduct applies to the following situations/areas: while in any school building or on any school premises before, during or after school hours; while on any bus or other vehicles as part of any school activity; while waiting at any school bus stop; during any school-sponsored activity or extracurricular activity; when subject to the authority of school employees; and at any place or time when the student’s behavior has or is reasonably expected to have a direct and immediate impact on the orderly and efficient operation of the schools or the safety of individuals in the school environment.</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4300B Student Code of Conduct</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA</p>	<p>In order to accomplish the task of providing academics to all student and improving student achievement the board has incorporated a Student Code of Conduct to ensure a safe and orderly environment in every school. The Code of Conduct serves as a guide for all stakeholders as a</p>

<p>Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>standard of appropriate student behaviors and expectations during school and at all school related activities.</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4302 School Plan for Management of Student Behavior</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>School Plan for Management of Student Behavior must exist in all schools and it must contain effective strategies and policies to address behavioral issues that may arise. Local Education Agencies are encouraged to incorporate a program(s) that address positive behavior support and to continue to seek additional support measures to address and manage student behavior.</p> <p>Components of the Plan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Process by which student behavior will be addressed, including any use of a disciplinary committee and the means by which students at risk of repeated disruptive or disorderly conduct are identified, assessed and assisted; 2. positive behavioral interventions and possible consequences that will be used; and 3. parental involvement strategies that address when parents or guardians will be notified or involved in issues related to their child's behavior. <p>This plan should not address the use of corporal punishment, which is identified as intentional infliction of physical pain upon the body of a student as a disciplinary measure. The policy states that corporal punishment includes but is not limited to, spanking, paddling and slapping. The use of corporal punishment is not permitted or allowed in any district. The board expects other measures to be used in place of corporal punishment because the board believes other consequences are more appropriate and effective to address behavior expectations.</p>

Policy Code: 4315
Disruptive/Disrespectful
Behavior

Citation: NCSBA
Legal/Policy Services
policy.microscribepub.com--
school district in Southeast,
NC, Board of Education
Policy Manual, 2013

A safe, orderly and inviting school environment is essential for teaching and learning to take place within each school. Teachers, staff and students play an integral part in the establishment and maintaining of a safe and inviting environment where free speech is enforced and may be limited based on time, place and manner in an effort to maintain an environment that allows for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Students are not permitted to disrupt or disrespect the learning environment, school activities to include extracurricular activities. The following provides an explanation of disruptive behavior:

1. intentional verbal or physical acts that result or have the potential to result in blocking access to school functions or facilities or preventing the convening or continuation of school-related functions;
2. appearance or clothing that (1) violates a reasonable dress code adopted and published by the school; (2) is substantially disruptive; (3) is provocative or obscene; or (4) endangers the health or safety of the student or others
3. possessing or distributing literature or illustrations that significantly disrupt the educational process or that are obscene or unlawful;
4. engaging in behavior that is immoral, indecent, lewd, disreputable or of any overly sexual nature in the school setting;
5. failing to observe establish safety rules, standards and regulations, including on buses and in hallways; and
6. interfering with the operation of school buses, including delaying the bus schedule, getting off at an unauthorized stop, and willfully trespassing upon a school bus.
7. Students shall not use racial epithets or obscene or vulgar language or gestures or otherwise show marked disrespect to a student, teacher, or other school employee.
8. Students shall comply with school regulations and with directions of teachers, substitute teachers, student teachers, teacher aides, principals or other authorized school personnel during any period of time when they are properly under the authority of such school personnel.

Consequences:

	<p>K-5 Code of Student Conduct</p> <p>1st Offense: Warning/Parent Conference 2nd Offense: Up To 3 Days OSS 3rd Offense: Up To 10 Days OSS</p> <p>6-12 Code of Student Conduct</p> <p>1st Offense: Warning/Up to 3 Days 2nd Offense: Up To 5 Days OSS 3rd Offense: Up To 10 Days OSS/Possible ALA/LTS</p>
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<p><u>Policy Code: 4320 Tobacco Products – Students</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>In a continuing effort to support a safe, caring, inviting and clean schools for faculty, student, staff the board supports the state law that denies the sale of tobacco products to minors and the use of tobacco products by minors. This law extends to school buildings, campuses and any other area identified as school property. The policy defines the term “tobacco product” as any product that contains or that is made or derived from tobacco and is intended for human consumption, including electronic cigarettes and all lighted and smokeless tobacco products.</p> <p>K-5 Code of Student Conduct</p> <p>1st Offense: Warning/Parent Conference/Tobacco Awareness 2nd Offense: Warning/Up to 1 Day ISS/OSS/Tobacco Awareness 3rd Offense: Up to 3 Days ISS/OSS</p> <p>6-12 Code of Student Conduct 1st Offense: Warning/Parent Conference/Up to 1 Day ISS/Tobacco Awareness 2nd Offense: Warning/Up to 3 Days ISS/OSS/Tobacco Awareness 3rd Offense: Up to 5 Days ISS/OSS</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4325 Drugs and Alcohol</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>Drugs and alcohol will not be prohibited on school premises at any time because it is a threat to the safety and order of school environment. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to ensure that this policy is implemented and applied consistently throughout Local Education Agencies.</p> <p>Prohibited Behavior identified by policy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. narcotic drugs; 2. hallucinogenic drugs; 3. amphetamines; 4. barbiturates; 5. marijuana or any other controlled substance; 6. synthetic stimulants, such as MDPV and mephedrone(“bath salts”), and synthetic cannabinoids (“Spice”, “K2”)

	<p>7. any alcoholic beverage, malt beverage, fortified or unfortified wine or other intoxicating liquor; or</p> <p>8. any chemicals, substances or products procured or used with the intention of bringing about a state of exhilaration or euphoria or of otherwise altering the student's mood or behavior</p> <p>K-5 Code of Student Conduct</p> <p>1st Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 2nd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 3rd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS</p> <p>6-12 Code of Student Conduct</p> <p>1st Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 2nd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS/LTS 3rd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS/LTS</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4328 Gang-Related Activity</u> Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>As part of the safety initiative within the district, gang activity is not permitted or prohibited. Gang activity distracts and takes away from the mission and vision of the district to ensure that All students are academically successful.</p> <p>A gang is identified by board policy as any group or organization made up of three or more people in a formal or informal way that is involved in any type of criminal activity. This group is easily identified by colors, signs and/or gesture for affiliation purposes.</p> <p>The following activities have been identified as gang related activity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. soliciting others to become part of gang 2. committing, possessing, distributing, displaying or selling any clothes 3. tagging or defacing school property 4. requirement of payment for protection and/or insurance

	<p>5. inciting others to intimidate or to act with physical violence</p> <p>The gang-related activity policy is a non-discriminatory policy that follows the Code of Conduct based on the following consequences:</p> <p>K-5 1st Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS 2nd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS 3rd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS</p> <p>6-12 1st Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS/LTS 2nd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS/LTS 3rd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS/LTS</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4341 Parental Involvement in Student Behavior Issues</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>Parental involvement is essential for appropriate teaching, learning and behavior to take place consistently and appropriately in school environment. School employees seek assistance and support from parents for all stakeholders to understand the expected behavior and the appropriate understanding of Code of Conduct in an effort to have a inviting and safe school culture.</p> <p>Faculty and Staff will implement effective strategies to support the Behavior Management Plan soliciting help and support from parents. Part of this process is to invite parents to conferences involving their students as it pertains to inappropriate conduct outlined in Student Code of Conduct, school standards and/or school rules.</p>

	<p>If administration decides to implement a short-term suspension, the principal shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. notify the parent in accordance with policy 44351, Short-Term Suspension' 2. maintain documents and relevant information that he or she receives about the misbehavior for review with the parent, taking into account the rights of other students or staff that may be involved; 3. make reasonable efforts, if appropriate, to meet with the parent before or at the time the student returns to school after any suspension; and 4. make available a copy of this policy, the Code of Student Conduct, and all other applicable board policies, school standards and school rules.
<p><u>Policy Code: 4351 Short-Term Suspension</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>A short term suspension is an out of school suspension for up to 10 days. The policy does not permit a short-term suspension to include: (1) the removal of a student from class by the classroom teacher, the principal or other authorized school personnel for the remainder of the subject period or for less than one-half of the school day or (2) the changing of a student's location to another room or place on the school premises. Any student given short-term suspension is not allowed to be on school premises or to attend any extracurricular activity without prior approval of the building principal.</p> <p>Pre-Suspension Rights of the Student</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student must be provided with an informal hearing with principal prior to receiving short-term suspension. Administration may hold the meeting after giving student oral or written information about charges. The student and parent are part of the hearing process and will hear all information to include statements in regards to the charges the student received. <p>If a student poses a threat to the safety and order of school environment or disrupts the school environment the principal may impose short-term suspension prior to administration of hearing.</p> <p>Students Rights During Suspension</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the opportunity to take textbooks home for the duration

	<p>of the suspension</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. upon request, the right to receive all missed assignments and, to the extent practicable, the materials distributed to students in connection with such assignments; and 3. the opportunity to take any quarterly, semester or grading period examinations missed during the suspension period <p>Parents should receive documentation that identifies reason for suspension and a description of charges in which suspension was imposed.</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4352 Removal of Student During the Day</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual 2013,</p>	<p>The principal has the authority to remove a student from school grounds that has been suspended under the following circumstances:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the parent has been notified and is able to make arrangements for the student to leave the school or agrees to the student's using public transportation or driving himself or herself home; 2. the parent has been notified and is available to receive student, and the principal is able to arrange for transportation from the school to home; or 3. the principal involves law enforcement in the removal of the student from school grounds because such action is necessary to provide a safe, orderly school environment <p>If these conditions are not existent the suspension will begin the next school day.</p>
<p><u>Policy Code: 4353 Long-Term Suspension, 365-Day Suspension, Expulsion</u></p> <p>Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013</p>	<p>Long-term suspension, 365 Day suspension, and expulsion practices will be followed in correspondence with Policy 4353. These actions include the right to written notice of the suggested discipline and the right to recourse via a full hearing prior to imposing disciplinary action.</p> <p>A principal may suggest to the Superintendent the long-term suspension of any student who voluntarily takes part in conduct that violates a provision of the Student Code of Conduct that authorizes long-term suspension. Only the Superintendent or his/her designee has the authority to long-term suspend a student.</p>

	<p>Determination of Appropriate Consequences based on principal recommendation</p> <p>a. Culpability of Student- In assessing the culpability of the student for his or her behavior, the principal may consider criteria such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. student's age; 2. the student's ability to form the intent to cause the harm that occurred or could have occurred; and 3. evidence of the student's intent when engaging in the conduct <p>b. Dangerousness of the Student- In assessing the dangerousness of the student, the principal may consider criteria such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the student's disciplinary or criminal record relate to anti-social behavior or drugs and alcohol; 2. whether a weapon was involved in the incident and if a weapon was involved, whether the student had the ability to inflict serious injury or death with weapon; 3. evidence of the student's ability to cause the harm that was intended or that occurred; and 4. whether the student is subject to policy 4260, Student Sex Offenders <p>c. Harm Caused by the Student-In assessing the severity of the harm caused by the student, the principal may consider criteria such as whether any of the following occurred;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. someone was physically injured or killed; 2. someone was directly threatened or property was extorted through the use of a weapon 3. someone was directly harmed; either emotionally or psychologically; 4. educational property or others' personal property was damaged; or 5. students, school employees or parents were aware of the presence of a weapon or of dangerous behavior on the part of the perpetrator. <p>After the principal makes recommendation in regards to long-term suspension, 365-day suspension or expulsion to the superintendent a parent/guardian should receive notification of this recommendation. The following items must be documented in this notice:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the notice type, i.e., notice of long-term suspension
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. a description of the incident and the student's conduct that led to the recommendation; 3. the specific provision(s) of the Code of Student Conduct that the student allegedly violated; 4. the specific process by which the parent may request a hearing to contest the decision and the deadline for making the request; 5. the process by which the hearing will be held, including all due process rights to be accorded the student during the hearing; 6. notice of the right to retain an attorney to represent the student in the hearing process; 7. notice that an advocate, instead of an attorney, may accompany the student to assist in the presentation of the appeal; 8. notice that an advocate, instead of an attorney, may accompany the student to assist in the presentation of the appeal; 9. notice of the right to review and obtain copies of the student's educational records prior to the hearing; 10. a reference to policy 4345, Student Discipline Records, regarding the expungement of disciplinary records; and 11. the identity and phone number of a school employee whom the parent may call to obtain assistance in receiving a Spanish translation of the English language information included in the document.
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APPENDIX F: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office [252-744-2914](tel:252-744-2914) · Fax [252-744-2284](tel:252-744-2284) · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial **Approval**: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral **IRB**

To: [Cherie Hinton](#)

CC: [Bill Grobe](#)

Date: 7/9/2014

[UMCIRB 14-001014](#)

Re: Non-traditional learners: Identifying an appropriate organizational structure to effectively meet the academic needs of non-traditional learners.

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was **approved**. **Approval** of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 7/9/2014 to 7/8/2015. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this **approved** research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the **IRB approval** date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the **IRB approval** date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The **approval** includes the following items:

Name	Description
Approval Letter to SCS Superintendent.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Assent-Template-12-17-years-of-age-Graham.docx	Consent Forms
Chp. 1-3 Dissertation Submission (May).docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Data Collection Sheets.docx	Data Collection Sheet
Interview Questions for Administration.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Interview Questions for Community Members.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Letter to Expert Panel for Surveys.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Letter-to-Adult Participants- Graham.pdf	Consent Forms
Letter-to-Parents and Students- Graham.pdf	Consent Forms
Proposal Powerpoint.pptx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Scotland Letter of Support.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Shaw Academy Faculty Survey.htm	Surveys and Questionnaires
Shaw Academy Parent Guardian Survey.htm	Surveys and Questionnaires
Shaw Academy Student Survey.htm	Surveys and Questionnaires
Survey Consent Letter- Graham.doc	Consent Forms
Update Letter to SCS Superintendent 12.04.13 (1).pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL FOR TITLE CHANGE

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Cherie Hinton](#)

CC:

[Bill Grobe](#)

Date: 4/15/2015

Re: [Ame1_UMCIRB 14-001014](#)
[UMCIRB 14-001014](#)

Non-traditional learners: Identifying an appropriate organizational structure to effectively meet the academic needs of non-traditional learners.

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review for the period of 4/15/2015 to 7/8/2015 . It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. A continuing or final review must be submitted to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Thesis committee has recommended a change in study title	

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

