

ABSTRACT

Jonathan L. DeBerry, AN EVALUATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM IN PENDER COUNTY (Under the direction of Dr. James McDowell). Department of Educational Leadership, March 2018.

The purpose of this problem of practice was to conduct an evaluation of the Pender County Alternative School, Students Taking Alternative Routes Academy (STAR). The evaluation was conducted using the Empowerment Evaluation system developed by Fetterman, Karfarian, and Wandersman (2015a). At the conclusion of the evaluation, it was recommended that the STAR Academy be left in place with recommendations to: (a) Improve linkages to referring schools; (b) Increase support systems for students enrolled in STAR Academy; and (c) Develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for all students enrolled in STAR.

AN EVALUATION ON AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM IN PENDER COUNTY

A Dissertation

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The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

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by

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DEDICATION

For my parents James and Althea who taught me how to educate others.

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This evaluator is grateful to all those with whom having had the pleasure to work with during this project. Recognizing the members of my committee who made this possible, Drs. Robert Cauley, Kermit Buckner, and William Rouse thanks for the professional guidance and encouragement. The evaluator would especially like to thank Dr. Jim McDowell, the chairman of my committee. As chairperson and mentor, the lessons taught and experiences shared have been invaluable.

There is nobody who has been more valuable to the evaluator in the pursuit of this attainment than family. Giving thanks to the most supportive wife, Dionne, and three amazing children, Jathan, Bryce, and Zia who provide constant inspiration. Special thanks go out to three nurturing sisters, Satana, Katyna, and Nanette for a lifetime of love.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Pender County Schools

Geographic and Demographic Context

Pender County is in eastern North Carolina. The largest age demographic in the county is persons under 18 years making up 22.2% of the population. The female and male resident population is equally divided. With regards to race, Caucasians represent 79.9% of the population followed by African Americans representing 16.6% of the population. These are the two largest race demographic groups in the county, outnumbering Hispanic residents who constitute only 6.5% of the population. Also, persons representing two or more races account for 1.9% of the population, Asians make up 0.7%, while Native American and other Pacific Islanders constitute 0.1% of the county's population (Commerce, 2016).

In Pender County, 85.9% of the residents who are 25 years or older are graduates from high school or have attended college. Twenty-one percent of the residents that are 25 years or older have completed a Bachelor's degree or greater (Commerce, 2016).

Educational Information

The Pender County Schools system is among the fastest growing school districts in the state of North Carolina. Though the district is classified as a high poverty district, students continually exceed local and state performance on North Carolina End of Grade and End of Course tests (Schools, 2016). The district consists of sixteen schools: eight of which are elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and one Early College High School. Approximately 9,310 students attend Pender County Schools. Sixteen schools are in a diverse array of suburban and rural communities, and serve students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The school system employs 1,200 individuals, and during the 2015-2016 school year

the system employed 620 certified teachers, with 82 of them being nationally board certified (Schools, 2016).

Introduction to the Problem of Practice

The problem of practice upon which this dissertation-in-practice focuses is the effectiveness of the Pender County School System Alternative School. The purpose of this dissertation will be to conduct a program evaluation of the Students Taking Alternative Routes Academy (STAR). The original document created by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) for the State Board of Education (SBE) in response to Session Law 2005- 446, directed the SBE to adopt standards for alternative learning programs (House Bill 1076 Session Law 2005-446, 2005). Originally termed Success Centers, House Bill 1076 was sponsored by Representative Thomas Wright (primary) to study these Success Centers and report back to the North Carolina Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee before being implemented in the New Hanover County Schools. The Session Law utilizes North Carolina Statutes sections: 115C-105.47A, 115C-12, and 115C-47, allows School Districts the flexibility to create a model that: (a) maintains emotionally and physically safe, orderly, and caring learning environments, (b) increases student achievement, and (c) reduces dropout and suspension rates. Districts may choose to have a stand-alone alternative school where the purpose is to focus on awareness of skills or have more than one program utilized to assist students in a variety of curriculum areas. The stand-alone alternative school in Pender County was closed in 2009. At that time, schools developed in-house programs at each site. In the years that followed, the Twilight Academy was established in which students attended the program after regular school hours. This program was located at a nearby facility. The program was supported with grant funding. When the grant funding ended, the school system created the STAR Academy to provide an alternative program

during the day. STAR Academy has been in operation since the 2012-2013 school year. The purpose of the STAR Academy is to give students who are at risk of academic failure, a fresh start and an opportunity to work toward high school graduation. Students are enrolled in credit recovery classes or introductory credit classes through the Apex Learning Web-Based Program. Certified teachers at the high school deliver instruction during their planning period, with topics in their specialized area (i.e., English, Math, History, or Science) (R. Cauley, Director of Alternative Learning Program, personal communication, July 20, 2016).

When students are assigned to the STAR Program instead of long-term suspension, a recommendation is made through a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) team or Student Support Team (SST). STAR Academy meets the needs of students with and without disabilities. The first step in the process is the Alternative Learning Program Coordinator scheduling a meeting with the intake team. This team is comprised of the student, the parent(s)/guardian(s), a representative from the student's home school (i.e., student support coordinator, principal, or asst. principal), The STAR Lead Facilitator, Alternative Learning Program Coordinator, Director of Student Services, an administrator where STAR located, and anyone else that the parent may deem appropriate for the meeting. The meeting is conducted on the campus of Heide Trask High School (HTHS), so the student can become familiar with the setting (S. Willis, Alternative Learning Program Coordinator, personal communication, August 30, 2016).

The lead facilitator details the daily schedule in the classroom and includes how the academy incorporates Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) within the classroom and throughout the school. Finally, the student and parent are each asked to sign a contract holding them accountable for the terms laid out in the contract (R. Cauley, Director of Alternative Learning Program, personal communication, July 20, 2016).

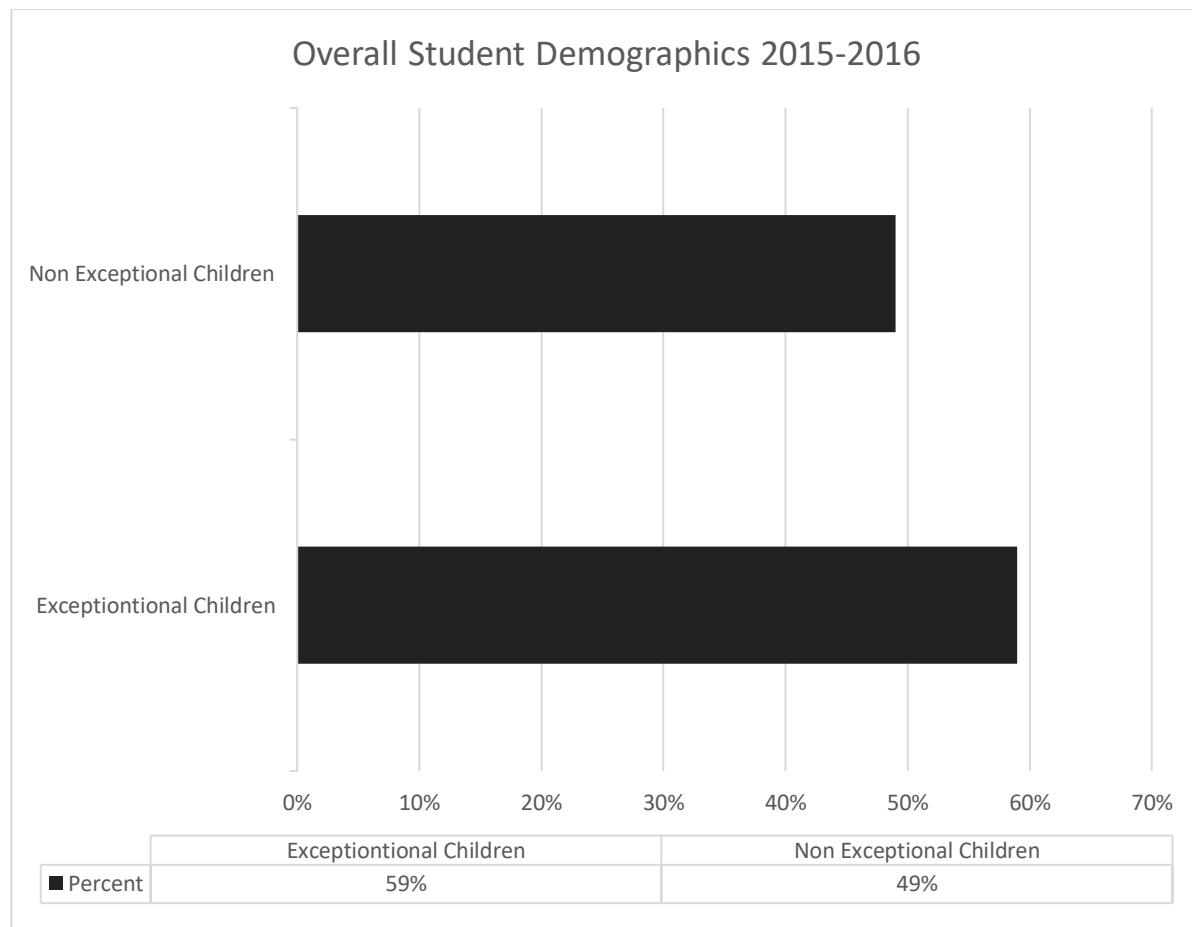
The parent is entered in the Apex Learning Virtual School system as a coach so that they can see their child's progress on a weekly basis. The team sends home progress reports and report cards through the Pender County Schools (PCS) calendar and conducts home visits each quarter (R. Cauley, Director of Alternative Learning Program, personal communication, September 9, 2016).

Since the goal is to transition students back to their referring school with a skill set that they will be able to use to function better in that setting, the intake team conducts transitional meetings at the student's school homeschooled. The intake team communicates the student's strengths they will observe in the STAR Academy and provided strategies to enable the student to be successful in the traditional high school setting (R. Cauley, Director of Alternative Learning Program, personal communication, July 20, 2016).

Descriptions of Figures One through Four

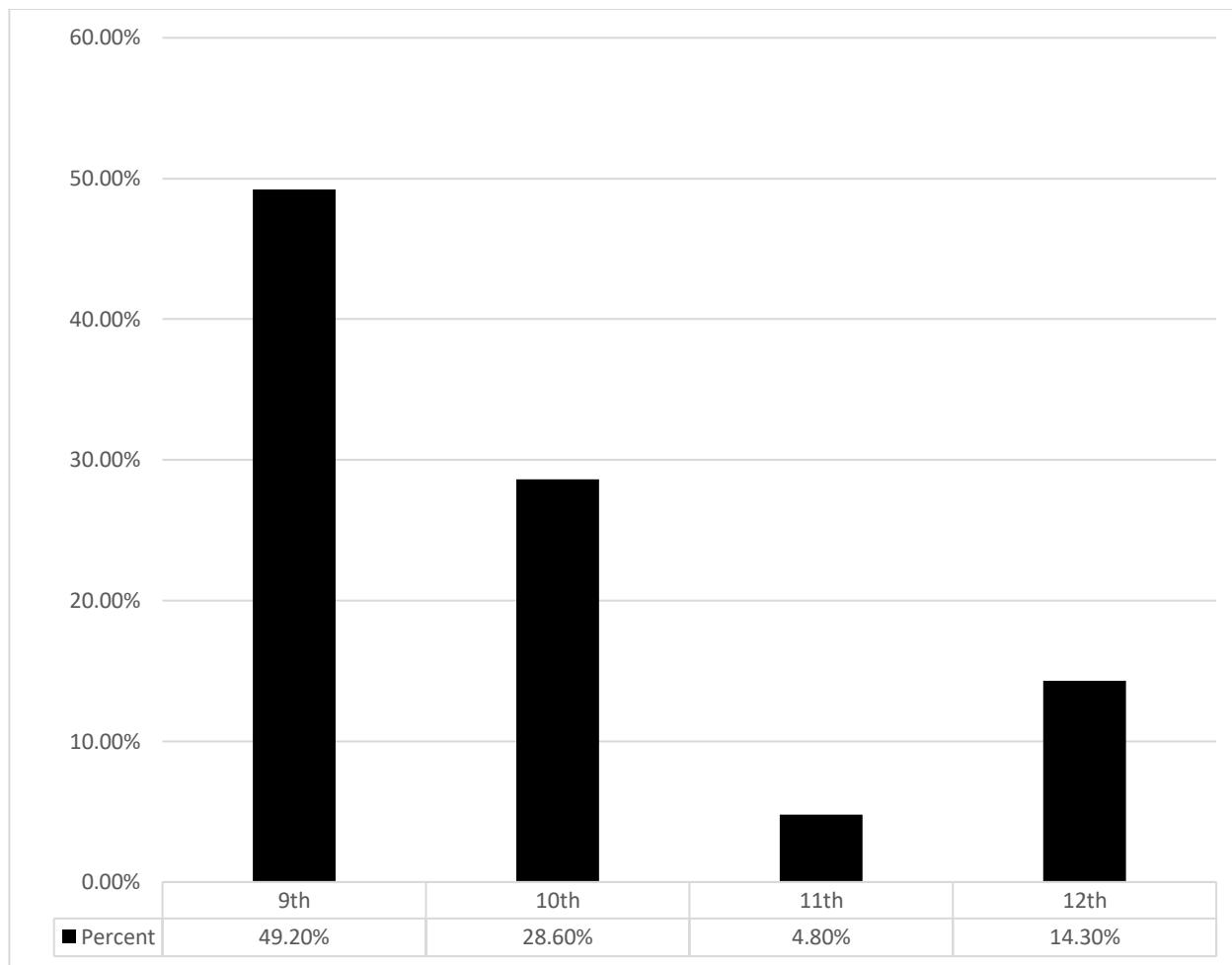
The overall demographic for STAR Academy is depicted in Figure 1. No matter the educational category, all students receive the care and guidance they need to complete the requirements of the alternative learning program and return to the referring school. Individual Educational Plans are followed, and if the student requires special services they will receive the exceptional children's services every day in addition to the curriculum. Non-exceptional students who are following a 504 Plan are provided with those accommodations during the enrollment period.

Student by grade level statistics are illustrated in Figure 2, the data suggests that the ninth grade represents the largest segment of the population that are attending the STAR Academy. Tenth grade comes second followed by the twelfth grade. The eleventh grade shows a smaller percentage of students enrolled in STAR. Transitions from middle school to high school may



Note. Twenty-one students assigned to the STAR Academy. Shown is the student comparison between non-exceptional children and exceptional children for the SY 2015-2016.

Figure 1. Overall student demographic.



Note. This graph represents the breakdown of students by grade level for SY 2015-2016.

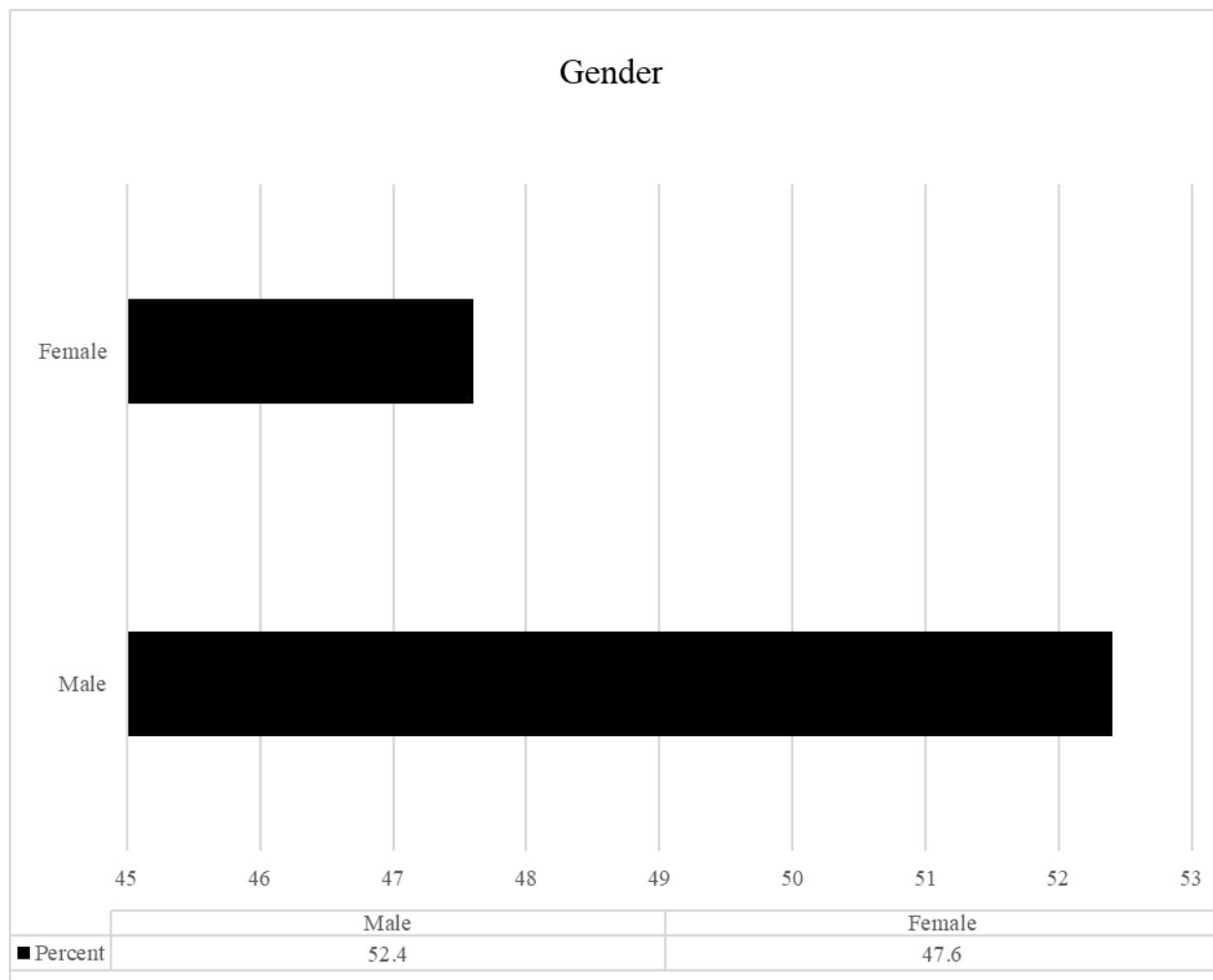
Figure 2. Students by grade level.

present circumstances that co Gender demographics shown in Figure 3, suggests that the males in the district present risk factors far more significant than females. These risk factors generate more referrals for males to attend STAR Academy. This includes risk factors such as attendance, disruptive behavior or no connectedness to school. Implications of these risk factors may have serious consequences later in a males' life which include drop-outs, incarceration or worst that contribute to the placement of this grade levels.

Racial makeup demographics represented in Figure 4, depict how students enter an alternative learning program for reasons such as attendance, disruptive behaviors or school disengagement. Data suggest that in the district, white students make up the larger portion of the students that attend STAR Academy. Minorities' attendance in STAR academy is smaller than the majority population but high in comparison to the minority population in Pender County.

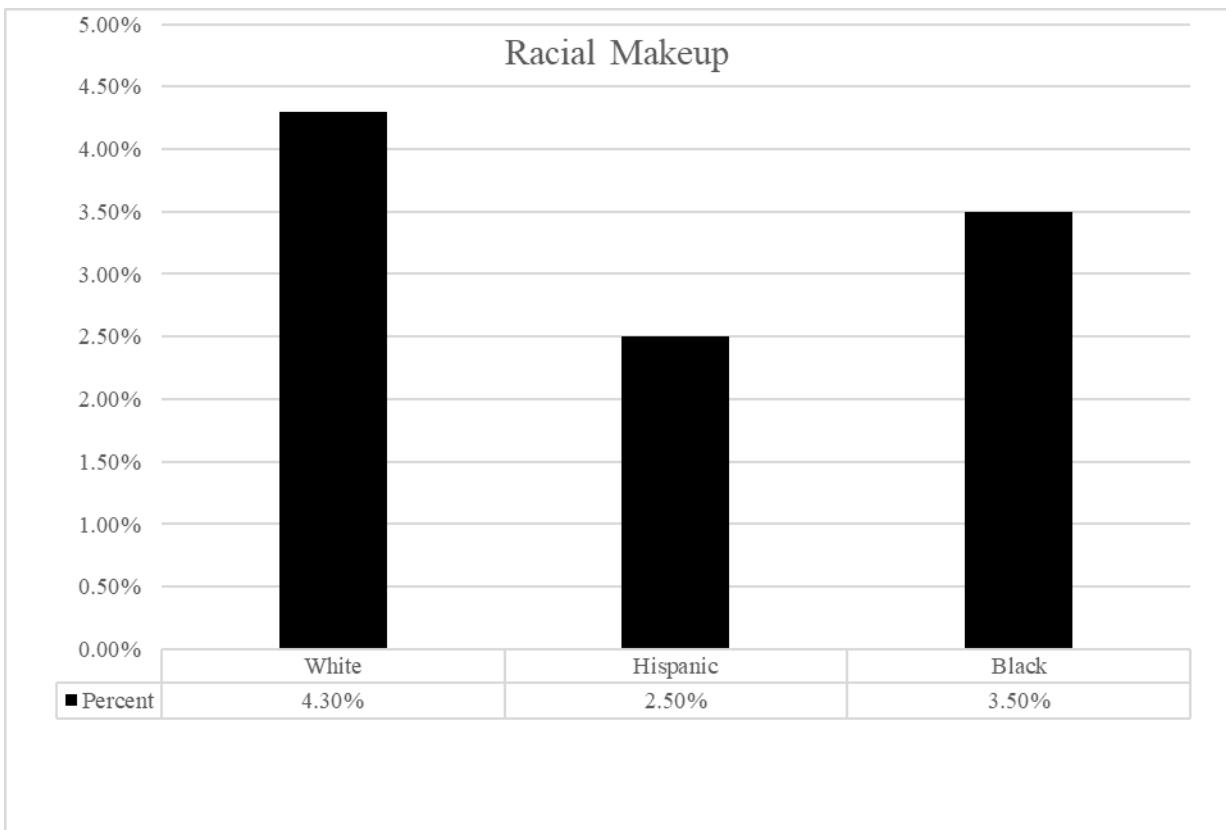
Discussion of Program Evaluation

This program evaluation will be the first attempt at evaluating the STAR Academy. The program evaluation will allow school system decision-makers to (1) determine overall effectiveness in meeting program goals and objectives such as achieving academic goals, behavioral/social goals, and transition plans; (2) determine at what level of quality program activities are conducted; (3) identify strengths and weaknesses in program effectiveness through tools such as intake interviews, surveys, observations, attendance records, discipline records, course completion and exit interviews. When complete, the program evaluation of the STAR Academy will lead to developing recommendations for changes resulting in the alternative program's improvement. A Gantt Chart will be used to provide a timetable for keeping the evaluation on schedule (see Table 1).



Note. This figure represents gender of the students who attended STAR Academy in SY2015-2016.

Figure 3. Gender.



Note. This figure is a representation of racial make-up at STAR Academy for the SY 2015-2016.

Figure 4. Racial makeup.

Table 1

Gantt Chart

Activity	Start Date	End Date	Who is in charge?	Outcome
Design evaluation instruments	May 2017	August 2017	J. DeBerry	Tools will be developed and used to obtain data from the participants in the evaluation
Collect data	November 2017	January 2017	J. DeBerry	Use data to write notes
Write up notes	January 2018	February 2018	J. DeBerry	Review the notes to analyze data uncovered
Analyze data	February 2018	March 2018	J. DeBerry	Results of the data to use in compiling report to deliver to the evaluation recipients
Compile report or presentation	March 2018	March 2018	J. DeBerry	Present to evaluation recipients
Disseminate findings	March 2018	March 2018	J. DeBerry	Share results of the evaluation and conclude the evaluation

Note. Gantt Chart timetable will be used for completing evaluation objectives. In the following chart, the progress plan will detail when activities begin and end. Also, the program will discuss who is responsible for the activities and outcomes.

Definition of Terms

The language used throughout this evaluation are as follows:

Alternative Learning Program - Safe orderly, caring and inviting learning environments that assist students in overcoming challenges that place them “*at risk*” of academic failure (Alternative Learning Programs, 2017).

Alternative Learning Program Coordinator - Responsible for instructional leadership, planning, management, operation and evaluation of the educational program.

Alternative Learning Program Staff - Delivers instruction and provides nurturing support that meets the student’s socioemotional needs while placed in an alternative setting.

At-Risk Student - 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 (Implementation and Procedure, 2017).

Evaluation Capacity Building Theory - An intentional process to increase individual motivations, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organization’s ability to conduct or use evaluation (Fetterman et al., 2015a).

Empowerment Evaluation - (created by David Fetterman, Shakeh J. Kaftarian, and Abraham Wandersman) the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination (Fetterman et al., 2015a).

Empowerment theory - Gaining control, obtaining resources, and understanding one’s social environment (Fetterman et al., 2015a).

Referring school - Original school of a student before being assigned to an alternative setting.

Program Evaluation - Assessment of a program by collecting and analyzing data relative to the program effectiveness based on established goals and objectives.

Recidivism - The tendency of a student to re-offend in their referring school resulting in that student being referred to an alternative learning setting.

School in a school model - A smaller educational unit with a separate educational program and its staff, students and budget.

Three-Step Approach - Helping a group (1) establish their mission, (2) take stock of their status, and (3) plan for the future (Fetterman et al., 2015a).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this program evaluation will be to determine whether the current structure in place makes this alternative program useful or not. There are many alternative program topics that address various needs of a school system. However, in this literature review the following subtopics are covered: (a) history of alternative educational settings, (b) school climate, (c) capacity building, (d) special education, (e) curriculum and instructional guidelines, (f) program evaluation, (g) guidelines for assessing program needs, (h) guidelines for evaluating student outcomes, (i) and effective assessment of alternative programs.

History of Alternative Educational Settings

Alternative learning programs have traditionally been viewed as a different approach to instructional delivery for students. The traditional approach has not been found to meet the needs of *all* learners. As there are factors that keep students engaged in school, there are several other factors that cause students to become disengaged. For those students who are considered at-risk, some barriers prevent them from obtaining an education. According to the Public Schools of North Carolina, examples of these obstacles are emotional, behavioral, attendance, criminal, and pregnancy (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>). As stated by Vanderhaar, Munoz and Petrosko (2014), “The characteristics that are deemed hurtful to student outcomes include racial isolation, punitive focus, intensified social control, inadequate resources, lack of accountability, and an unchallenging curriculum” (p. 3).

This statement suggests alternative learning settings were established to provide the at-risk student an opportunity to continue to obtain a quality education when they are removed from the mainstream setting and still meet the requirements for graduation. Today, different options

are available to students such as charter schools and other public/private school choice models. Lang and Sletten (2002) contend that school options consider the factors that present barriers to at-risk students and assist them to achieve their goal. However, alternative programs have been in place for years. They have evolved since the 1960s to the present day and currently are an educational alternative for students across the country.

“Options programs may be the closest example of what schools of choice can become. The structure of the alternative setting has a more flexible approach that meets the needs of its students compared to a mainstream setting that is more rigid. The increase in numbers of alternative learning programs is related to more students becoming disenfranchised in mainstream schools; particularly minority students and students that live-in poverty” (Vanderhaar, Munoz, & Petrosko, 2014; Verdugo & Glenn, 2006, p. 2).

School Climate

Vieno et al. (2005) studied democratic school climates and the student sense of community. Vieno discovered that the way in which students and teachers related to each other was an important factor in students’ sense of community within the school. Moreover, school climate was a moderate to strong predictor of students’ development of a sense of community and a critical factor in adolescents’ well-being (Vierno et al., 2005). This study suggests that students want to share in the vision of the school environment and that the student’s embrace of the vision promotes engagement. Furthermore, this creates an environment in which the student and staff have a collegial working relationship, and this ultimately, fosters students’ feelings of ownership.

This change in mindset illustrates the need for a more thoughtful approach in the manner in which student participation is understood in schools. For some, participation means just

attending school, while for others the focus is on participation in decision-making at school. Thus, participation may occur in various forms. From only attending class to involvement in formal and informal decision-making about matters relating to curriculum, culture, and governance, and engagement with the community (Davies, Williams, & Yamashita, 2004; Thomas, 2007; Simmons, Graham, & Thomas, 2015). Because at-risk students are exposed to so many outside distractions, they sometimes demonstrate more maturity than the average student. Therefore, they may be able to understand different approaches to learning and buy-in when the approach is in alignment with their educational and personal needs. For example, the need for employment or the responsibility of parenthood often interferes with the traditional approach to school participation, but these requirements and responsibilities may offer an opportunity to engage the alternative school student.

Promoting Capacity Building

Stringer (2013) states, “capacity building is a public enterprise for which there is no single definition” (p. 3). Regarding the alternative program setting, this means that staff fosters the students’ knowledge base by better understanding the obstacles they face and finding a way to achieve their educational goal. It is of particular importance to build capacity in this setting because it meets the foundational requirements that make the alternative program setting unique as opposed to the mainstream school environment.

Macadam, Drinan, Inall and McKenzie (2004) argue that capacity building is about improving one’s ability to learn and adapt to change. Much of learning gained through trial and error. Most students who are sent to an alternative setting have struggled with changes in their lives. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) argue that capacity building results from *single-loop* and *double-loop* learning. Marks and Louis (1999) state that *single-loop* learning occurs within

existing structural arrangements, and is influenced by a shared organizational memory of prior events and existing ways of knowing. Senge states that *double-loop* learning represents new, rather than adaptive learning, by collaboratively examining the causes of issues and questioning the fundamental assumptions underlying existing professional attitudes and behaviors (Senge et al., 2000). The presence of double loop learning would appear to be essential in the alternative school setting.

Special Education

Students with special needs are served by the STAR Academy. Along with the staff providing the students with their curriculum needs, federal law requires that exceptional students receive a resource to help them meet the requirements of their Individualized Educational Plan. These federal statutes are: Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Family Educational and Privacy Rights Act. There are advantages and disadvantages to the special education setting. Federal legislation that stipulates students should be educated in a least restrictive environment has produced a negative effect on students with special needs:

We have almost a virtual perfect storm, where we have shrinking public school budgets, limited pool of adequately trained general educators and special educators and significant turnover. So, we have a confrontation of limitations of general educators to support students who are increasingly spending a greater amount of time alongside their typical classmates and they're suffering the consequences. (Gable, 2017, p. 190)

On the other hand, meeting the needs of the exceptional student in a smaller setting offers many benefits such as: (a) one on one instruction, (b) focused learning opportunities, and (c) cultivation of their socioemotional needs. When the student can work with the teacher

individually, this can increase the comprehension of the curriculum because the delivery of instruction is tailored to meet the needs of the student. This one on one attention can assist in helping the student. Without the distractions of a large learning environment, the student can focus on important aspects of the curriculum. By focusing on what is important, allows the student to retain information and scaffold to higher dimensions of knowledge. Feeling like someone cares about you and building a relationship allows the exceptional student to have the sense of acceptance and value. Building on the socioemotional needs of the student makes attending the program relevant and promotes community. To this extent, the small-scale setting offered by the alternative school provides some tangible benefits for the special education student.

Curriculum and Instruction Guideline

Successful alternative learning programs provide specialized academic courses, curriculum modification, individualized methods of teaching, and individual assistance (i.e., academic and behavioral) to students. Also, these programs provide vocational training and an integrated curriculum that makes connections between the classroom and the world of work. Some programs require and provide an opportunity for participation in volunteer or service programs, extracurricular, and enrichment opportunities outside the classroom. Successful programs also allow for a more flexible schedule that allows students to work at their own pace. Students use options such as online, summer, and extended day (i.e. early morning or evening) classes (Connor & McKee, 2008; Costley, 2009; Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004; Knutson, 1999; Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004; Smith & Thomson, 2014; Thomas, 2012).

On purpose of this program evaluation in an alternative setting is to evaluate the program to determine the curriculum most suitable to meet the students' needs as it relates to graduation and future employment. It appears that in the traditional school setting, at-risk students frequently cannot discover the relevancy of the curriculum to their personal needs. Furthermore, outside distractions interfere with their ability to prosper in a traditional setting.

There are different classroom assessment approaches which can be used to collect student information about achievement. Examples of teacher-centered strategies used currently include tests, exams, quizzes and textbook exercises. Other assessments that are considered alternative strategies to the traditional academic program are student-centered approaches including concept maps, group work, portfolios, journals and presentations (Bell, 2007; Rahim, Venville, & Chapman, 2009).

Program evaluation. Student learning is fundamental to any educational setting. There must be a process in place that allows for discussion by staff to make decisions on how to promote student learning. In most school districts, curriculum conversations are conducted by central office staff that addresses the needs of an alternative learning program. The curriculum offered to the students in the program is often limited, making for an unpleasant experience. According to Rodgers, Grays, Fulcher, and Jurich (2013), assessment should provide a systematic process for the faculty and school to make informed decisions about student learning. By assessing student learning outcomes, faculty members can identify aspects within their curriculum to be modified or retained based on results. Though assessment is frequently conducted, the quality of its implementation is seldom investigated. Logically, the quality of evaluation is important because influential decisions, such as curricular changes, should be informed by quality information.

There must be data points available that produce valid information for an alternative program to utilize to determine effectiveness. Most data points in high school focus on attendance, dropout rates, and End-of-Course testing. Other data points to consider in making important decisions are math rigor, use of the American College Testing program and Career and Technical Education assessments. These data points are important because it gives those assessing the program other options that they can tailor to the needs of students in an alternative setting and the students who attend can have other alternatives other than just placed on track for college. According to Yearwood and Abdum-Muhaymin (2007):

... the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has developed its evaluations because of student outcome and achievement data (i.e., End-of-Grade and end-of-course tests), student opinion data about regular schools and alternative learning programs, and school-related outcome data (i.e., promotion, graduation, dropout, and discipline). Evaluations that based on these specific dimensions have produced invaluable findings regarding the failures and successes of alternative learning programs" (Yearwood & Abdum-Muhaymin, 2007, p. 48).

According to Jones (2015), who conducted similar program evaluations in North Carolina and South Carolina public school districts, concluded companion investigators in North and South Carolina alternative education programs were effective in decreasing recidivism for African American males and females in the ninth grade and increasing student success when they returned to their traditional education settings.

Guidelines for assessing program need. The STAR Academy was developed by using a very standard structure when it comes to meeting the needs of the at-risk student. There is a list of categoric needs, but it only recognizes students that have been placed in the alternative

program due to behavior. A budget is allotted every year to help with the delivery of the program's operational needs. Often when there is a decrease in attendance, one can conclude that the resources allotted go to waste. Wasteful resources may be the reason why the STAR Academy is located at a parent school and not in a stand-alone setting. Using this *School Within a School* model has effectively allowed the alternative program to combine resources with the school in which it resides.

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, under the subsection Alternative Learning Programs and Schools Standards and Implementation Procedures, from a combined list of all schools' suspected at-risk student needs, the LEA should consolidate the list into categories of need, and then determine which needs are critical. Based on identified priority student/program needs, the LEA should develop goals and measurable objectives, determine the resources needed, and develop a program budget to address identified needs. Budget needs and the above guidelines will ensure that the LEA can demonstrate that its planning efforts are responsive to critical identified needs (e.g., suspended and expelled students) (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>).

Quality teachers are as vital in the alternative school setting as they are in the traditional setting. It takes a special teacher to meet the needs of a student who has experienced failure in their life. As stated in the Alternative Learning Programs and Schools Standards and Implementation Procedures, with regular education, the quality of teaching and instructional support services is the lifeblood of the educational program. Critical to the success of ALPs will be the program administrator, teachers and instructional support staff (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>).

Guidelines for evaluating student outcomes. Any successful alternative program must have guidelines for evaluating outcomes. According to the Alternative Learning Programs and Schools Standards Implementation Procedures, assessing improvements in student performance is best grounded in determining the extent to which the measurable objectives of a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Personalized Education Plan (PEP) are met. The student's PEP should contain goals or strategies that pertain to post-placement considerations (i.e., how the student will prepare for placement possibilities that follow the ALP placement, and how the student will be exited from the ALP and transitioned to a subsequent placement) (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>).

Once the intervention goals of the IEP or PEP meet, a student may be ready to exit the program. Exiting the program is crucial because, the program must be able to demonstrate that once students leave the program, they use those strategies learned through the interventions to transition back into their referring school. The data obtained from these measurable objectives of: (1) student achievement, (2) individualized student goals, (3) an evaluation system to decrease dropouts and (4) an evaluation system that produces data to meet the needs of the program are an important factor in making sure that the program continues to be efficient and if need be, to secure additional funding and resources to meet its needs.

Best Practices in Evaluating Student Outcomes

For students to meet the requirements of the alternative learning program and return to their home school, it is necessary for the student to be proficient in specific curriculum content. Student proficiency ensures that the program is successful in making the student transition back to the referring school. As stated under the Best Practices in Evaluating Student Outcomes section of the Alternative Learning Programs and Schools Standards and Implementation

Procedures, (PEP) objectives that involve academic measures may include consideration of measured proficiency in achieving Standard Course of Study (SCS) goals, achievement of benchmarks based on the SCS, and performance on standardized tests. PEP goals that involve behavior measures may include consideration of improved attendance, and improved behavior and discipline records (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>).

Evaluation of Program Process and Outcomes

Organizationally, the ALP can set strategic objectives to help the principal, counselor, teachers and other staff deliver expected results that guide each role's output. These objectives facilitate position descriptions to be stated clearly and precisely. If these roles are clear, the operations of the ALP should run efficiently. Also, operationally, staff will be able to meet the safety, instructional and emotional needs of the students in the alternative learning program.

Evaluation of Program Process and Outcomes section of the Alternative Learning Programs and Schools Standards and Implementation Procedures, states that; the last major component of alternative education to evaluate is the program itself. While much of the successes of an ALP are tied to realizing student outcomes, there are organizational or operational aspects of the program that can and should be evaluated (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>).

Best Practices in Evaluating Program Processes and Outcomes

To ensure that the district offers its students who are placed in the alternative learning program a free and appropriate public education, several measures must be met. For example, transportation must be provided for the student. Students ride a bus from their residence to the referring school. There, the bus transports the student to the alternative program. The order is reversed at the end of the day, and the bus transports the student home. Regarding curriculum,

review of the student's schedule and any enrolled courses in which the student participates factor into consideration towards graduation. Surveys are sent out to parents of the students who attend and to the homeschool principal, counselors and teachers to obtain feedback on the returning student or student current serving in the program. Staff from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction evaluate the program every two or more years to determine if the alternative school is complying with the State's standards by law (Retrieved from <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp/develop/>).

Effective Assessment of Alternative Programs

At the conclusion of an evaluation, it is important to determine whether the assessment of the program was effective or not. If effective, the outcome could lead to a program that may impact a districts approach to planning and funding decision making. However, if the assessment is not effective, the result may lead to discontinuation of the program all together. Using assessment strategies may be used to understand the nature and quality of how an assessment has been received. For example, in the area of social work education, Secret, Bently, and Kadolph (2016) state,

The rapid ascent of social work education into the distance education arena requires social work educators to seek out all types of assessment strategies to understand the nature of quality in online formats in social work education and to implement what is need to achieve that quality. In general, assessment strategies focus on what and how educators intend to teach or on what and how students learn. (p. 30)

Conley (2002) states observations serve to only superficially benefit the evaluation of alternative schools. In addition, evaluation studies and reports have resulted in seemingly endless list of generalized characteristics that appear to describe all effective schools. Researchers who

have looked at what has been happening in different types of schools have come up with different solutions.

Hines (2013) states:

research study seeking to support schools with high concentrations of students that are at risk of dropping out is the Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) Project, which has define a community school as both a place and set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. (p. 82)

A community schools' mission is carried out through an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement that lead to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier community schools (Leadership, 2017). The CCS project is like the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools in Multnomah County, Oregon which are full-service neighborhood hubs where the school and partners from across the community come together to make sure kids and families have what they need to be successful—in school and in life (SUN Community Schools, 2016).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As stated in the previous chapters, the approach chosen for this problem of practice is Program Evaluation. This chapter presents a description of an empowerment evaluation method for planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. A description of how an empowerment evaluation strategy can be used to best measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the alternative school program will also be provided. The program evaluation will use the *three-step* approach of empowerment evaluation. The *three-steps* are (1) establish the missions, (2) take stock of the status, and (3) plan for the future (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 2015b).

Empowerment Evaluation

The book, *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines*, describes the empowerment evaluation approach of Fetterman et al. (2015a). Their method, *Empowerment evaluation*, uses different tools to assist stakeholders in undertaking an evaluation. Five different theories guide this type of evaluation. Those theories are:

(a) empowerment, (b) self-determination, (c) evaluation capacity building, (d) process use and (e) theories of use and action. These approaches help to define the ten overarching principles that provide empowerment evaluation with its direction and purpose. The driving concepts of this type of evaluation focus on (a) critical friends, (b) cultures of evidence, (c) cycles of reflection and action, (d) communities of learners, (e) and reflexive practitioners. (Fetterman et al., 2015a, p. 20)

Two of the most popular empowerment evaluation approaches are the *Three-Step* and the *Ten-Step* Models. For this study, will use the *Three-Step* approach. The theories, principles, concepts, and steps of the Empowerment Evaluation Model are interconnected and related to each other. This model allows for a greater focus on program involvement as opposed to the *10-Step* Model.

Empowerment Evaluation Step 1: Establish the Mission

The group will come to a consensus concerning their mission or values. This allows the group to decide on what values are important to them and what direction they want the program to head. The external evaluator will facilitate the process by:

presenting the participants with the opportunity to develop statements that reflect their mission. These statements will be recorded on large chart paper. The statements will be used to draft the mission statement. The group will be asked to approve the draft and/or suggest changes in wording as needed. By coming to a consensus about the mission statement anchors the group in its common values. (Fetterman et al., 2015a, p. 30)

Empowerment Evaluation Step 2: Taking Stock

Fetterman et al. (2015a) explain the next step in their evaluation model by utilizing a group's efforts:

First, the external evaluator assists the participants generate a list of the most important activities required to accomplish program goals. The external evaluator gives each participant five dots and asks the participants to place the dots by the activities they think are the most important for accomplishing program goals. Their use of the dots can range from putting one sticker on four different activities to putting all five dots on one activity if they are concerned an activity will not receive enough votes. The top two items with the most dots represent the results of the prioritization part of taking stock. The two activities represent the rating. (p. 30)

Empowerment Evaluation Step 3: Plan for the Future

The authors of Empowerment Evaluation believe that during this step of the evaluation, the process ends. However, reading further, one gets an understanding that this is the beginning of the remainder of the evaluation:

Once the rating and program activities are concluded, it is important to use the findings.

Now, it is time to plan for the future. The next step involves generating goals, strategies and evidence to determine effectiveness. Goals are related to the activities selected in the taking stock step. The primary data collection strategies (if any) the staff will use to show student progress were determined by talking with the Program Coordinator and employees. In addition to consulting with employees individually, three monthly staff meetings will be established and followed throughout the evaluation until its completion.

(Fetterman et al., 2015a, p. 32)

Fetterman et al. (2015a) notes that many evaluations fail at this step of the process due to individual or group accountability:

Individuals who spoke eloquently and/or emotionally about certain topics should be asked to volunteer to lead certain topics and asked to volunteer to lead groups to respond to the identified problem or concern. The task does not have to be completed. However, the individual is responsible for taking the lead in a circumscribed area and report the status periodically at ongoing staff meetings. Similarly, groups should make a commitment to reviewing the status of new strategies as a group and be willing to make mid evaluation corrections if they are not working. Conventional and innovative evaluation tools are used to monitor the strategies, including online surveys (Fetterman et al., 2015a, p. 33)

All online survey questions, as well as the focus group interview questions, have been validated for clarity and understanding by: (1) a school counselor, (2) an 8th grade English teacher, (3) a 9th grade Science teacher (4) Middle School Principal and (5) a 5th grade teacher.

Program-specific metrics are developed using: (a) baselines, (b) goals, (c) benchmarks, and (4) actual performance. These four metrics will be used to help STAR:

monitor its program implementation efforts and enable participants to make mid-evaluation corrections and substitute ineffective strategies with potentially more effective strategies. These data will be invaluable when the group conducts a second taking stock exercise (3months later) to determine if progress is being made toward their goals or objectives (Fetterman et al., 2015a, p. 34).

Strategy-Developing an Alternative Learning Program Evaluation System

Alternative learning program evaluation procedures need to be developed for staff at the alternative education program to set goals and monitor the progress they are having with the at-risk students. In developing this evaluation system, several questions needed to be asked of the Program Coordinator and staff:

- How often will staff collect data? The report period calendar for the alternative learning program is set for once a semester (i.e., six-week period). Data collection should coincide with reporting period. A spreadsheet will be made available to the staff as they track data. The spreadsheet will be used for two purposes: (1) for a repository of data, and (2) as a tool to help structure the staff's goal setting, data collection and data reporting (Fetterman et al., 2015a).
- What measurement tools would the staff use to measure at-risk students' success?

The study will use surveys completed by caregivers, students and faculty and an open-ended survey for the ALP Program Coordinator. The caregiver survey will consist of four open questions which will allow respondents an opportunity to provide the responses that apply to their open-ended questionnaires. The student survey will include three open-ended questions which will allow respondents an opportunity to provide the responses that apply to their open-ended questionnaires. The faculty survey consists of ten open-ended questions which will allow respondents an opportunity to provide the responses that apply to their open-ended questionnaires. Caregivers, students, and faculty will complete their surveys on personal devices as well as school computers through Google Survey. For those without access to an electronic device such as a computer, a paper copy will be provided, and the evaluator will enter the feedback verbatim.

Additionally, structured questions will be used for this evaluation. The program administrator and three random staff will be identified to complete the open-ended questionnaires. The Program Coordinator will respond to the thirty questions via email. Results from both the surveys and the open-ended questionnaires will be used to evaluate the goals of the alternative learning program.

Survey Section

Before beginning, the evaluation of the ALP, the External Reviewer obtained permission from the Superintendent of the school district for the surveys and open-ended questionnaires to be given to the caregivers, students, and faculty of the alternative school. The Alternative Learning Program Coordinator will be contacted to explain the purpose of the questionnaire. The Alternative Learning Program Coordinator will be provided with copies of the surveys and a cover letter explaining the procedure for completing the survey. Strict anonymity will be

followed for participants in the survey. Surveys will be picked up by the evaluator every other week or asked to be sent through the interoffice mail in a packet addressed to the reviewer. Follow-up phone calls and emails will be forwarded to ensure that all surveys and open-ended questionnaires will be returned. Each returned survey will be given a code from the school. Surveys will be coded and entered into a spreadsheet on Google Drive. An exploratory data analysis will provide insights which will be examined further. For this evaluation, the evaluator will focus on the variables of age, gender, dropout, and recidivism rate as the sample data set. Exact age, drop out, and recidivism rates will be measured nominally, and gender will be measured by a nominal level using the symbols of “M” (male) or “F” (female). Descriptive statistics will be utilized to reduce a large amount of data into a simpler summary of a broad cross-section data set.

Upon What will the Analysis of this Evaluation be Based?

The report of the evaluation will be based upon the following evaluation goals:

1. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 1: To evaluate an alternative learning program evaluation system that supports the academic needs of the student so they can have the opportunity to recover credits/earn opening credits in a small learning environment and return to their home.
2. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 2: To evaluate an alternative learning program evaluation system where educational goals will be individualized for each student with the result being a high school diploma based on Future-Ready Core Course of Study.

3. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 3: To evaluate an alternative learning program evaluation system to decrease the dropout rate in the district by providing an alternative way for students to gain high school credits.
4. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 4: To evaluate an alternative learning program evaluation system that will produce the type of data that could meet the needs of the alternative school's decision makers and justify the funding for the program.

Defining Success

Success at the alternative learning program will be determined by supporting the academic needs of the student so they can have the opportunity to recover credits/earn opening credits in a small learning environment and return to their home, (2) educational goals will be individualized for each student with the result being a high school diploma based on Future-Ready Core Course of Study, (3) determine recidivism as both being returned to the alternative school after not be successful in the referring school setting and dropping out of the referring school, and (4) produce the type of data that could meet the needs of the alternative school's decision makers and justify the funding for the program. Also, typical recidivism rates in alternative learning settings are determined by using data obtained from the attendance, admission and discharge records. Because each alternative learning program has a different scope of operation, it is difficult to determine what is a common alternative learning setting recidivism rate or dropout rate when they return to their referring school. For the sake of determining whether the STAR Academy is effective, attendance, admission and discharge records will be helpful in determining recidivism rate of the STAR Academy. Along with the four goals listed above, another goal will be students, once returning to their referring school, will have learned the appropriate socioemotional skills to be successful and not return to the

alternative learning setting. If the number of students who are not successful is in their transition back to their home school or drop out is less than or equal to 25%, then the outcome of the evaluation will indicate a successful program (Burkett, 2012).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As stated in Chapter Three, the evaluation of the Alternative Program will be based on the following empowerment goals:

1. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 1: To evaluate an alternative learning program that supports the academic needs of the student so they can have the opportunity to recover credits/earn opening credits in a small learning environment and return to their home.
2. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 2: To evaluate an alternative learning program where educational goals will be individualized for each student with the result being a high school diploma based on Future-Ready Core Course of Study.
3. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 3: To evaluate an alternative learning program to decrease the dropout rate in the district by providing an alternative way for students to gain high school credits.
4. Empowerment Evaluation Goal 4: To evaluate an alternative learning program that will produce the type of data that could meet the needs of the alternative school's decision makers and justify the funding for the program.

Hence, the success of the alternative learning program was to be determined by supporting the academic needs of the student so they can; (1) have the opportunity to recover credits/earn opening credits in a small learning environment and return to their home school; (2) have educational goals individualized for each student with the result being a high school diploma based on Future-Ready Core Course of Study?; (3) ascertain recidivism as both being a return to the alternative school after not being successful in the referring school setting and

dropping out of the referring school; and (4) produce the type of data that could meet the needs of the alternative school's decision makers and justify the funding for the program.

Organization of Data Analysis

The data collection tools for this study used survey and open-ended structured questionnaires completed by caregivers of students, students, faculty and the Alternative Learning Program Coordinator of the STAR Academy. This technique allowed the external evaluator an opportunity to access data and provided a rich content directory for analysis. Also, the technique provided the opportunity for the external evaluator to extend the conversation with the participants in an exploration of improving the program. Caregivers, students, and faculty of the STAR Academy completed their questionnaires on personal devices as well as school computers through Google Forms. For those without access to an electronic device such as a computer, a paper copy was provided, and the evaluator entered their feedback verbatim.

Results from the survey and open-ended questionnaires were used to evaluate the goals of the alternative learning program. Other method tools used to track data included unstructured or semi-structured question techniques, including group discussions, individual interviews, current evaluations, past evaluations, and observations. Other evaluations tools utilized were handbook, analysis of themes, rules, and procedures, policies, class roster, orientation materials for students and parents, attendance data, discipline data, student performance data and daily school schedules.

The survey data for this evaluation focused on the participants, age, and gender. (age) “A,” will be measured nominally and gender will be measured by a nominal level using the symbols of “M” (male) or “F” (female). Descriptive statistics, focusing on mode, were utilized to

reduce a significant amount of data into a more straightforward summary of a broad cross-section data set.

The data in this program evaluation was presented using exploratory research. For this program evaluation, exploratory research using open-ended questionnaires was used. Open-ended questions are exploratory and allow for better focus and significantly limit unintended bias. The fact that this research allows participants to provide feedback, gives the external evaluator the opportunity to gain insight on a topic not previously considered. Adding a few open-ended questions with small amounts of participants can be time-consuming but can indicate essential trends and opinions.

Using the Three-Step Method of Empowerment Evaluation, response analyzed from Establishing the Mission and Taking Stock steps. This analysis allows for the identification of the top three topics as our focus objectives for a new questionnaire that will delve deeper into the study.

Building upon the exploratory research, with the desire to understand the STAR Academy to gain better insight, two other types of research was also be conducted. The two types are primary and secondary research streams. Examples of primary research for this study included evidence of feedback on how the program has evaluated in the past. Using secondary research will include primary data that compiled at a previous date such as old reports.

The following sections reflected the exploratory research focusing on Recidivism, (a) events aiding student participation, (b) processes to track goals, (c) individualized and personalized education plans and (d) STAR Academy Priority Values.

Recidivism

Of all the topics about alternative learning programs, none is more critical than the recidivism rate. The recidivism rate is the likelihood that someone who exited the program and returned to their referring school, later returned to the alternative setting. The data from this program evaluation tells us whether the alternative school in Pender County is serving its intended purpose to prepare students with skills that will help them succeed in a traditional setting.

The data suggest that former STAR Academy student, who do not return to the program, are seventeen years or older students. The single best indicator of whether a former student will re-offend at their referring school is the length of time they spend away from the STAR Academy and the seriousness of the discipline incident. The conclusions bear some repeating since they offer some guidance to district policymakers who are not familiar with the working of an alternative setting.

The most striking finding is that since 2015, there have been three times that two individual students had re-offended and returned to the program. Also, there have been two times that four individual students have re-offended in their referring school that initially referred student to the STAR Academy for intake. These recidivists committed new incidents within one year of their release from STAR Academy. The statement suggests that the district should consider using funding allotments to provide programs and positions to aid in reentry to the referring school.

The respondents believe there should be some supportive relationship that the student must have to be successful in the program. Expectations should be clear and visible for there to be a positive learning environment. The respondents also believe that there needs to be positive

feedback provided to the students along with a rewards system that recognizes good behavior. All students are encouraged and presented with a vision that they can achieve success in the program if they follow the plan established upon entering the program. The goals of the plan are revisited daily, weekly and monthly until the student transitions back into their referring school. Faculty communicates with the parent/caregiver for actions both positive and negative that the student exhibits in the classroom. Instruction is delivered one-on-one by certified teachers with supplemental supports provided for the student who receives exceptional children's services while enrolled in the alternative setting (see Figure 1).

The event that hindered student participation while attending the STAR Academy was the failure of students to attend. Though there are ten students enrolled, at the time of the evaluation, only three students attended the program on a daily basis. Reasons for the absences range from involvement with the legal system to lack of parental involvement. Twenty percent of the students enrolled (2 out of 10) are currently serving time in a juvenile facility for violations of their release conditions. Upon their release, the students will return to the STAR Academy and complete their plan. Ten percent (1 out of 10) is a homebound student. Ten percent (1 out of 10) withdrew from the program. Ten percent (1 out of 10) students finished the program successfully and returned to their referring school. Twenty percent (2 out of 10) students experience chronic absenteeism (see Figure 2). The STAR Academy is in a central location within the district. Therefore, many of the students rely on transportation originating from their referring school to transport them to the alternative setting. The respondents attribute missed transportation as a possible reason why students are absent from school often. Other reasons include doctor visits, illness or lack of motivation (see Figure 3).

Fifty-seven percent (4 out of 7) of faculty respondents noted that parental contact makes

for positives outcomes in the classroom (see Figure 4). When there are academic or behavioral concerns, there is often open-communication between faculty and the parent/caregiver. Methods used to communicate with parents are telephone calls, text messages, Google message, and emails. Home visits were an effective strategy that the faculty previously used. However, due to changes in the school calendar because of inclement weather, workdays were lost, and now the faculty must stay at the site. The respondents state they often remain after work hours to accommodate the time needs of the parent (see Figure 5).

Process to Track Goals

The respondents state students can complete their instruction by using an online course system named APEX. Students work on the program and feedback is provided instantly to the student. Parents can see the progress that students are making in their courses on their digital devices anytime. Respondents agree that having long and short-term goals are essential for the school to achieve their goals. The faculty is familiar with using the strategy of SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for (1) Specific, (2) Measurable, (3) Action-oriented, (4) Realistic, and (5) Time specific goals. The respondents state that it is essential to set up a schedule of milestones to revisit the goals to determine whether the goal is working or change needs to be made to keep the goal on track for accomplishment (see Figure 6).

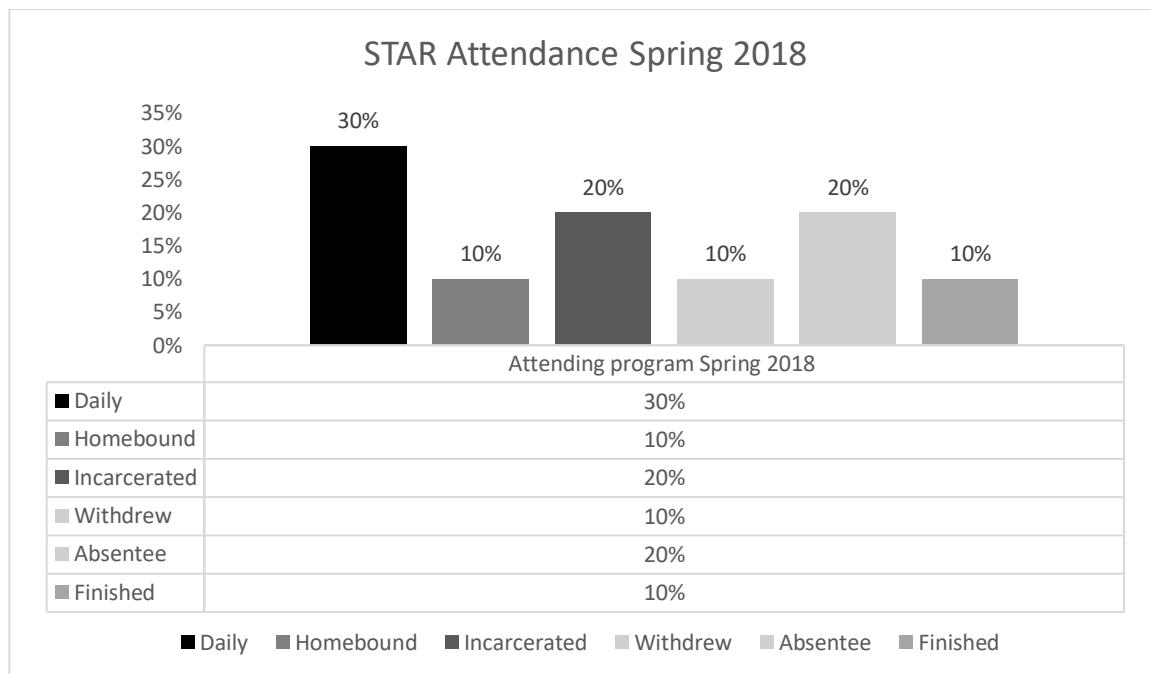
Faculty responded that their opinions on processes to consider for ensuring that students in the STAR Academy receive rigorous and high-quality education should connect directly to the student lives and must engage with the content. The education they receive must be meaningful. At STAR, students complete work by using the online course delivery known as APEX. The system can provide the student with instant feedback on their performance answering the assessment. Everyone who has access to the student's account can view the results. Suggestions

What events aided student participation or learning at STAR Academy?

- Positive adult relationships,
- goal setting,
- the ability for students to achieve and visually see their goals,
- ability to ask for help when needed and feeling comfortable to do so,
- the positive learning environment,
- earning privileges, earning rewards,
- positive feedback,
- students knowing and seeing that they can achieve success
- positive support,
- consistency along with clearly stated discipline,
- caring faculty,
- achievable weekly and monthly goals,
- frequent contact with parents (positive as well as negative)
- Daily rewards system, weekly rewards system
- The daily procedures and incentives that faculty employs aid student participation daily.
- Placement determined at the district level
- One on one instruction provided by certified teachers as well as supplemental instruction provided by EC teachers aided student participation in the educational setting.

Note. This figure illustrates respondents feedback regarding what aided student participation or learning at the STAR Academy. Themes that continue to appear are rewards, goals, and caring environment. These themes will be explored further and used to develop strategies that can improve the alternative program's priority values.

Figure 5. Response to what aids student participation.



Note. This figure illustrates the current student enrollment at the STAR Academy. Staff devotes instructional time to servicing the many needs of the students. However, barriers such as court involvement, missed transportation, or lack of motivation influence the attendance of students. These are some areas requiring more in-depth discussion to develop solutions for the future.

Figure 6. Spring 2018 attendance data.

to improve the process that ensures rigor involve having students to participate in a problem-based learning curriculum which can increase knowledge in subjects such as math. Students can use the strategies they develop using this approach in other real work contexts to solve problems (see Figure 7).

Individual Education Plans and Personalized Educational Plans

Varied services and/or strategies that may benefit the student are employed in the school. Some services may support the functional goals while others may support behavioral goals. There are also services for transportation to and from school. Services vary from student to student, and the staff adjusts their instruction to meet students individual IEP. A student may benefit from co-taught instruction or individual instruction which requires changing the classroom. Just because the student enrolls in an alternative setting does not mean that service takes a hiatus. Outside of services, supports, such as Counseling, are provided at STAR to help the student to remain on track for graduation. Counseling also addresses concerns inside and outside of school. Outside providers provide other supports such as a therapeutic and physical therapist. If a student requires a resource such as support, there is a staff member from the high school where STAR is housed which provides the support. Attendance is tracked every day and monitored to provide information to the IEP team.

During the intake meeting, the student Personalized Educational Plan (PEP) from the referring school is reviewed by the parent, student, referring school administrator and STAR Academy. Parent, student and STAR Academy sign a memorandum of understanding and copies are made and provided to all participants. The respondents state that this process holds everyone accountable to expectations. The PEP is targeted to the students' strengths, needs, skills, and interest. By customizing the student's PEP, it sets the student up to be successful in the

What events hindered student participation or learning at STAR Academy?

- attendance (for some students), some also struggle with online learning
- attendance and unmotivated students
- attendance
- None
- None noted
- The most significant obstacle to student participation or learning is the attendance of the students.

Note. This figure illustrates the respondent's feedback regarding what events hindered student participation or learning at the STAR Academy. Note that attendance is the common theme mentioned by the respondents. The identifying of poor attendance is essential to open dialogue which can determine if there is a correlation between attendance and drop out once the student returns to their referring school or the student's returns in the future the alternative school.

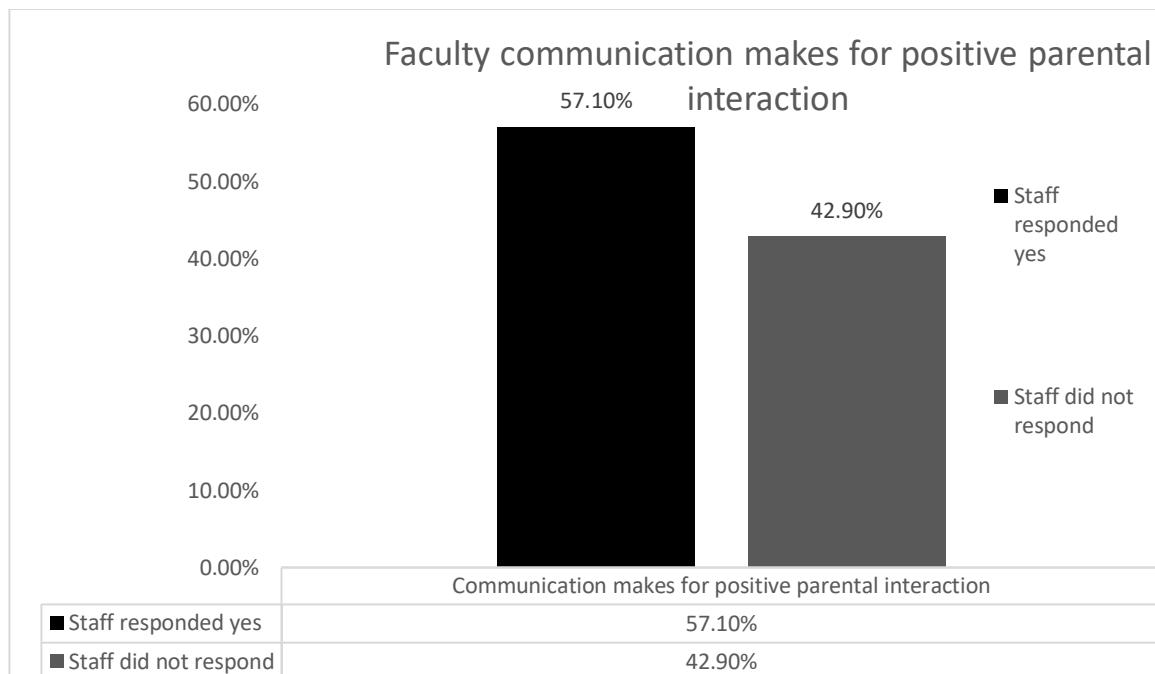
Figure 7. Response to what hindered student participation.

alternative setting and provides skill foundations that they can take back to the referring school and apply (see Figure 8).

STAR Academy Priority Activities

After coming to a consensus and evaluating the core values of the mission (see Figure 9), the external evaluator helped the group to develop a list, in order of priority, of activities required that will help the alternative program accomplish its goals. The group was provided five stickers and instructed to place them on the activities given highest priority. The staff could use all five on one priority or spread their five stickers among all the priorities identified. Here are the activities that the group came to consensus along with the level of priority with (1) having the most priority and (8) having the least priority (see Figure 10). The group provided evidence of the top three identified priority activities as goals. The plan will assist them in creating a plan for the future (see Figure 11).

The staff respondents stated that observations were an essential tool used to determine to build and maintain positive relationships with each other. These are very effective along with student surveys. Identifying what needs are in the organization, the staff conducts a comprehensive need assessment and revisits the assessment throughout the year to ensure that resources are in place to conduct services (see Figure 12). Respondents also recognized that communication with the parents is essential. One method that tracks ongoing attempts to communicate with the parent is through keeping contact logs. Logs are a significant piece of evidence that may be valuable when a district or state team audits the program. Another way of tracking ongoing communication is Sunday calls home (see Figure 13). These calls provide information regarding activities and reminders of events occurring in the program. On occasions,



Note. This figure illustrates the faculty's ability to facilitate positive communication between the school and the parents. As noted, open communication with the parents improves working relationships and creates collegiality between the two sides. Researching this aspect further may reveal another phenomenon that uncovers a path to improved service delivery.

Figure 8. Communication and positive parental interaction.

What things aided parent involvement at STAR Academy?

- Contact makes for positive outcomes and if there are concerns, open communication (parents can reach us directly in the classroom); personal phone calls for absences for the question below, there was not anything listed for this question that applied. We have good parent involvement. Always have time and will make the time to contact parents even it means staying after school to do it.
- Positive conversations with parents and discussions: For the answer below chose lack of teacher time, but that answer choice is not correct. We do not have problems parent involvement often.
- Unsure, do not interact with parents - and n/a would be excellent for those of us who only work with the students and are unaware of most of the circumstances surrounding their placement in STAR
- In the current role, am not directly involved with the parents. However, the faculty is in frequent contact with parents, and the parents seem very invested in their role in the program.
- Technology access
- Learning facilitators contacting parents.

Note. This figure illustrates the respondents' feedback regarding what things aided parent involvement at STAR Academy. Parent communication is mentioned again as was before, though, depending on the role of the staff, involvement varies.

Figure 9. The response is to what aid parent involvement.

Describe the weekly, monthly and yearly goals of the program. How are these goals currently tracked?

Our student's complete work in our online course system, APEX. Student progress is instant, and their progress can see at any moment, all stakeholders have access.

Note. Using the acronym SMART is a good strategy STAR Academy can use tracking goals for students and organization.

Figure 10. Long and short-term goals.

Describe the process for ensuring that the students in the program receive a rigorous and high-quality education.

Our student's complete work in our online course system, APEX. Student progress is instant, and their progress can be seen at any moment, all stakeholders have access.

Note. This figure illustrates a process for ensuring that a student's program receives a rigorous and high-quality education. APEX is the only current delivery of curriculum for the students. Respondents discussed the need to research another delivery method to meet the needs of the student who struggles with the structure and discipline of taking courses in an online environment.

Figure 11. Rigorous and high-quality education.

What type of services are provided to students with individual education plans or Personalized Educational Plans?

- The goals of any plan follows as would with any situation.
- Extra time.
- Quiet a space to focus on work.
- Modified test.
- Guided notes.
- Dictating answers.
- Co-taught instruction.
- Extra breaks provided during the day.
- Applying goals to student interest
- Setting goals
- Developing learning modalities

Note. This figure illustrates the respondent's responses to the use of individual educational plans and personalized educational plans. The respondents understand the importance of tailoring the individual's services to a plan that allows the student the best chance to succeed. Plans are often reviewed with the team and are an important measure used to transition the student to the referring school. Supports such as counseling and having a social worker may be explored to accent service needs of the students.

Figure 12. Types of support structures.

Democratic
Transparent
Shared group values
Honor existing mission but go where the energy is in the room
Giving voice and making meaning

Note. This figure illustrates the steps helping the faculty establish the mission statement. Note the faculty's criteria for improving upon the current STAR Academy mission statement for SY 2017-2018.

Figure 13. Establishing the mission statement.

there are parent/caregivers who do not speak English, in this event paper communication is transported home by the student (see Figure 14).

Demographics and Survey Responses

The study was conducted using surveys (faculty, student, and parent/caregiver) and open-ended structured questionnaires (parent/caregivers, student, and faculty). Before providing questionnaires to the participants, the questionnaires were reviewed by an expert panel for construct validity. After receiving feedback from the expert review panel, the questionnaire questions for the staff, students, and parent/caregivers adjust as recommended by the expert panel (see Figure 15).

The Alternative Learning Program Coordinator questionnaire consisted of eighteen questions open-ended completion statements. One hundred percent (2 out of 2) of ALP Program Coordinator responded to the survey, 50% (1 out of 2) of ALP Program Coordinators were male, and 50% (1 out of 2) were female. The racial makeup of the ALP Coordinators was White at 50% (1 out of 2); 50% (1 out of 2) of ALP Coordinators respondents were African American. Two ALP Coordinators, past and present, were provided a set of questions aligned with the perspective role through electronic mail to complete and return to the external evaluator. The open-ended structured questions consisted of questions in which the individuals responded through the internet. The open-ended structured questionnaires provided a more in-depth look at the alternative program and the district as well as the perceptions of the respondents about the effectiveness of the STAR Academy. The responses provided the external evaluator a detailed account of the program's organizational structure, the impact that the program had on the students serve from the past and present ALP Coordinators. These responses were reported and recorded verbatim in this document with on edits.

Creating/maintain a positive learning environment
Maintaining positive relationships with parents
Goal setting
Having visible and achievable goals
Respect for each other
Building and maintaining positive relationships
Earning rewards and privileges
Communication
Teaching

Note. This figure illustrates the priority activities for the STAR Academy to accomplish to improve their goals. Improving their goal is a start in determining which direction the program would go to obtain improvements.

Figure 14. Priority activities.

Building and maintaining positive relationships
Creating/maintain a positive learning environment
Maintaining positive relationships with parents

Note. This figure illustrates the top three priorities selected by the STAR staff to improve the delivery of their service to the students placed in the alternative learning setting.

Figure 15. Top three priorities.

The faculty questionnaire consisted of eight questions open-ended completion statements. 42.9 percent (3 out of 7) of faculty responded to the survey (see Figure 16), 14% (1 out of 7) of faculty were male, and 100% (6 out of 7) were female (see Figure 17). The racial makeup of the faculty was White at 100% (3 out of 3); 0% (0 out of 3) of faculty respondents were African American (see Figure 18). Seven faculty provide a set of questions aligned with the perspective role through electronic mail to complete and return to the external evaluator. The open-ended structured questions consisted of questions in which the individuals responded through the internet. The open-ended structured questionnaires provided a more in-depth look at the alternative program and the district as well as the perceptions of the respondents about the effectiveness of the STAR Academy. The responses provided the external evaluator a detailed account of the program's organizational structure, the impact that the program had on the students serve from the perspective of the faculty. These responses were reported and recorded verbatim in this document with on edits.

The student questionnaire consisted of eight questions open-ended completion statements. Students under the age of 18, and having a desire to participate, received written parental permission before completing the questionnaire. The external evaluator provided the parent a consent form that was signed and returned before the minor subjects' completion of the questionnaire. Thirty percent (3 out of 10) of students responded to the survey (see Figure 19), 100% (3 out of 3) of students were male, and 0% (0 out of 3) were female (see Figure 20). The racial makeup of the students was African-American at 100% (3 out of 3); 0% (0 out of 3) of student respondents were White, 0% (0 out of 3) were Hispanic, and (0 out of 3) were identified as Other (see Figure 21). Ten students provide a set of questions aligned with the perspective role through electronic mail to complete and return to the external evaluator. The open-ended

Building and maintaining positive relationships
List evidence currently in use.

- Contacting parents
- progress reports
- observations
- feedback from students (surveys)
- comprehensive needs assessment
- parent contact logs (ongoing)
- weekly academic progress email (Sunday)
- Translator
- STAR of the week (certificate) goes to the student with the most points for behavior.

Note. This figure illustrates the evidence currently in use. This evidence drives conversation for the faculty at the STAR Academy to deliver improved service. Based on this evidence, strategies will be explored in the future to improve service delivery.

Figure 16. Positive relationships.

Creating/maintaining a positive learning environment
List evidence currently in use.

- Behavioral Contracts/Goals
- One-on-one instruction
- Recognition of student successes
- Daily/weekly/monthly goals
- Positive rewards ticket (color coordinated for points reward system sheet)
- Earn privileges (breaks/rewards)
- Providing personal need items (hygiene)
- Phone that dials outside
- Supplies
- Computer-based program to deliver instruction (APEX)
- Credit recovery
- Study guides

Note. This figure illustrates the evidence for creating and maintaining a positive learning environment currently in use at the STAR Academy. Respondents feel that it is essential to include a rewards system with an expression of genuine care to motivate student engagement and success. Based on this evidence, strategies will be explored in the future to improve service delivery.

Figure 17. Positive learning environment

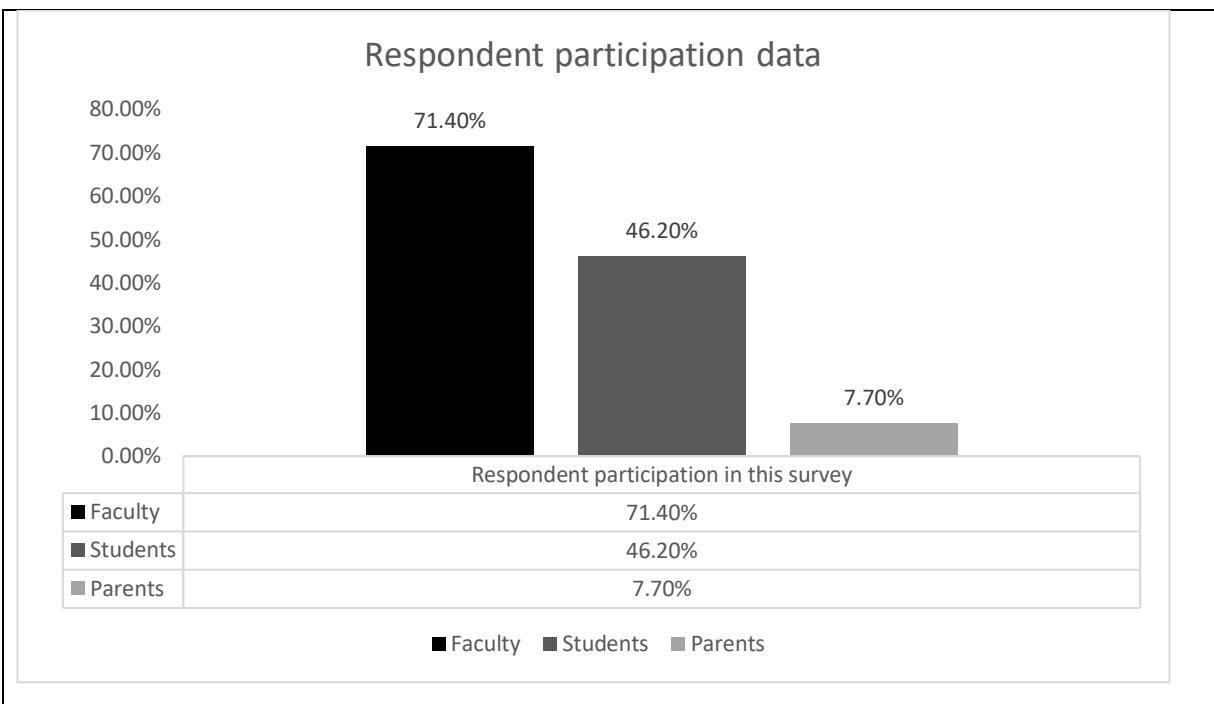
Maintaining positive relationships with parents

List evidence currently in use.

- Parent Contacts logs
- In-take Meetings
- Cut out home visits on half-days (Weather make-up days)
- Two staff
- Weekly progress reports

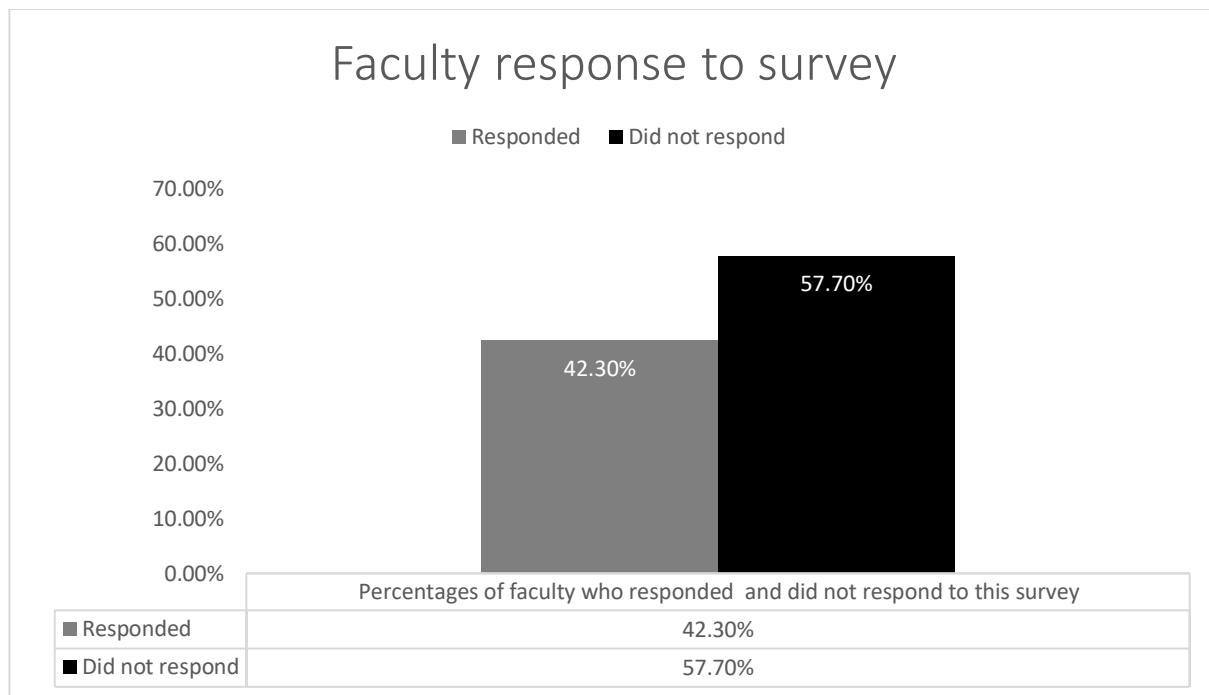
Note. This figure illustrates maintaining a positive relationship with parents. Based on this evidence, strategies will be explored in the future to improve service delivery.

Figure 18. Positive relationships with parents.



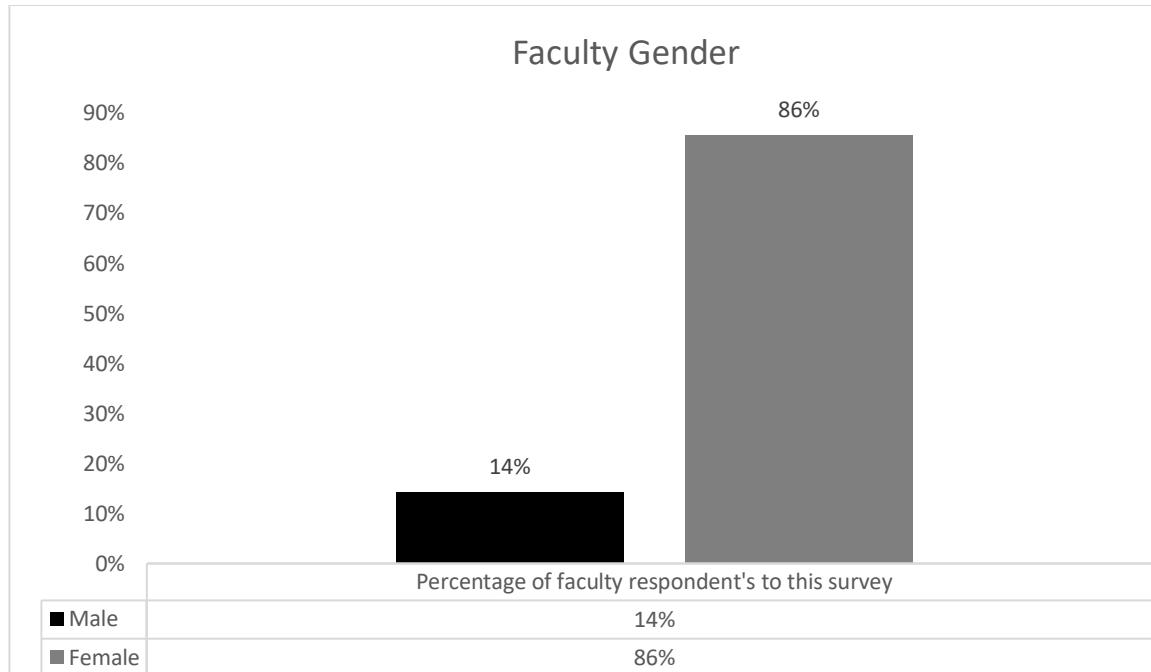
Note. This figure illustrates a breakdown of respondent participation data for this study.

Figure 19. Respondent participation.



Note. This figure illustrates the faculty respondent's response to this study.

Figure 20. Faculty response to survey.

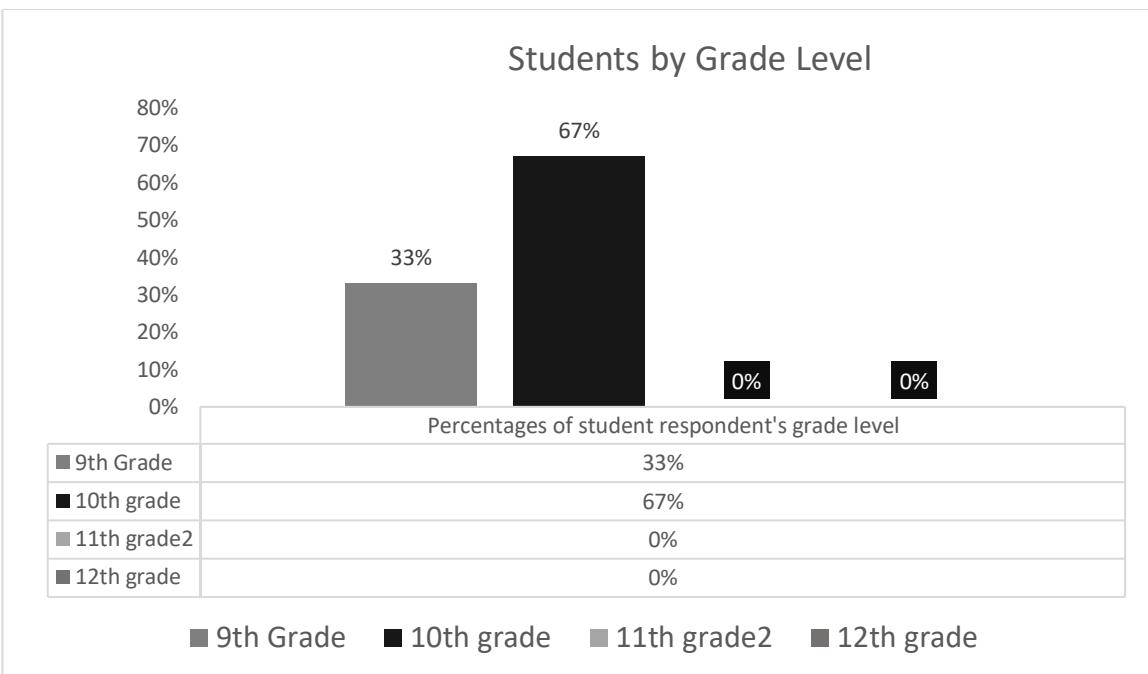


Note. This figure illustrates the faculty respondent's gender for this study.

Figure 21. Faculty respondent gender.

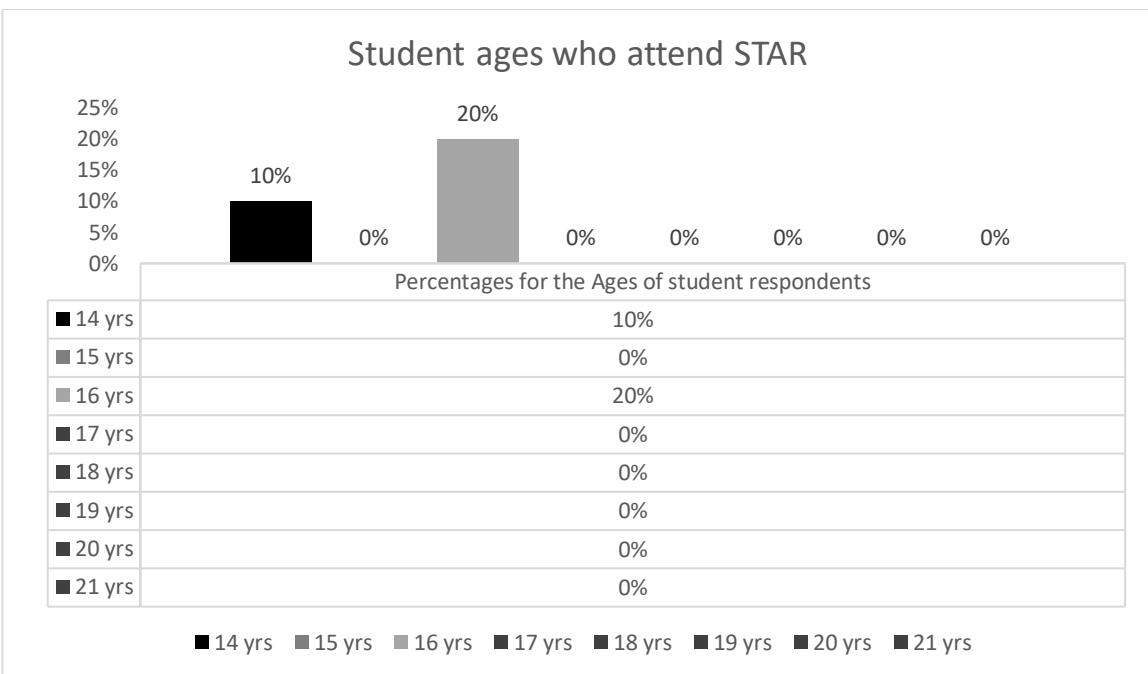
structured questions consisted of questions in which the individuals responded through the internet. The open-ended structured questionnaires provided a more in-depth look at the alternative program and the district as well as the perceptions of the respondents about the effectiveness of the STAR Academy. The responses provided the external evaluator a detailed account of the program's organizational structure, the impact that the program had on the students serve from the perspective of the student. These responses were reported and recorded verbatim in this document with on edits. The grade range at the alternative program was from 9th to 12th grade with the highest percentage of student respondents in grade 10 and nine followed by grades 11 and 12 (see Figure 22). Lastly, student respondents were in the range of 14-18 years of age. Sixty-seven percent (2 out of 3) of the student respondents were in the 10th grade. 0% (0 out of 3) were in the 12th grade. 0% (0 out of 3) was in the 11th grade, and 33% (1 out of 3) were in the 9th grade. Twenty percent (2 out of 3) student respondents were sixteen years old, and 10% (1 out of 3) student respondent was fourteen years old (see Figure 23).

The parent/caregiver questionnaire consisted of seven questions open-ended completion statements. Ten percent (1 out of 10) of parent/caregivers responded to the survey (see Figure 24) 0% (0 out of 10) of parent/caregivers were male, and 10% (1 out of 10) were female (see Figure 25) The racial makeup of the parent/caregivers was White at 20% (2 out of 10); 80% (8 out of 10) of parent/caregiver respondents were African American (see Figure 26) Ten parent/caregivers provide; a set of questions aligned with the perspective role through electronic mail to complete and return to the external evaluator. The open-ended structured questions consisted of questions in which the individuals responded through the internet. The open-ended structured questionnaires provided a more in-depth look at the alternative program and the



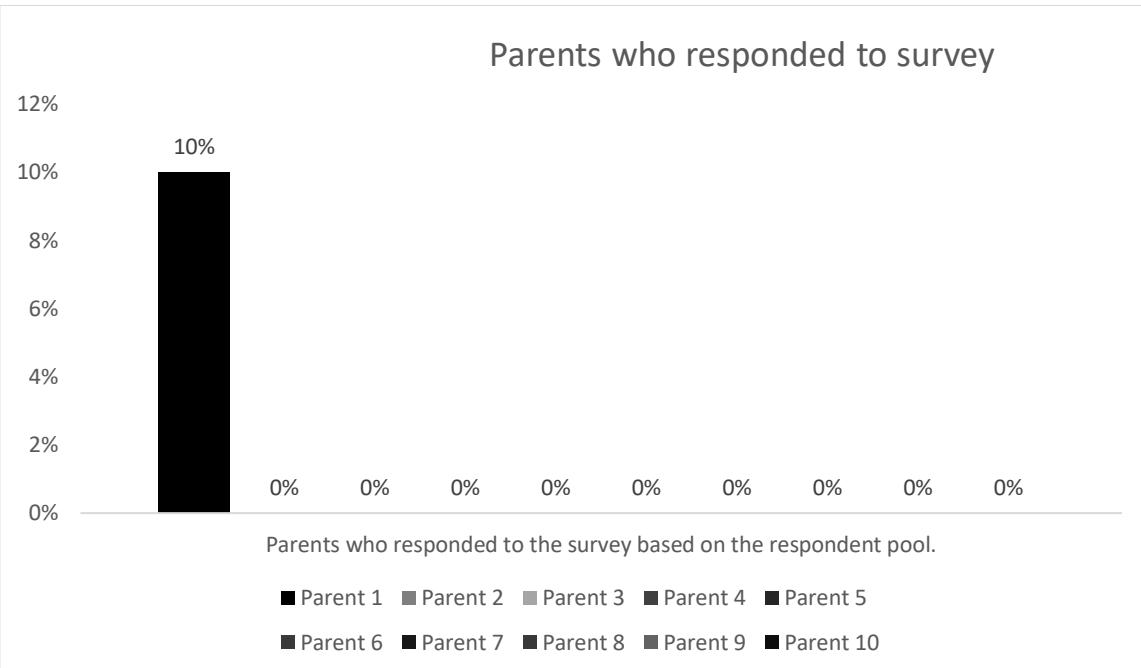
Note. This figure illustrates the student respondent's grade level for this study.

Figure 22. Student respondent by grade level.



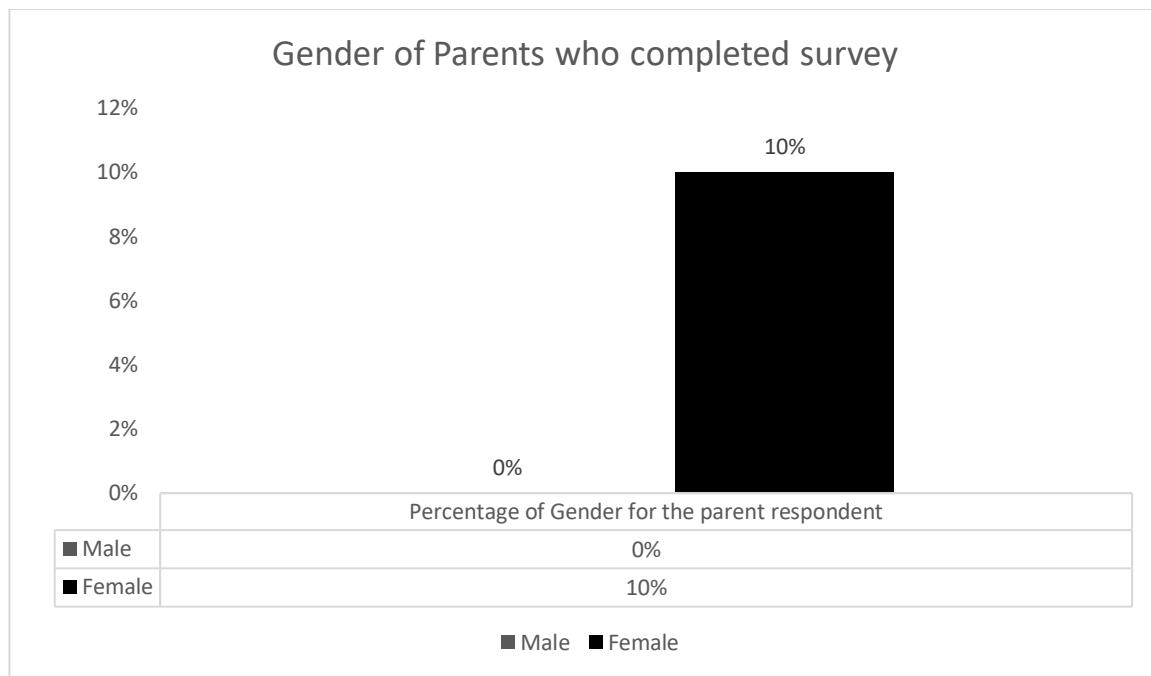
Note. This figure represents the respondent's ages.

Figure 23. Age of student respondent.



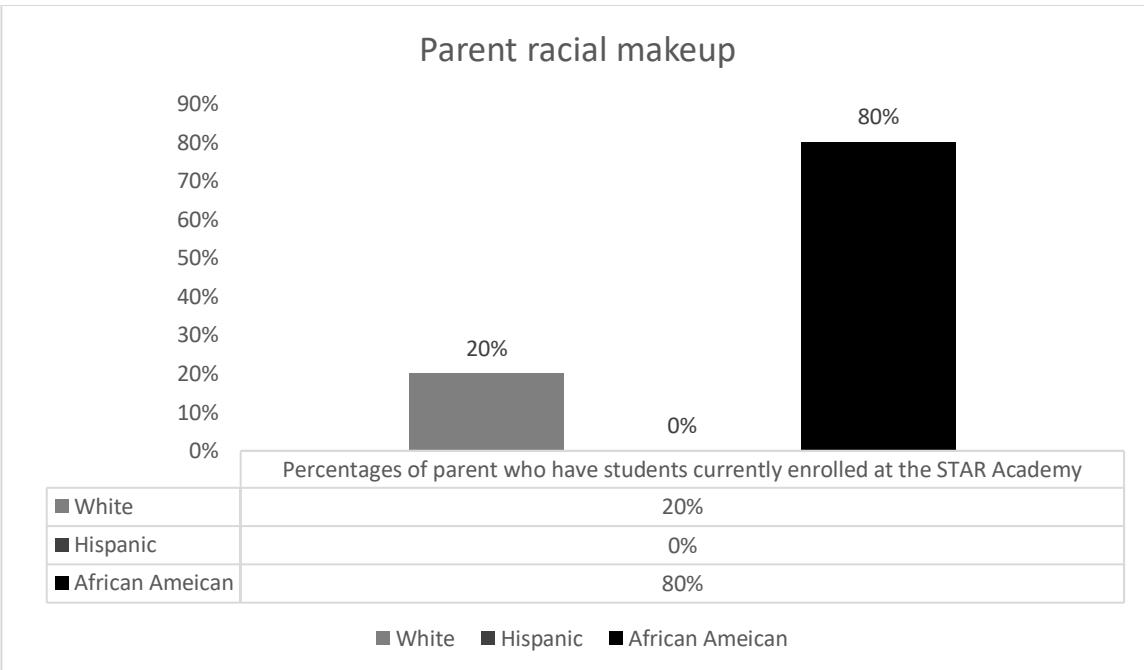
Note. This figure illustrates the parent's response from the respondent pool of this survey.

Figure 24. Parent respondent to survey.



Note. This figure illustrates the gender of the parent's respondents of this survey.

Figure 25. Gender of parent respondents.



Note. This figure illustrates the racial makeup of the parents who currently have students enrolled at the STAR Academy

Figure 26. Parent racial makeup of the student currently enrolled at STAR Academy.

district as well as the perceptions of the respondents about the effectiveness of the STAR Academy. The responses provided the external evaluator a detailed account of the program's organizational structure, the impact that the program had on the students; serve; from the perspective of the parent/caregiver. These responses were reported and recorded verbatim in this document with on edits.

Summary

Survey and open-ended structured questionnaire data collection tools were used to gain an understanding of the organizational structure of the STAR Academy and discover strategies to improve service delivery. By identifying and improving delivery strategies, the purpose is to impact graduation of students attending this alternative school. The goal is for drop out and recidivism rates of the student to decrease once they returned to the referring school. The ALP Coordinator, faculty, student, and parent/caregiver participated in the study. In the next Chapter, recommendations will be discussed that, if implemented with fidelity, can show significant improvements in program delivery.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONDUCTED, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this program evaluation at an alternative learning setting was to determine the effectiveness of the program and particularly the impact of the program on recidivism rates. Data obtained through questionnaires, in-depth interviews and surveys at the Students Taking Alternative Routes Academy. This study was intended to determine whether this alternative setting could meet program objective by expanding its mission statement to identify the priority goals and implement strategies to plan for the future. The data revealed that the program had many variables and the staff was reluctant to share perceptions fear that the evaluation would jeopardize aspects of their roles. This trust issue made it difficult to determine the grounded theory initially. However, after asking probing questions, the evaluation began to discover factors that can help to improve the delivery of the program in the future. One of the themes to emerge from the analysis of the STAR Academy was “What events hindered student participation or learning at STAR Academy?” The findings suggested that reduced attendance is a substantial determining factor for students dropping out of the alternative program.

The alternative staff’s encouragement in a smaller setting was a significant perceived influence on why students wanted to continue in the program and not drop out.

The respondents showed some clear preferences for building and maintaining positive relationships, creating/maintaining a positive learning environment, and maintaining positive relationships with parent.

How the Literature Reviewed Relates to the Findings

School Climate

These findings are broadly aligned with those of researchers such as Vieno et al. (2005) who studied democratic school climates and the student sense of community. Vieno et al. (2005)

discovered that the way in which students and teachers related to each other was an essential factor in students' sense of community within the school. Moreover, school climate was a moderate to strong predictor of students' development of a sense of community and a critical factor in adolescents' well-being. This study suggests that students want to share in the vision of the school environment and that the student's embrace of the vision promotes engagement. Furthermore, this creates an environment in which the student and staff have a collegial working relationship, and this ultimately fosters students' feelings of ownership.

Promoting Capacity Building

Stringer (2013) states, "capacity building is a public enterprise for which there is no single definition" (p. 3). Regarding the alternative program setting, this means that staff fosters the students' knowledge base by better understanding the obstacles they face and finding a way to achieve their educational goal. It is of particular importance to build capacity in this setting because it meets the foundational requirements that make the alternative program setting unique as opposed to the mainstream school environment.

Special Education

The STAR Academy serves students with special needs. Along with the staff providing the students with their curriculum needs, federal law requires that exceptional students receive a resource to help them meet the requirements of their Individualized Educational Plan. These federal statutes are: Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Family Educational and Privacy Rights Act. There are advantages and disadvantages to the unique educational setting. Federal legislation that stipulates students should educate in the least restrictive environment has produced an adverse effect on students with special needs:

We have almost a virtual perfect storm, where we have shrinking public school budgets, limited pool of adequately trained general educators and special educators and significant turnover. So, we have a confrontation of limitations of general educators to support students who are increasingly spending a more significant amount of time alongside their typical classmates, and they are suffering the consequences. (Gable, 2017, p. 190)

Program Evaluation

Student learning is fundamental to any educational setting. There must be a process in place that allows for discussion by staff to make decisions on how to promote student learning. In most school districts, curriculum conversations are conducted by central office staff that addresses the needs of an alternative learning program. The curriculum offered to the students in the program is often limited, making for an unpleasant experience. According to Rodgers, Grays, Fulcher, and Jurich (2013), assessment should provide a systematic process for the faculty and school to make informed decisions about student learning. By assessing student learning outcomes, faculty members can identify aspects within their curriculum to be modified or retained based on results. Though assessment frequently conducted, the quality of its implementation seldom investigated. Logically, the quality of evaluation is essential because crucial decisions, such as curricular changes, should be informed by quality information.

These findings are consistent with previous research in that the student and faculty respondents both shared a need for a shared community. Working together to achieve this community allowed the student respondents to flourish in a caring and safe environment. Also, increasing the understanding of the mission allows for the faculty respondents to develop priority goals which help to achieve the program's organizational goals. Students arrive at the program with many special needs. Individual Education Plans and Personalized Educational Plans provide

the foundation while the student respondents served in the program which allows them a more significant opportunity for success. Conducting the Three-Step Approach to Empowerment Evaluation allowed the faculty respondents to visualize the evidence and form strategies that were attainable.

Implication as Found in the Literature for the Study

This study offers support for the literature that suggests when a student attends an alternative learning program with fidelity, they are more prone not to drop out of school and return to the alternative learning program. The study appears to support the argument for a necessity if checking up on the student after they transitioned back into the referring school. On the face of it, this would suggest that a fresh start and mentoring by a member of student support along with a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support plan may be an essential factor in increasing the student's probability of staying in school and on-track to graduate with their cohort. The conclusions of the study make a case for these measures to be implemented for all students once they return to their referring school.

The district should consider providing the STAR Academy, along with the referring schools, additional allotment resources that produce opportunities for professional development. This professional development provides insight into the student's behaviors and implements strategies that staff, at both sites, can deliver to close the cultural divide and increase student engagement as they transition back into the mainstream environment.

For Further Study

We think possible areas for future research include how to build a framework of supports that will follow the student once they returned to the referring school. This framework of supports may be essential to the maintenance of skills that the student received while in the

alternative learning program. Future study of the STAR Academy might focus in particular on students drop outs in another context. One avenue for further study would be research into the specific reasons why students who are referred to alternative settings attendance is affected by their involvement with the judicial system. It is essential to investigate whether being adjudicated in a court of law increases the chances of dropping out of school.

Recommendations for Improvement

Specific recommendations for improving the STAR Academy include:

- It is recommended that STAR Academy develop a system to calculate the number of STAR enrollments as a percentage of repeaters. Rationale: Acknowledging that there will be repeaters, STAR Academy can quickly obtain information about the number of repeat offender students using enrollment data. STAR Academy can make this calculation as a part of their program goal setting process.
- It is recommended that STAR Academy develop a better understanding of the reasons why students return to STAR. Rationale: Doing so would allow the alternative school to design a program that is more compelling and keep the re-offenders from returning within one year.
- It is recommended that STAR Academy focus outreach efforts on re-offenders referring schools by targeting the appropriate intervention. Rationale: By tailoring the interventions to what the student needs to increase student success and involving the school counselor and student support staff in tracking the delivery of the intervention the chances for recidivism will be lessened.
- It is recommended that STAR Academy explore the possibility of developing partnerships with the high schools to research causes of why student become

repeaters. Rationale: To help better understand the link between recidivism and the referring school's discipline incidents. Hopefully, enough evidence can be obtained which can potentially lead to the allotment of more professional development to address the phenomenon.

- It is recommended that STAR Academy develop an efficient outgoing system once the student returns to the referring school. Rationale: This recommendation will help build a support system for the student other than their peer groups. Peer groups are the number one leading factor as to if the student will become involved in an incident that sends them back to STAR Academy. An active mentor is the best chance of having a positive impact.

The STAR Academy is the only alternative learning setting offered in Pender County. Though there is a change in leadership and it will take some time for the new administrator to acclimate to the program and link with other long-serving staff which remain and keep the program on track to serve its mission. The State of North Carolina General Statue 115C-47 Power and duties generally (local boards of education) states:

- (32a) To Establish Alternative Learning Programs and Develop Policies and Guidelines. - Each local board of education shall establish at least one alternative learning program and shall adopt guidelines for assigning students to alternative learning programs. These guidelines shall include (i) a description of the programs and services to be provided, (ii) a process for ensuring that an assignment is appropriate for the student and that the student's parents are involved in the decision, and (iii) strategies for providing alternative learning programs, when feasible and appropriate, for students who are subject to long-term suspension or expulsion. In developing these guidelines, local boards shall consider

the State Board's standards developed under G.S. 115C-12(24) (Retrieved from NC Public Schools at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/alp/develop/alpmanual.pdf>). Therefore, since there is only one alternative school in existence for Pender County Schools at present, it is recommended to leave the current program in place.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
[**www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb**](http://www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb)

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Jonathan DeBerry
CC: Jim McDowell
Date: 2/6/2018
Re: UMCIRB 18-000039
AN EVALUATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM IN PENDER COUNTY

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/6/2018. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category #1 & 2.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: STAFF SURVEY

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled “An Evaluation of an Alternative Program in Pender County” being conducted by Jonathan L. DeBerry, a student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. The goal is to survey 19 individuals at Students Taking Alternative Routes (S.T.A.R.) Academy. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. It is hoped that this information will assist us to better understand the effectiveness of the Pender County School System Alternative School. Your responses will be kept confidential and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is no penalty for not taking part in this research study. Please call Jonathan L. DeBerry at (910) 520-9259 for any research related questions or the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

The following is a list of questions designed to gather information about individual staff's ability to identify perceptions regarding achievement, parent involvement, attendance, discipline and recidivism rates.

1. What events aided student participation or learning?
2. What events hindered student participation or learning?
3. What things aided parent involvement in the past month?
4. What things hindered parent participation in the past month?
5. Were there issues with attendance in the past month?
6. Were there problems with discipline in the past month?
7. Were individualized plans such as personal education plan (PEP) or individualized education plan (IEP) followed? How so?
8. What is your perception of recidivism as it relates to the STAR Academy?

APPENDIX C: PARENT SURVEY

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled “An Evaluation of an Alternative Program in Pender County” being conducted by Jonathan L. DeBerry, a student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. The goal is to survey 19 individuals at Students Taking Alternative Routes (S.T.A.R.) Academy. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. It is hoped that this information will assist us to better understand the effectiveness of the Pender County School System Alternative School. Your responses will be kept confidential and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is no penalty for not taking part in this research study. Please call Jonathan L. DeBerry at (910) 520-9259 for any research related questions or the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

The following is a list of questions designed to gather information about individual parent's ability to identify perceptions regarding communication and program satisfaction.

1. Was there personal communication between parent and the alternative school? How so (phone, email or text)?
2. What was the reason for the contact?
3. Were satisfied with the outcome of staff participation as it related to student's education?
4. Were happy with the overall communication and service provided?
5. What is your perception of recidivism as it relates to the STAR Academy?
6. Has your student discussed with you a desire to drop out of school? If so, what advice have you provide to them to help them to stay in school and graduate?
7. Attendance is very important, therefore, describe any barriers that prevent your student from attending STAR Academy.

APPENDIX D: STUDENT SURVEY

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled “*An Evaluation of an Alternative Program in Pender County*” being conducted by Jonathan L. DeBerry, a student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. The goal is to survey 19 individuals at Students Taking Alternative Routes (S.T.A.R.) Academy. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. It is hoped that this information will assist us to better understand the effectiveness of the Pender County School System Alternative School. Your responses will be kept confidential and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is **voluntary**. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please call Jonathan L. DeBerry at (910) 520-9259 for any research related questions or the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

The Following is a list of questions designed to gather information about individual student’s ability to identify perceptions regarding obtaining credits to help return to referring school or being able to graduate.

1. Does student like being in the program?
2. Is the alternative program helping achieve school needs?
3. Does student think the program is harmful by keeping from getting credits to return to referring school or graduating?
4. Was student satisfied with the overall communication and service provided?
5. What does dropout mean to you?
6. What does recidivism mean to you?
7. Explain the functional and behavioral goals of your individual educational plan (IEP).
8. Explain the goals of your personalized education plan (PEP).

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER (STAFF)

Dear Staff,

I am presently working on my Doctorate of Education through the Department of Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. As part of my degree requirements, I am planning an educational research project to take place in my classroom that will help me to evaluate the STAR Program to determine its value to the students who are enrolled in the program as they progress towards their goal of graduation. The fundamental goal of this research study is to:

- Goal : To evaluate an alternative learning program that supports the academic needs of the student to determine did attending an alternative school impact student dropout and recidivism rates.

As part of this research project in my classroom, your child will participate in various activities over the next six to eight weeks that will allow me to track program improvement. As this study is for educational research purposes only, the results of your student's participation **will not** affect your student's grade.

I am requesting permission from you to use your student's data in my research study. Please know that participation is entirely voluntary.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at school (910)520-9259 or by emailing me a deberrj15@students.ecu.edu. If you have questions about your child's rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (ORIC) at phone number (252)744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the OHRI, at (252) 744-1971.

If you permit your child's data to be used in my study, please return the attached form by February 13, 2018. Thank you for your interest in my educational research study.

Your Partner in Education
Jonathan L. DeBerry

As the parent or guardian of _____,

- I grant my permission for Mr. DeBerry to use my child's data in his educational research project regarding program evaluation of the STAR Academy. I fully understand that my child's data will be kept completely confidential and will be used only for the purposes of Mr. DeBerry's research study. I also understand that I or my child may at any time decide to withdraw my/our permission and that my child's grade will not be affected by withdrawing from the study.**
- I do NOT grant my permission for Mr. DeBerry to use my child's data in his educational research project regarding an program evaluation of the STAR Academy.**

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER (PARENT)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am presently working on my Doctorate of Education through the Department of Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. As part of my degree requirements, I am planning an educational research project to take place in my classroom that will help me to evaluate the STAR Program to determine its value to the students who are enrolled in the program as they progress towards their goal of graduation. The fundamental goal of this research study is to:

- Goal: To evaluate an alternative learning program that supports the academic needs of the student to determine did attending an alternative school impact student dropout and recidivism rates.

As part of this research project in my classroom, your child will participate in various activities over the next six to eight weeks that will allow me to track program improvement. As this study is for educational research purposes only, the results of your child's participation **will not** affect your child's grade.

I am requesting permission from you to use your child's data in my research study. Please know that participation is entirely voluntary.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at school (910)520-9259 or by emailing me a deberryj15@students.ecu.edu. If you have questions about your child's rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (ORIC) at phone number (252)744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the OHRI, at (252) 744-1971.

If you permit your child's data to be used in my study, please return the attached form by February 13, 2018. Thank you for your interest in my educational research study.

Your Partner in Education
Jonathan L. DeBerry

- As the parent or guardian of _____,**
- I grant my permission for Mr. DeBerry to use my child's data in his educational research project regarding program evaluation of the STAR Academy. I fully understand that my child's data will be kept completely confidential and will be used only for the purposes of Mr. DeBerry's research study. I also understand that I or my child may at any time decide to withdraw my/our permission and that my child's grade will not be affected by withdrawing from the study.**
- I do NOT grant my permission for Mr. DeBerry to use my child's data in his educational research project regarding an program evaluation of the STAR Academy.**
- Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G: ASSENT FORM



Assent Form

Things You Should Know Before You Agree To Take Part in this Research

IRB Study # UMCIRB 18-000039

Title of Study: AN EVALUATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM IN PENDER COUNTY

Person in charge of study: Jonathan DeBerry

Where they work: Pender County Schools

Study contact phone number: (910) 520-9259

Study contact E-mail Address: deberryj15@students.ecu.edu

People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to find out if your enrollment at the current alternative learning program is meeting your educational needs as a student.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

Why are you doing this research study?

The reason for doing this research is to evaluate an alternative learning program that supports the academic needs of the student to determine did attending an alternative school impact student dropout and recidivism rates.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research because your input is valuable in helping us to make improvements to the STAR Academy.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this research, you will be one of about 19 people taking part in it.

What will happen during this study?

These steps are designed to help program participants internalize evaluation as part of their program planning and management. There will be additional communication with staff whether there is any follow-up.

- Taking stock or determining where the program stands, including strengths and weaknesses
- Focusing on establishing goals, determining where you want to go in the future with emphasis on program improvement.
- Developing strategies and helping participants determine their own strategies to determine program goals and objectives
- Helping program participants determine the type of evidence required to document progress toward their goals.
- The study will utilize surveys to:
 - Record findings and review content to uncover common themes.
 - All surveys will be stored in a secured setting offsite.
 - Participants will be advised that their surveys may be requested to not use.

Check the line that best matches your choice:

- OK to manually record data during the study
 Not OK to manually record data during the study

This study will take place at S.T.A.R. Academy and will last 30 minutes.

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?

The evaluator will only have access to the information being collected. Student identity will not be disclosed. After the evaluation, parents and teachers will be presented with the finding of the evaluation.

What are the good things that might happen?

Sometimes good things happen to people who take part in research. These are called “benefits.” The benefits to you of being in this study may be a better understanding of achieving your goal of graduation. We will tell you more about these things below.

What are the bad things that might happen?

There is no known risk from your participation in this evaluation.

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

If you decide to take part in this research, you should sign your name below. It means that you agree to take part in this research study.

Sign your name here if you want to be in the study

Date

Print your name here if you want to be in the study

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent

APPENDIX H: LETTER OF COOPERATION



Board of Education

Dr. Steven Hill, Superintendent

Kenneth I. Lanier, Chair

Don Hall, Vice Chair

Brad George

Katherine Herring

Preparing Our Graduates for the World that Awaits Them

Rochelle Whiteside

Date: 01/30/2018

Re: Letter of Cooperation For Students Taking Alternative Routes Academy

Dear Jonathan L. DeBerry,

This letter confirms that I, as an authorized representative of Pender County Schools, allow the PI access to conduct study related activities at the listed site(s), as discussed with the PI and briefly outlined below, and which may commence when the PI provides evidence of IRB approval for the proposed project.

- **Research Site(s):** Students Taking Alternative Routes Academy, 14328 NC HWY 210, Rocky Point, NC 28457
- **Study Purpose:** The purpose of this dissertation will be to conduct a program evaluation of the Students Taking Alternative Routes Academy (STAR). The program evaluation will use the three-step approach of empowerment evaluation. The three-steps are (1) establish the mission, (2) take stock of the status, and (3) plan for the future. The goal is to evaluate an alternative learning program that supports the academic needs of the student to determine did attending an alternative school impact student dropout and recidivism rates?

- **Study Activities:** Study activities that will commence at the site will include: Screen potential participants, obtain informed consents, collect data, prepare study initiation activities, educate participants, families and staff, conduct online surveys /interviews, perform observations, and access to database(s)
- **Subject Enrollment:** The Subjects/Participants being evaluated in this study are enrolled students, staff, and caregivers of the students are identified as the subject inclusion criteria and the sample size target is 21.
- **Site(s) Support:** The study site(s) agree to provide to further the research, space to conduct study activities, authorize site employees to identify persons who might qualify for study, distribute questionnaires, and retrieve data from Site files.
- **Data Management:** Data will be collected by method of survey/questionnaires and standardized/non-standardized tests, and teacher inquiry. Data will be anonymous.
- **Anticipated End Date:** April 6, 2018

We understand that this site's participation will only take place during the study's active IRB approval period. All study related activities must cease if IRB approval expires or is suspended. I understand that any activities involving Personal Private Information or Protected Health Information may require compliance with HIPAA Laws and East Carolina University Policy. Our organization agrees to the terms and conditions stated above. If we have any concerns related to this project, we will contact the PI. For concerns regarding IRB policy or human subject welfare, we may also call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.



Dr. Robbie Cauley, Director of Student Support Services
Pender County Schools

925 Penderlea Highway • Burgaw, North Carolina 28425
Telephone (910) 259-2187 • Fax (910) 259-0133
www.pendercountyschools.net

APPENDIX I: WORK PLAN

This work plan is created to be a living document. Therefore, to ensure the success, it will be an evolving process. This plan will be reviewed with the alternative learning program staff at the end of each month to check if there need to be changes made to the goals. Feedback regarding obstacles will allow us to take the necessary actions to eliminate problems. For purposes of clarity, the following definitions have been included to explain the significance of performance, criteria, and conditions as each relates to this work plan and its goals.

- a. Performance-what the staff is expected to do plus the steps needed to meet the goal
- b. Criteria-quality or level of performance that will be considered acceptable (time frame)
- c. Conditions- environment under which production is expected to occur.

APPENDIX J: WORK PLAN (GOAL #1)

Goal #1

The External Evaluator and the alternative learning program staff will conduct a staff, student and parent survey at the end of each month for four months while the program evaluation is conduct. Method tools used to track data are staff survey, parent survey, and a student survey.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound

APPENDIX K: WORK PLAN (GOAL #2)

Goal #2

The alternative learning program staff will document student achievement monthly for four months while the program evaluation is conduct. Method tools used to track data will include: formative and summative assessments, benchmarks, end of course test/final exams, grade books, School Net, and interviews.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound

APPENDIX L: WORK PLAN (GOAL#3)

Goal #3

The alternative learning program staff will document parent involvement to be reviewed at the end of each month for four months while the program evaluation is conduct. Method tools used to track data will include: parent contact logs, emails, google text, home visit notes, school visitor sign in, parent conferences, interviews.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound

APPENDIX M: WORK PLAN (GOAL #4)

Goal # 4

The alternative learning program staff will document student attendance to be reviewed at the end of each month for four months while the program evaluation is conduct. Method tools use to track data will include Power School, interviews, parent notes, and doctor's notes.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound

APPENDIX N: WORK PLAN (GOAL #5)

Goal #5

The alternative learning program staff will document student discipline to be reviewed at the end of each month for four months while the program evaluation is conduct. Method tools will include Power School, teacher notes, interviews, surveys, discipline referrals, and control determinations.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound

APPENDIX O: EVALUATION CAPACITY ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

Please circle the number that best corresponds to the level of agreement with each of the statements in the sections that follow. Base the ratings on the program where you work as a staff member (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 2015b).

Thoughts about Evaluation

Section I: About You						
Think that an evaluation	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree	
	1	2	3	4		
1. Will help understand program.	1	2	3	4		
2. Will inform the decisions I make about my program.	1	2	3	4		
3. Will justify funding for the program.	1	2	3	4		
4. Will help to convince managers that changes need in the program.	1	2	3	4		
5. Will inform changes in our documentation system.	1	2	3	4		
6. Is necessary to improve the program.	1	2	3	4		
7. Should involve program participants in the evaluation process.	1	2	3	4		
8. Will influence policy relevant to the program.	1	2	3	4		

9. Will help improve services to people from diverse ethnic backgrounds that also have disabilities.	1	2	3	4
10. Is unnecessary because we already know what is best for our participants.	1	2	3	4
11. Is too complex for our staff to do.	1	2	3	4

Motivation to Engage in Evaluation

	Are motivated Disagree	Strongly Disagree		Agree	
		Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Learn about evaluation.	1	2	3	4	
2. Start evaluating the program.	1	2	3	4	
3. Support other staff to evaluate the program.	1	2	3	4	
4. Encourage others to buy into evaluating the program.	1	2	3	4	

Evaluation Knowledge and Skills

	Know how to y Disagree	Strongl e		Disagre e		Agre e		Strongl y Agree	
		Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Develop and evaluation plan.	1	2	3	4					
2. State measurable goals and objectives for the program.	1	2	3	4					

3. Identify strategies to collect information from participants.	1	2	3	4
4. Define outcome indicator of the program.	1	2	3	4
5. Decide what questions to answer in an evaluation.	1	2	3	4
6. Decide from whom to collect the information.	1	2	3	4
7. Collect evaluation information.	1	2	3	4
8. Analyze evaluation information	1	2	3	4
9. Develop recommendations based on evaluation results.	1	2	3	4
10. Examine the impact of the program on people from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and individuals with disabilities.	1	2	3	4
11. Write an evaluation report.	1	2	3	4
12. Evaluate the program alone.	1	2	3	4
13. Conduct an evaluation of the program with support from others.	1	2	3	4

14. Present evaluation findings orally.	1	2	3	4
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SECTION II: About Your Organization

Leadership

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4
1. Provide effective leadership.	1	2	3	4
2. Staff understands how everyone's duties fit together as part of the overall mission of the program.	1	2	3	4
3. Communicate program goals and objectives.	1	2	3	4
4. Have a clear plan for accomplishing program goals.	1	2	3	4
5. Have realistic expectations of what staff can accomplish given the resources they have available.	1	2	3	4

Learning Climate

The program where the work fosters an environment in which	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4
1. Evaluation information is shared in open forums.	1	2	3	4
2. Staff is supported to introduce new	1	2	3	4

approaches to their work.				
3. It is easy for staff to meet regularly to discuss issues.	1	2	3	4
4. Staff provide opportunities to assess how well they are doing, what they can do better, and what is working.	1	2	3	4
5. Staff can encourage managers and peers to make use of evaluation findings.	1	2	3	4
6. Staff respects each other's perspectives and opinions.	1	2	3	4
7. Staff errors lead to teachable moments rather than criticisms.	1	2	3	4
8. Staff participates in making long-term plans for their program.	1	2	3	4
9. Staff concerns ignore in most decisions regarding strategic planning and evaluation.	1	2	3	4

Resources for Evaluation

	In the program	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4				
1.	Resources are allocated to provide accommodations for people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and for people with disabilities to collect evaluation information (e.g., interpreters, translated documents).								
2.	The staff has time to conduct evaluation activities (e.g., identifying or developing a survey, collecting information from participants).	1	2	3	4				
3.	The staff has access to technology to compile information collected from participants (e.g., computerized database).	1	2	3	4				
4.	The staff has access to adequate technology to produce	1	2	3	4				

summary reports of information collected from participants (e.g., computerized database).				
5. Resources allocated for staff training (e.g., money, time, bringing in consultants).	1	2	3	4
6. Technical assistance is available to staff to address questions related to evaluation.	1	2	3	4
7. Funders provide resources to conduct the evaluation.	1	2	3	4
8. Funders provide leadership from conducting the evaluation.	1	2	3	4
9. Agency leadership engages in ongoing dialogue with funders regarding evaluation.	1	2	3	4

SECTION III: About Your Work

Evaluations as Part of Assigned Job

	Disagree	Strongly	Disagree	Agree	Strongly
		Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
1. The program gathers information from diverse stakeholders to engage how well the program is doing.		1	2	3	4
2. The program has adequate records of past evaluations efforts and what happened as a result.		1	2	3	4
3. Have access to the information I need to make decisions regarding my work.		1	2	3	4
4. Can integrate evaluations activities into the daily work practices.		1	2	3	4
5. The evaluation activities engage in are consistent with funder's expectations.		1	2	3	4

Use of Evaluation Findings

Please indicate the extent to which the program currently uses evaluation results for the following purposes:	Not at all	To Some Extent	To Considerable Extent	To a Very Great Extent	To a Great Extent
	1	2	3	4	5
1. To report to a funder.	1	2	3	4	5
2. To improve services or programs.	1	2	3	4	5
3. To get additional funding.	1	2	3	4	5
4. To design ongoing monitoring processes.	1	2	3	4	5
5. To assess implementation of a program.	1	2	3	4	5
6. To assess the quality of a program.	1	2	3	4	5
7. To improve outreach.	1	2	3	4	5
8. To make informed decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
9. To train staff.	1	2	3	4	5
10. To develop best practices.	1	2	3	4	5
11. To eliminate unneeded services or programs.	1	2	3	4	5

Have been involved in past efforts to evaluate a program at the school?

No

Yes. If Yes, please explain your role:

Have had any previous training in evaluations? (1) No (2) Yes

If the answer is yes, please indicate the type of training:

- 1) Course about evaluation as a part of the educational/college training
- 2) Workshops
- 3) Talks/ conferences

Experience conditioning/collaborating in evaluations

