 Characteristics Of Secondary Alternative School Programs In The State Of New Jersey

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CHARACTERISTICS OF SECONDARY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

BY

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ABSTRACT

CHARACTERISTICS OF SECONDARY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Incarceration, unemployment, underemployment, drug addiction, welfare, and overall lower socioeconomic status are just a few of the life situations that are dramatically increased for those individuals who are unable or unwilling to complete a high school education. In order to slow the tide of students leaving school, much of the research has focused on prevention and intervention programs for the at-risk student. In the state of New Jersey, policy-makers have attempted to address concerns regarding the high level of dropouts from New Jersey's public schools by developing alternatives at the secondary level. Reflective of the national trend, these programs focus on the at-risk student's social, as well as, academic needs, in securing a high school diploma.

Although advocates on both the rational and state level have reported many successes for at-risk students enrolled in alternative schools, "there is still very little consistent, wide-ranging evidence of their effectiveness or even an understanding of their characteristics" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p.2). Given the extent of the at-risk problem in New Jersey, the variety of
alternative schools, their availability, and their effectiveness, it has become increasingly more difficult for educators, parents, and the general public to determine what program characteristics exist at the local level.

In light of these issues, this researcher utilized survey research as a vehicle for examining and describing the characteristics of secondary alternative schools existing in the State of New Jersey. The researcher received a total of 57 returned surveys out of 81 that were mailed out, for a return rate of 70%. A review of the literature provides the comparison of these characteristics to the available research.

This study's significance is that it provides information about alternative school philosophies, practices, structures, goals, and outcomes that resonate with broader community concerns about children on the margins of traditional programs. The researcher also provides significant recommendations for future research.

In the concluding chapter the researcher postulates that successful program characteristics found in alternative schools may, and should, be considered in any school setting restructuring their pedagogical approaches.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Any place that anyone can learn something useful from someone with experience is an educational institution"

Al Capp, (1870-1951)
Italian Educator and Reformer

It is with this in mind, at the beginning of this work on alternative education, that I acknowledge those individuals with experience who have taught me so much about living and learning. First and foremost, I thank my mentor and committee for their patience and guidance. Dr. Grace May always had the right thing to say to focus me in the right direction. Dr. Colella, Dr. De Noble, and Rev. Nynes, Ed.D. provided me with invaluable support and guidance in conducting this study; I am forever grateful to all of them. I also thank Dr. James Caulfield and the members of Cohort 1 at Seton Hall for their support.

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DEDICATION

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy:
They are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

Marcel Proust (1871-1922)

This work is dedicated in loving memory of

My Mom
Sandra Ann Doran

My Brother
Robert C. Doran

My Friends
Mayor Frank E. Rodgers
&
Terrance Buckley

I am forever grateful for the joy with which you have graced me.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of the Study

Incarceration, unemployment, underemployment, drug addiction, welfare, and overall lower socioeconomic status are just a few of the life situations that are dramatically increased for those individuals who are unable or unwilling to complete a high school education. Fisher and Gale (1994) reported that some 700,000 students drop out of high school each year and cost the nation $240 billion in lost earnings and foregone taxes. Further complicating the problem are the conflicting data on the actual number of annual dropouts. Schwartz (1995), in reviewing a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), stated that "although declining, 381,000 students left school without graduating in 1993. Nearly two-thirds leave before the tenth grade" (p.1).

In a later report, Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000, Kaufman, Naomi, and Chapman reported for the NCES that "while progress was made during the 1970s and 1980s in reducing high school dropout rates and increasing high
school completion rates, these rates have remained comparatively stable during the 1990s* (p.iii). Although remaining stable, the report concluded that there still remains 3.8 million (10.9%) of the 34.6 million sixteen to twenty-four-year-olds in the nation not enrolled or not completing a high school program (Kaufman, Naomi, & Chapman, 2001). This same report further stated:

Five out of every 100 young adults enrolled in high school in October of 1999 left school before October 2000 without successfully completing a high school program. The percentage of young adults who left school each year without successfully completing a high school program decreased from 1972 through 1987. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, the percentage of students dropping out of school each year has stayed relatively unchanged since 1987. (p.iii)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 survey data, the national percentage of adults age 25 and over without a high school diploma is 17.2 percent. In the State of New Jersey the rate is 14.6 percent, ranking New Jersey 30th among the 50 States (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 2002).

The dropout rate in many urban centers has exceeded 45% and sometimes 50%. In the 1980s the city of New York
tapped an astonishing dropout rate of 45% (Foley & Crull 1984). In a recent article for the Daily News, Williams (2004) reported that a New York City high school maintains a graduation ‘completion’ rate of only 27.5%, the city’s third worst.

Schwartz (1995) reported that as many as half of the heads of households receiving welfare and an equal percentage of the prison population are reported to have dropped out of high school. Nelson (1985) reported that males dropout more frequently than females, and that Hispanics and Blacks had higher dropout rates than Whites. He also stated that the unemployment rate was double for dropouts as compared with high school completers.

In reviewing the dropout rate by race, the NCES stated that the dropout rate varied for Whites and Blacks. Between 1972 and 2000, the White rate was lower than the Black or Hispanic rate, and while both the White and Black rates have overall, declined, the Hispanic rate remained fairly constant, and in some years has increased (Heger, 1992; Wirt & Livingston, 2002). In discussing this data, Honawar (2004) indicates that Hispanics continue to drop out at higher rates than those for non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks.

In a most recent Policy Information Report for the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Barton (2005) claims
that the government-provided high school completion figures
are flawed, and that one-third of our nation's students do
not complete high school. He further claims that the
situation is getting worse in most states, especially in
light of mandates for higher achievement levels. This
recent finding is also supported by the research of Greene
and Winters (2005) reporting on graduation rates for the
Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute,
wherein they indicated that the national graduation rate
has steadily declined to 71% in 2002.

During the past two decades more attention has been
given to the potential dropout, commonly referred to as the
at-risk student. This term has been borrowed from the
medical community and refers to the potential dropout and
the causal factors associated with dropping out. Fisher and
Gale (1994) define at-risk "as the place, school, family,
or community that puts a student in jeopardy of not
achieving in the conventional school program" (p.2).

Fisher and Gale (1994) also indicated that parental
involvement, a crucial element in successful schools, is
almost nonexistent with at-risk students. Most at-risk
students come from family backgrounds where there is only
one parent in the household. However, due to work, language
difficulties, or their own negative experiences with
school, they do not become involved with the school process. Liomtou (1991) indicated, 'traditional methods of parental involvement do not work with at-risk parents. In addition, the history of relationships between poor and minority parents and schools has been very different than those of the middle class' (p.1). She stated that many barriers and misconceptions exist for both parents and schools.

Reglin, King, Sedino, and Ketterer (2003) suggested that issues of child care, parenting practices, poor communication skills, and transportation are some of the barriers leading to low levels of inner city African-American parental involvement with the school. These barriers in turn, they hypothesize, lead to further isolation, lower expectations, and lower performance outcomes for the minority student, already determined to be at a disadvantage for school success.

In discussing this "Intensifying Concern," Schoenlein (1994, p.1) stated, "that because of dramatic failure of the educational institutions, clearly the dropout/at-risk problem has emerged as a national concern." Presseisen (1988) predicted that:

In short, the at-risk students represent the threat of the failure of democratic society
itself, the fear that we are creating, mainly in our inner city neighborhoods, an ineradicable, untrained underclass-plagued by a self-perpetuating pathology of joblessness, welfare dependency, and crime. (p.10)

Given the technological advancements taking place in society, there is an ever-shrinking labor pool of qualified workers. The business community has voiced concern on both the state and national level regarding recent applicants who in many cases are functionally illiterate and unacquainted with the responsibilities required for the world of work. Schwartz (1995) indicated that there is an ever-widening gap in earned income between the educated and non-educated as the need for more highly skilled workers replaces the manufacturing worker of the past.

Paylor (1989) and Schoenlien (1994) indicated that dropouts and marginal students have become an ever-increasing drag on the economy due to their substandard academic and employability skills. They state that corporations have been spending millions on training their workers to read and write in order to perform adequately in entry-level positions. Catterall (1985) reported that for every year we experience these record numbers of dropouts, the country loses $200 billion over their lifetimes in
lost income and unrealized tax revenue.

Kellymayer (1998) stated that future dropouts portend a "problem of such a potential magnitude as to pose a threat to America's economic and social well-being" (p.28). He further quoted David T. Kearns (as cited by Kellymayer, 1998), former head of the Xerox Corporation, as saying:

Public education has put the country at a terrible competitive disadvantage. The American workforce is running out of qualified people. If the current demographic and economic trends continue, American business will have to hire a million new workers a year who can't read, write or count. Teaching them how and absorbing the lost productivity while they're learning will cost industry $25 billion a year for as long as it takes. And nobody knows how long that will be. (p.28)

Frazis, Gittleman and Joyce (1998) conducted a study on workplace training for the Department of Labor Statistics utilizing the 1995 Survey of Employer-Provided Training (SEPT95) data and found that U.S. employers spent an astonishing $37 Billion on direct and indirect cost related to employee training. In light of the need for global competition in global markets and wider use of
technology and the Internet, the need for a highly skilled workforce becomes more apparent. Workers in the 21st Century need to have the training, skills and most importantly, the education level necessary to navigate in the new millennium (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999).

In another recent study for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Wirt & Livingston (2002) compared working college graduates with high school dropouts for the year 2000. The researchers found that male college graduates earned double the amount of high school dropouts.

Kellymayer (1998) also pointed out an alarming issue when viewing the current and future birth differentials. Minority birth rates are projected to rise dramatically over the next several decades as compared to non-minorities. If the trend continues that minorities tend to dropout at higher rates than non-minorities, usually at double the rate, then our country must further prepare for an under-educated population and under-trained workforce.

Overall, trying to calculate the dropout rate is often a difficult process given the wide range of descriptors and categories that are employed throughout the nation’s school districts. The reporting of dropout rates can vary depending on who is collecting the data and the purpose for
which the data is being used (Vail, 2004). However, given the generally accepted range of 10% to 50%, depending on the geographical area (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2002), this situation has become a crisis and has lead to the mobilization of education leaders, federal and state officials, and policy makers in an attempt to address this pressing national problem.

As a result of the widely accepted report calling for educational reforms, "A Nation at Risk," the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) started the movement to address the dropout problem as a national priority. It called for school reforms and accountability for student outcomes, including dropout interventions.

In 1990 the "National Education Goals" proposed by President George H. Bush and the National Association of Governors set as one of the six Education Goals, goal number two, that all schools should attain a high school graduation rate of 90% by the year 2000 (Gronlund, 1993).

More recently, in 2002 President George W. Bush signed the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB), which is described by the Department of Education as a "landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools" (U.S. Department of Education, NCLB Desktop Reference Guide, p.9). In
addressing the reforms for dropout and at-risk prevention programs the law mandates that programs be developed "to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school, and to provide dropouts, and children and youth returning from correctional facilities or institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth, with a support system to ensure their continued education" (U.S. Department of Educacion, NCLB 2001: Part D, Sec.1401, A.3).

Ironically, it should also be noted that as a direct result of the excellence movement, many within the field of education suggest that the dropout rate will grow to its highest levels because lower achieving students were being pushed out of the system. Fisher and Gale (1994) and Donnelly (1987) pointed out that both federal and state mandates to implement higher academic standards and high-stakes testing mandates have negatively impacted the teaching and learning of low achieving at-risk students.

A national expert on alternative education and small school research, Mary Anne Raywid (2001), views the accountability movement as doing a disservice to public education. She stated that due to emphasis on test scores (which are usually what is portrayed in the news headlines) as the only measure of success, the public evaluates a school with limited information based on only one
measurement indicator. Rayvid stated that:

If school test scores are going to be splashed all over the headlines, so must other indicators be highlighted. One easy way to raise 11th test scores, of course, is to keep low scorers out of the 11th grade. Therefore, a school's dropout, course failure, and grade retention rates are important for assessing its success. (p. 594)

There is a growing concern and urgency within the education community that, as the at-risk population grows, the traditional educational establishment is becoming less adept at being successful with these students. Therefore, the process must begin to move beyond restrictions and curricula guidelines to deal with the real and perceived needs of this population.

In order to slow the tide of students leaving school, much of the research has focused on prevention and intervention programs for the at-risk students. A goal of the research in the middle and late 1980s centered on defining the at-risk student, determining who was at-risk, and discovering what were the causal factors that lead to being at-risk. As a result of this research, many types of intervention and prevention programs were developed to address the special needs of this group. Some intercede at
the elementary level and younger in the form of Head Start, full-day kindergarten, and after school programs. Others focus on the middle school level with after school and summer school programs. The largest variety and number of programs exist for secondary at-risk students. These program options are available primarily as intervention programs and alternative school programs (Asher & Schwartz, 1987; Casey 1992; Staresina 2003; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson [NDPC/N] 2003).

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) at Clemson (2004), an organization that conducts and analyzes research to further the mission of reducing the dropout rate by seeking strategies that meet the needs of youth in at-risk situations, has developed 15 strategies for successful dropout prevention. It lists alternative schools as an effective strategy because they provide dropouts and at-risk students with a variety of options leading to graduation. These options are usually in programs that pay attention to the student’s social, as well as, academic needs, in securing a high school diploma.

Statement of the Problem

In the state of New Jersey, the Department of Education issued a groundbreaking report in 1984 entitled Alternative Education Programs for Disruptive Students. The
policy-makers attempted to address the concerns among educators, parents and the public regarding the high level of violence, vandalism, and overall disruptions within New Jersey's public schools. In addressing these issues, the report-writers acknowledged the particular problem in light of skyrocketing dropout rates that already exceeded 50 percent in some of the urban cities (New Jersey Department of Education, 1984).

The report-writers stressed the need to remove the disruptive student from the regular school environment without increasing the dropout rate, by encouraging school districts to create alternative educational programs as a means of addressing the academic needs of this population. The report pointed out that the use of expulsion and suspension were only short-term solutions that did not address the underlying societal problems of this population and, in fact, may place in jeopardy, the state's constitutional responsibility to educate all children.

In encouraging the development of alternative schools, the State of New Jersey sought to create programs that would allow disruptive, disaffected, or at-risk students who were not classified, and who were not succeeding in traditional school programs, to attend more non-traditional learning environments. These new non-traditional programs
were charged with creating a means for addressing the underlying causes of student alienation, disruption and failure, in order to improve the student's self-esteem by providing a more positive school experience.

This charge led to the development of many varied programs ranging in style from boot-camp settings to programs located on college campuses. With the passage of the Zero Tolerance and Gun Free Schools legislation, alternative schools became required placements for students who violated these national and state laws.

In order to address this mandate, alternative schools developed in record numbers throughout the state, as well as the nation. In a recent study for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Kleiner, Porch & Parris (Sept. 2002), reported that the number of alternative school programs has grown to the point that it estimates 1.3 to 2 percent of the total high school population are enrolled in alternative schools.

Although advocates on both the national and state level have reported many successes for at-risk students enrolled in alternative schools, "there is still very little consistent, wide-ranging evidence of their effectiveness or even an understanding of their characteristics" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p.2). Lange and
Sletten further stated that this is due, in part because there is yet to exist any clearly established, widely accepted definitional framework of alternative programs. Additionally, they stated, studies on the characteristics of alternative programs and evaluation data on the link between these characteristics and outcomes are in short supply (Lange & Sletten).

Given the extent of the at-risk problem in New Jersey, the variety of alternative schools, their availability, and their effectiveness, it has become increasingly more difficult for educators, parents and the general public to determine what program characteristics exist at the local level in the State of New Jersey for the at-risk student population. In light of these issues, this researcher will attempt to describe the characteristics of secondary alternative schools within the State of New Jersey.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of alternative secondary schools within the State of New Jersey, the types of programs, the students they serve, the curriculum, the staff, and any evaluative data these programs may utilize to measure their effectiveness. This study utilized survey research as a vehicle for examining these characteristics to provide a
better understanding of the alternative education programs that exist within the State.

Definition of Terms

Alternative education program/Alternative schools: Terms that are used interchangeably. A more general definition of this term is offered in Education Week’s Online glossary (2001) of terms as a term that:

broadly refers to public schools which are set up by states or school districts to serve populations of students who are not succeeding in the traditional public school environment. Alternative schools offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities or behavioral problems an opportunity to achieve in a different setting. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios and modified curricula. (p. 1)

The New Jersey Department of Education (2003) defines an alternative education program as:

a non-traditional learning environment that addresses the individual learning styles and needs of disruptive or disaffected students at risk of school failure or mandated for removal from general education, that is
based upon an Individualized Program Plan and New Jersey Core Content Standards and has been approved by the Commissioner of Education. (Title 6A:16-1.3 Definitions, Supp. 5-5-03)

*At-risk Student:* as defined by *Education Week's Online Glossary* (2001) this term describes a student with socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty or teen pregnancy, which may place him or her at a disadvantage in achieving academic, social, or career goals. Such students are deemed "at risk" of failing, dropping out, or "falling through the cracks" at school. (p. 1)

This term also refers to a student who is at a risk of educational failure, as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with early withdrawal from school before completion or graduation.

*Dropout:* The Federal Government, for the purposes of research describes the dropout in two ways, the event and status dropout. The event descriptor defines the event of an individual leaving school before graduating. The status dropout defines an individual who is not enrolled in school and is not a graduate. For the purposes of this study the term dropout includes both types.
Dropout Rate: Describes the population who is not enrolled in a school and who has not graduated or completed a high school program or secured an equivalency certificate.

High School Completion Rate: Defines the percentage of students who graduate within four years of entering high school.

Zero Tolerance: Federal and state policies that mandate specific consequences or prescribed punishments for delinquent acts and do not allow anyone to avoid the consequences.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to describe the Characteristics of Secondary Alternative School Programs in the State of New Jersey. This study is significant because it provides students, parents, educators, community leaders and the State Department of Education with data that can inform them regarding various program philosophies, practices, structures, goals and outcomes.

This information may help these various groups in the following ways:

1. For students and parents it may assist them in making informed and meaningful decisions regarding future educational choices.
2. Educators not aware of alternative school programs may be better informed of the availability of program options for the students they serve.

3. Current alternative school educators may utilize this study to implement new or upgrade alternative school programs based on this relevant research.

4. On a statewide basis, this study is significant in that it provides an overview of program characteristics that can then be compared to other states when making State Department of Education policy decisions and recommendations.

5. It will also assist policy and decision makers on both the state and local level with fiscal decisions in the allocation of funding for alternative education.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the alternative education programs that were listed with the New Jersey State Department of Education during the summer of 2000 and surveyed for the 1999-2000 school year. Only secondary alternative programs dealing with at-risk students enrolled in public schools, including charter, vocational and regional school districts, were surveyed. Programs in the private sector and residential treatment programs, as well as those programs that exclusively serve special education
students, were not studied. of the one hundred-eight programs that were listed in the directory only ninety-one were listed as secondary programs. Ten of these programs were reported as no longer in existence, leaving a total sample population of eighty-one secondary alternative schools.

Nea and Parker (1997) indicated that there are disadvantages in utilizing mailed surveys, mainly due to the low return percentage. They suggest utilizing certain research-tested guidelines that could yield a higher return rate for specialized populations. They state that a response rate of 50 to 60 percent can be considered satisfactory for purposes of analysis and reporting of findings. This study received a total of 57 returned surveys out of 81 that were mailed out, for a return rate of 70 percent.

Another possible limitation of the study is that the researcher is not aware of any possible responses for those programs that choose not to respond, or if there would have been any effect on the findings based on them.

This study is limited only to alternative secondary schools. The study did not survey alternative schools that deal specifically with elementary and middle school students.
Organization of the Study

This study on the Characteristics of Alternative School Programs in the State of New Jersey is divided into five chapters. Chapter I provides for an introduction of the study and includes a background of the problem, it defines the problem, it states the purpose and significance of the study. Chapter I also defines the terms and inherent limitations of the study.

Chapter II offers a comprehensive review of the literature on the characteristics of alternative schools. It reviews the types of programs, including a brief history of the alternative school movement, the students that attend alternative schools, the staff and curriculum, and evaluation data on program effectiveness. This review of the literature provides a theoretical basis, grounded theories, and relevant research to determine the characteristics of alternative schools. This chapter also includes a definitive overview of the relevant information regarding the at-risk and dropout information within the state of New Jersey.

Chapter III describes the methods and procedures utilized in the collection, analysis, and presentation of the data. This chapter includes a comprehensive description
of the study design, data sources, survey instrument, and the procedures and statistical techniques.

Chapter IV presents the data collected and the analysis of these findings utilizing statistical and qualitative data techniques. This chapter will provide an understanding of how the sources of data translate into an interpretation of data.

Chapter V provides a discussion and summary of the data presented in the previous chapter. This discussion includes implications for alternative programs and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Related Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is to offer a comprehensive review of the literature on the characteristics of alternative schools. It reviews the characteristics regarding types of programs, including a brief history of the alternative school movement, the types of students, staffing and curriculum, program evaluation and the characteristics relevant to the at-risk student and dropout information in the State of New Jersey.

Characteristics of the Alternative School Model

On May 17, 2004, the Nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling that changed the educational system in this country. In Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, the Court unanimously outlawed school segregation on the basis of race stating that 'separate was not equal'. Given the enormity of this case, school districts across the country struggled to provide an educational system that was fair and equitable for all students of all races. Additionally, as the decision was
implemented, the educational system tried to right past wrongs by offering urban school districts additional resources to assist minority and poor children to succeed in school (LaMorte, 1996). This Supreme Court decision planted the seeds for the alternative school movement that has accelerated to the significant role that it plays as an option in today's educational experience. Thus, to understand this, the present system of alternative education, a brief history of the development of the movement is necessary.

The alternative schools that we know today have their roots in the civil rights movement of the early 1960s. By this time, according to Young (1990), the progressive movement of the 1940s was replaced by the 'cold war era' and the launching of Sputnik in 1957. Excellence and the drive for technological superiority had replaced any movement made by the progressives. During this period the public school system was criticized for being insensitive to minorities and designed for the success of only a chosen few. Raywid (1981) put it simply by stating that schools were "cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions largely indifferent to humanity and the 'personhood' of those within them" (p.551).
Sagor (1999) portrayed a series of these historical events that lead school boards and public school administrators to express genuine sympathy for the students who could not or would not succeed in the mainstream of public education. According to Young (1990) and Sagor (1999), alternative programs accelerated as a result of this movement’s request for educational equity by providing more equal and meaningful educational experiences for disadvantaged and minority youth.

By the end of the 1960s, ‘equity’ had replaced ‘excellence’ (Young, 1990; Mintz, 1994) and alternative schools and programs began to flourish, following two distinct paths: those within the public school system and those private and outside the jurisdiction of the public school system (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Alternative programs that grew outside the public school system developed as two types of programs, Freedom Schools and Free Schools. Freedom schools were developed and administered by the community and housed in places such as the local church basement or the community center. The goal of these programs was to provide high quality educational experiences for minority youth. They were influenced and administered according to the needs of the community. These types of programs were developed as a
direct response to the uncaring, unresponsive and often oppressive public school system (Lange & Sletten 2002).

The second type of non-public alternative program to develop was referred to as the Free School Movement. Young (1990) stated that the goal of this type of program was to structure a school that allowed the student to freely explore his or her natural intellect and curiosity:

A.S. Neill, the founder of Summerhill, a private alternative school and one of the most widely recognized of the free schools, was quoted as saying, "My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic, if left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing." (as cited in Young, 1990 p.10)

The Free School Movement focused on discovery learning to seek self-determined fulfillment, without the controls, consequences and evaluation of the public system. Korn (1991) described this early period as truly innovative, basing many of the theories on the work of John Dewey, Piaget, and others who viewed children "not as empty vessels, but as ceaselessly active, seeking organisms" (p.22).
Simultaneously, the public school system developed many alternatives during this time period for very much the same reasons. Most notably, this era took the form of 'Open Schools' that were designed to turn around the conventional schools of the time by including the 'individual' student, the parent and the community in the educational process. This movement stressed a 'child centered' approach that allowed for autonomy in learning without critical evaluation (Lange & Slatten 2002).

The following synopsis provides for an overview of the types of alternatives that grew from the Open Schools movement:

1. Schools without Walls- stresses community based educational experiences and allows for members of the community to enter the schools to teach and mentor students.

2. Schools-within-a-School- this is a process of making large ineffective schools into smaller sub-schools that can be based on a particular theme, student interest, or learning community.

3. Multicultural Schools - these types of schools attempt to integrate culture and ethnicity throughout the curriculum.
4. Continuation Schools - an individualized school program that was geared to those students in need of remediation and at-risk of failing or dropping out of the regular school program.

5. Learning Centers - offers the student special resources and services such as vocational and technical training in addition to academics.

6. Fundamental Schools - in response to the perceived 'lack of rigor' of the Free Schools, these programs emphasized a back-to-basics approach.

7. Magnet Schools - these schools developed in response to the need for racial integration and offered a thematic curriculum to attract students for various ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Young 1990).

Given this new zest for innovation, coupled with a call for equal educational opportunities for all students, the alternative education movement accelerated to the point that according to Raywid (1981), public alternative schools 'exploded' from 100 to more than 10,000. Miller (2000) attributed this growth to the rejection of the conventional views of education to 'alternative visions' of education that are "grounded in a genuine desire to support children's natural ways of learning and growth" (p.339).
Many pioneers of this early movement observe that this quest for innovation and student centered and directed learning experiences that existed during the 1960s and early 1970s began to narrow and loose momentum. Due to the vast number of students still functioning below grade level, the emphasis became more conservative and stressed the remedial over the creative, a trend they note which, in some instances, still exists until today (Young, 1990; Mintz, 1994, Lange & Sletten, 2002).

The NDPC/N (2003) observed that these programs became "dropout prevention programs, serving students who had already dropped out of school" and "Educational leaders soon found out that the strategy had little effect on the dropout rate" and that they "tended to be discontinued as district budgets began to shrink in the 1970s" (p.2).

However the NDPC/C (2003) also pointed out that:

Within the last decade there has been a resurgence of alternative schools addressing the needs of students in at-risk situations. However, these new schools have truly emphasized the "dropout prevention" aspect. They have been designed to provide an alternative to dropping out of school, with special attention to the student's individual social needs and the
academic requirements for a high school diploma.
(p.2)
Raywid (1999b) stated that alternative schools: from their inception, stood for very different things. They have been launched to fulfill disparate purposes and designed to function quite differently from one another. They’ve functioned almost as an empty glass to be filled with any sort of liquid— or even used for something other than a glass. (p.47)

It is this ‘durability’ and ‘flexibility’ she contends, that places alternative education on the marginal lines or ‘fringe’ of being accepted as a member by the educational establishment. Thus, even though alternative education has been around for decades, it has never achieved institutional legitimacy (Raywid).

Recently, given the vast array of programs that have developed throughout the past two decades, it has become increasingly more difficult to define and collect data on present day alternative schools. This proliferation, Raywid (1994), Barr and Parrett (2001) and Lang and Sletton (2002), contend, is because the alternative movement has regained the momentum and are once again on the ‘cutting-
edge" of educational reform. In addressing this point, Raywid (1994) stated:

Amid all the current talk of school restructuring, alternatives are the clearest example we have of what a restructured school might look like. They represent our most definitive departure from the programmatic, organizational and behavioral regularities that inhibit school reform. Moreover, many of the reforms currently pursued in traditional schools—downsizing the high school, pursuing a focus or theme, students and teacher choice, making the school a community, empowering staff, active learner engagement, authentic assessment—are practices that alternative schools pioneered. (p.26)

On both the national and state level, there remains a great concern regarding school violence, vandalism, disruption, substance abuse, school failure and the dropout rate. Thus, the need to create alternatives for this group that can provide more positive learning experiences that will encourage the at-risk student to stay in school continues.

Alternative schooling, Dynarski (as cited in
NDPC/N, 2003) stated:

is not an option in America- it is an absolute requirement in every community. Alternative schooling opportunities will be needed to accommodate the educational needs of youth because the traditional school system, and in particular, the traditional high school, can no longer serve the needs of the students and their family lifestyles in the 1990s. It has been suggested that society might want to consider allowing students to drop out and then provide alternative schools for them to complete their high school education. (p.1)

In response to this need for more educational alternatives, many authorities, as well as the available research, (Naylor, 1987, 1989; Schoenlein, 1994; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Lange & Sletton, 2002; NDPC/N, 2003) have indicated that alternative schools and programs are the most promising strategy at the secondary level in preventing at-risk students from dropping out. In fact, alternative programs and schools have become widely accepted and the most available option for at-risk youth. They are located in a variety of places, for example, a school within-a-school, an after school program, in
shopping malls, at college campuses or vocational schools, schools without walls, etc. These programs generally employ instructional models and pedagogy that are distinctly different from the conventional school program. Small group instruction, independent study, proficiency-based curriculum, cooperative learning, relevant curricula, service learning and constructivist techniques are some of the more common approaches employed in these programs.

More recently Raywid (1999b) offered an up-to-date description of the types of alternative schools by describing the program according to what it is trying to change. The first type is to 'change the student' and the student's performance. These schools are seen as 'last chance' programs that are usually offered to the student as an alternative in lieu of expulsion. Although some are punitive, similar to many in-school suspension programs, others can be of a therapeutic nature, reflective of the many dropout prevention programs that currently exist. The common elements in these types of programs are that they are usually temporary placement programs that rely on intensive remediation and emotional support or both.

The second type of programs is one that focuses on 'changing the school' and the experiences the school provides. They are typical of the innovation schools of the
1960s and stress innovative ways of instruction and learning in a positive school environment. They typically provide non-traditional approaches to curriculum, assessment, discipline, and organization that empower students and staff to take part in all aspects of teaching and learning. These programs, Raywid (1999b) stated, showed the most positive results in school graduation and college placement rates.

The third and last type of program described is the alternatives that attempt to change entire systems. This is typically seen in such places as Minneapolis, where alternative schools are offered to all students as a choice educational option, or in Chicago where the entire district's secondary schools are taking part in a small school and schools-within-schools project. These systems are restructuring and testing the alternative movement ideals on a wide scale basis (Raywid, 1999b).

Ironically, over the years, there exists a great deal of controversy among educators regarding the definition of alternative. Kellymayer (1995) referred to programs that are alternative in 'name only' that "represent ineffective and often punitive approaches that isolate and segregate students who can be difficult from the mainstream" (p.2). This bad practice he believes, has caused confusion in the
perception of many who "view alternative schools as havens for misfits and dumping grounds where difficult adolescents are warehoused" (p.2).

Lange and Sletton (1995) stated that as early as 1978, the controversy over the definition existed. Many feel that some alternative programs have become smaller versions of the traditional high school that offer no alternatives at all. As early as 1981, Farrell stated, "there have been hundreds of titles, names, and types of alternative schools composing a conglomeration which defies any type of categorical classification. Alternative has often become synonymous with 'new' in many educators vocabularies without any regard for program substance" (p.3).

Osher, Dwyer and Jackson (2004) suggested that alternative schools run the risk of causing more harm than good. They assert that utilizing interventions that bring antisocial youth together, without careful monitoring, may reinforce negative behaviors among the students.

Raywid (1983) also addressed this early concern by presenting a formal and a substantive definition of what is 'alternative' to assist in providing a working framework. The formal stresses the separateness of the program, the option for choice, and ability to be distinct in accommodating learner needs. The substantive definition not
only includes the facets of the formal, but also adds the elements that make alternative schools caring, humane and supportive learning environments. She stated: "The definitions facilitate asking more 'meaning-fully' about the usefulness and value of alternative schools as a model or design for education" (p.191).

A common theme that is prevalent throughout the literature on alternative schools is the incorporation of the higher order needs such as the psychosocial, self-actualization, and emotional aspects of the at-risk student. Most of the programs reviewed utilize a 'student-centered approach' as an integral aspect of the learning environment. Successful programs are ones that build individual strengths and self-confidence, stress individual interests and learning styles, account for student needs and desires, encourage coping and conflict resolution skills, as well as, academic goals and achievements. Gaston (1987) states that: "the structure of a school most suitable for retaining potential dropouts is one that shows a great deal of care and concern for the student" (p.3).

Raywid (1999b) offered 10 considerations that confront those who are adopting, designing and operating alternative schools or programs. She states: these "formative policy decisions shape such programs and are repeatedly reinforced
or undermined through daily implementation decisions" (p.50). They are summarized as follows:

1. For whom is the alternative school intended? The so-called 'losers' and disruptive students or for those desiring an alternative to what is locally available.

2. Is the alternative school's purpose to educate those enrolled (innovative schools) or to provide relief to the school from which they came ('soft jails').

3. Should the alternative school seek a particular kind of student? If so, does this perpetuate tracking and limit enrollment?

4. How many alternatives are envisioned? Should there be more than one providing more options for all?

5. Do students have to qualify for enrollment i.e. poor grades or truancy, or are they open to all?

6. Are teachers and students assigned or do they select to be part of the alternative program?

7. Are the alternative schools subject to the same academic requirements as the regular school programs?

8. Are alternative school students subject to the same evaluation and academic indicators and standards as in regular schools? Or are alternative indicators allowed to be developed and utilized?

9. Where is the alternative school located? A separate
building, annex, wing, school-within-a-school etc. are options to be considered.

10. Does the school have autonomy in its design and purpose? Is it free to fashion and maintain its own climate and identity?

Raywid (1999b) stated that alternative programs are very adaptable and capable of being what you make them. Responses to these questions and considerations provide significant direction when planning and operating an alternative program.

Tindall (1988) identified five key components of successful programs that lead to keeping at-risk students in school:

1. Administrative support;
2. Community support;
3. Family support;
4. Funding support; and
5. The development of a program geared toward the special needs of at-risk students.

The National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University (2004) delineated the following expected outcomes of alternative programs.

Students in alternative programs tend to:

1. Become more committed to school and learning;
2. Reduce their level of disruptive behavior;
3. Have increased levels of self-confidence and esteem;
4. Improve attendance and reduce the incidence of dropping out;
5. Increase achievement and academic credits they earn.

Raywid (1994) discussed a variety of definitions and noted that:

two enduring consistencies have characterized alternative schools from the start: they have been designed to respond to a group that appears not to have been serviced by the regular school program and consequently they have represented varying degrees of departure from the standard school organization, programs and environments.

(p. 27)

In response to the varying definitions of alternative programs Raywid (1994) provided this summary of the different types of programs that are available:

1. Type I (Popular Innovations) alternatives are schools of choice and are usually popular. They sometimes resemble magnet schools and in some locales constitute some or all of the choice systems. They are likely to reflect programmatic themes or emphasis pertaining to content or instructional strategy, or both.
2. Type II (Last-Chance Programs) alternatives are programs to which students are sentenced—usually as one 'last chance' prior to expulsion. Typically, Type II programs focus on behavior modification, and little attention is paid to modifying curriculum or pedagogy. Often they have been referred to as 'soft jails'.

3. Type III (Remedial Focus) alternatives are for students who are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation—academic, social/emotional, or both. The assumption is that after successful treatment, students can return to mainstream programs.

Raywid's (1994) types of alternatives provide a framework for classifying the multitude of programs that exist as alternatives, although many programs may be a combination or mix of more than one type.

In addition to Raywid’s classification of the types of programs, the following compilation includes several generally accepted characteristics that define alternative education programs (Parrett, 1981; Tindall, 1988; Ascher 1990; Young, 1990; Schoenlein, 1994; Kellymayer, 1995, 1998; Raywid, 1996, 1999b, 2002; Harr & Parrett, 1997, 2001, 2003; Black, 1997; Fizzell & Raywid, 1997; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Lange, 1998; Lange & Lehr, 1999; May & Copeland, 1998; Lehr & Lange, 2000; Schargel & Smink, 2001;
Haddeman, 2002; Lange & Sletton, 2002; Anastos, 2003;
Farris-Berg, 2003; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Flumerfelt & Follo,
2004; Osher, Dwyer & Jackson, 2004):

1. To every degree possible the program should be the choice
of the student to participate. Although many programs do,
and should, have entrance and acceptance requirements,
participation should be strictly voluntary on the part of
the student, hopefully with input and support from
family. The same observation applies to the staff and
teachers. They should be highly motivated and trained in
the various techniques for dealing with this population.
All too often a contractual obligation is fulfilled on a
district’s part, and an ill-suited, poorly trained,
disgruntled staff person gets assigned to the alternative
program. In either scenario, chances for success are
severely diminished if enrollment is not by choice. It
should also be noted here that many programs do not
encourage or accept applications from special needs or
classified students, claiming that there already exists
an extensive network of programs and services for this
population.

2. The program should be distinct in the selection of its
site and mission. Whether it is a school within-a-school
or in a shopping mall, the program should have a distinct
and appropriate site conducive for teaching and learning. Alternative schools that have a clear purpose and mission stand a better chance of succeeding. Schools with no purpose or mission run the risk of becoming a mere ‘dumping ground’ for troubled children.

3. The program size should be small enough to provide for individual instruction and foster community spirit and social interaction. "Research has consistently found that students at small schools are less alienated than students in large schools- and this positive effect is especially strong for students labeled at-risk" (Raywid & Oshiyoma, 2000, p.2). Inclusion of small schools research is viewed as an essential practice in the formulation of alternative schools and programs. In discussing the small schools research to combat the dropout problem with at-risk students within the Chicago Public Schools, Nowaczewski (2003) reported: "Small schools research unequivocally demonstrates that small schools are a powerful force in reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates" (p.38). Smaller schools and alternative programs Raywid (2002) suggested, are synonymous, and are much more successful at retaining students until graduation.

4. The curriculum, method of instruction, and management
should be different than the traditional or home school. This provides the school with a focus and a unique identity. The curriculum should be affective, providing for personal, emotional and academic development. It should also be individualized, emphasizing the at-risk student’s needs on both the cognitive and affective levels. Additionally, the curriculum should incorporate the use of technology whenever possible. At-risk students in alternative programs are sometimes separated from the technology services of the traditional or home school because of the cost involved. Barr and Parrett (2001) stated that because at-risk students have little or no access to technology, there exists a digital divide that separates these students from their more advantaged peers. Schools must, they suggest, provide the essential technology resources to equally equip this under-served population.

5. The program should have a clear and comprehensive set of operational guidelines and learning objectives. Every student and staff member should know what is expected of him or her. They should understand what the learning objective is and how they will accomplish it.

6. The program should practice shared decision making, affording everyone, whenever the opportunity exists, to
take part in the planning and decision making process. Some programs even allow students to serve on discipline committees. Trickett (1991) discussed the success of an alternative school by empowering all the stakeholders in all aspects or the program. In discussing this idea, he states that: "Students would be encouraged to participate in many aspects of their education, teachers would be responsible for running the school, and parents would be invited to help govern" (p.1).

7. The program should also utilize the community as a whole in its attempt to educate the at-risk student. Learning opportunities should not be limited to the school building. School-to-work experiences, community service projects, college placements, community mentoring, and vocational training are examples of the many effective programs that are incorporated into successful alternative schools. Reglin (1998) provided substantial research findings that indicate mentoring programs are significantly successful in transforming attitudes and performance of at-risk students in alternative programs.

8. Given the extensive need for additional services in dealing with this population, a fully integrated coordination of community service agencies is imperative for the operation of an alternative school. Many programs
have requested case workers and staff members from various social service agencies to provide individual, group and family counseling, community health and welfare assistance, probation and legal assistance at the alternative school site.

In her review of the literature, Kadel (1994) listed the following Components of Effective Alternative Education Programs:

1. Good relationships with teachers and peers;
2. A low teacher-student ratio;
3. A stable and dedicated staff;
4. Student and parent choice to enroll in the program;
5. Basic skills instruction;
6. Multiple methods of instruction appropriate to student learning styles;
7. Vocational training and/or employment assistance;
8. Fair, consistent discipline;
9. Help for students obtaining health and social services;
10. Attention to personal development and counseling needs of students; and
11. Parental involvement. (p.32)

The goal of some programs is to utilize the above lists to modify student behaviors in order to return to the
regular school setting. Others utilize them to provide for a permanent placement in the alternative school. Most observers agree with the latter in that at-risk students tend to achieve more in a setting that is different from their original school. Whether it is proficiency-based or more traditional, a school within-a-school or a school in a shopping mall, the alternative school model continues to flourish as a major trend in education, quickly becoming the most prevalent placement for at-risk students (Kadel, 1994).

Barr and Parrett (1997), recognized experts within this field, in their most recent work purport that:

Alternative educational programs recognize and respect the value of diversity. Alternative schools reflect the mounting evidence that supports multiple teaching and learning styles and diverse educational philosophies. They provide an effective, cost-conscious approach to diversifying public schools and providing focused educational programs to meet the widely differing needs of students, their parents, and their communities. This approach also provides a way to recognize, organize, and legitimize the diverse philosophical pathways to education. (p.70)
In discussing how alternative schools meet the specific contextual needs of at-risk students, Barr and Parrett (1997) stated:

Alternative schools represent the most effective approach to addressing the needs of these [at-risk] children. If students are behind in reading, alternative schools mobilize to ensure that reading is the focus of their program. If students are pregnant or are teen parents, alternative schools provide health care, prenatal services, childcare and parenting classes. If students are far behind in basic skills, alternative schools provide an intensive approach so that students can accelerate and catch up. Alternative schools offer relevant educational programs and attract students in particular, focused careers. Conventional schools rarely can meet the needs of high-risk children and youth. Meeting these challenges of these youth is exactly what alternative schools have been designed to do. (p.7)

Characteristics of the At-Risk Alternative Education Student

Earlier definitions of at-risk students usually took
the form of a single causal factor that might lead to a student leaving school. More recently it is generally agreed upon that there exist a series of factors that contribute to defining at-risk. Donnelly (1987) defines at-risk students as those who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts. They are usually low academic achievers who exhibit low self-esteem. Disproportionate numbers of them are males and minorities. Generally they are from low socioeconomic status families. Students who are both low income and minority status are at higher risk; their parents may have low educational backgrounds and may not have high educational expectations for their children. (p.1) Donnelly (1987) further stated a generally observed factor in that:

at risk students tend not to participate in school activities and have minimal identification with the school. They exhibit impulsive behavior and their peer relationships are problematic. Family problems, drug addictions, pregnancies, and other problems prevent them from participating successfully in school. As they experience failure and fall behind their peers, school becomes a negative environment that
reinforces their low self-esteem. (p. 1)

In general, at-risk students have an excessive rate of absences, are behind at least one grade level in basic skills, and will most likely be retained or have already been retained a grade (Black, 2002; Lange & Sletton, 2002). Pallas (1999) provided five indicators of risk:

1. Poverty;
2. Race and ethnicity;
3. Family composition;
4. Mother's education, and
5. Language background;

that "are associated with a youth's exposure to inadequate or inappropriate educational resources and experiences" (p.1). He further stated, "while these factors do not automatically condemn a youth to school failure, the presence of one or more increases the possibility" (p. 2).

Students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds are already behind their peers upon their entry to school. When these students continue their education in ineffective schools they are further insulated from success and are more prone to leaving school in later years (Black, 2002). The NCES reported that students from low-income families are 2.4 times the more likely to drop out of school than are children from middle class families, and are 10.5 times
more likely than children from high-income families (Mc
Miller & Kaufman, 1993).

Barnes and Stewart (1991) found characteristics of at-
risk students included:
1. Being enrolled in large schools;
2. Placed in a low or nonacademic tract;
3. Associated with dropouts;
4. Viewed teachers and administrators as unsupportive;
5. Received low grades;
6. Were habitually absent; had negative attitudes toward
   school; and
7. Had high incidences of getting in trouble both in and out
   of school.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1999)
provides a comprehensive definition of students at-risk,
listing fourteen factors that place students in jeopardy of
dropping out:
1. Being one or more years behind grade level in reading or
   math;
2. Being three or more Carnegie credits behind their
   age/grade level in credits earned toward the graduation
   requirement;
3. Being chronically truant;
4. Being a school aged parent;
5. Having a history of personal and/or family drug and alcohol abuse;
6. Having parents who have low expectations for their child's success or who place little value on education;
7. Being a victim of physical, sexual or emotional abuse;
8. Experiencing a family trauma (such as a death or divorce);
9. Being economically, culturally, or educationally disadvantaged;
10. Being in a family with a history of dropping out;
11. Having lower intelligence test scores;
12. Having low self-concept and social maturity;
13. Having feelings of alienation; and
14. Having certain types of handicaps and limiting conditions.

(Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1999)

Any one or combination of the above list seriously impacts upon the student's ability to function and succeed in any school setting. Thus, a final operational definition states that at-risk students have a higher probability of failing academically and are more likely to drop out of school.

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) (2000) reported that, although declining slightly, 11,433 students dropped out of school during the 1999-2000 school year and 12,639 dropped out during the 2000-2001 school year (NJ
Ironically, the NJDOE also reported as part of the Quality Education Report that graduation rates, the number of students completing high school, has been declining during the past two years. The report states in Indicator 13: Percentage of New Jersey’s Students who graduate within four years of entering high school that:

The Department of Education is evaluating the potential factors contributing to the recent decline in graduation rates. In particular, the Department is studying the correlation between the decline in graduation rates and the parallel reduction in the dropout rate, especially in the State’s special needs districts. Schools are reporting that more students are staying in school through their senior year, but are failing to earn the credits necessary to graduate at the end of four years. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2000)

Fuller and Sabatino (1996) conducted a study of alternative high school students and found that over 62% had histories of poor academic achievement, in addition to other predominate characteristics such as poor attendance, anti-social behaviors, negative school attitudes, and truancy. Additionally, they found that 42% of the students
did not participate in any extracurricular school activities. Battin-Pearson and Newcomb (2000) suggested that, although it is clear from previous research that poor academic achievement is important in the etiology of dropping out, other psychological variables such as family socialization, deviant affiliation, personal deviance and structural strains may also be associated with dropping out of school.

In a review of the literature, Black (1997, 2002) found that students enrolled in alternative schools had common characteristics in that they: previously attended large schools; were placed in low or nonacademic tracks; they associated with dropouts or other at-risk students; viewed teachers and principals as unsupportive; and did not participate in school related or extra curricular activities. These students tended to maintain high incidences of absenteeism; poor academic performance; school suspensions; negative attitudes toward school; and frequently got into trouble both in and out of school. In response to why alternative schools are successful with these types of students she pointed out that the research indicates "kids bounce back quickly when teachers and staff respect them as individuals who have unique talents and abilities" and "kids understand that rigorous standards and
high expectations are a sign that people have faith in them" (Black, 1997, p.40).

Similarly, Lehr and Lange (2000), in comparing at-risk and not at-risk students found that at-risk students attending alternative schools reported that their school "encouraged a broad goal for students to succeed in life" and "students reported an important goal of the school was to provide a second chance" (p.14). Overall, the at-risk students attending alternative schools reported a variety of goals, fewer barriers to achieving their goals and more positive feelings toward school. Their responses were more similar to non at-risk students enrolled in regular school programs and overall more positive than at-risk students not enrolled in an alternative program.

May and Copeland (1998) found that students enrolled in alternative schools tend not to seek out the assistance of others in coping with stressors. This finding, they revealed, may lead to participation in higher incidences of inappropriate behaviors. However, over time they found that teacher commitment and participation in smaller classes lead to more reliance on others and encouraged school attendance.

Kaplan, Kaplan and Peck (1997) conducted a study to determine if early negative academic experiences have a
significant relationship to dropping out of school. Their results found that students who drop out of high school are more likely to be alienated from school life and tend to associate with students with the same negative school feelings. These negative feelings they claim, are a direct effect from earlier negative experiences.

In 2001 the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) conducted the first national level study of public alternative schools by utilizing the newly developed Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). The results are an accumulation of data from a national sample of 1,534 public school districts. The results offer the following characteristics of students enrolled in Alternative Education Schools and Programs:

1) On October 1, 2000, 612,900 students or 1.3 percent of all public school students were enrolled in alternative schools programs for at-risk students.

2) Overall, 12 percent of all students enrolled in alternative schools and programs were students in need of special educational services with Individual Educational Programs (IEPs).

3) About 50 percent of all districts with alternative schools and programs reported that each of the following 10 reasons was sufficient for transferring an at-risk
student to an alternative school or program:
   a) Possession, use, distribution or use of alcohol or drugs (52%);
   b) Physical attacks or fights (52%);
   c) Chronic truancy (51%);
   d) Continual academic failure (50%);
   e) Possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50%);
   f) Disruptive verbal behavior (45%);
   g) Possession or use of a firearm (44%);
   h) Arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system (36%);
   i) Teen pregnancy/parenthood (28%); and
   j) Mental health needs (22%).

4) 74 percent of districts with alternative schools or programs for at-risk students reported a policy that allows all students to return to the regular school program. 26 percent allow some, but not all, of their students to return, and 1 percent do not allow any to return (Kleiner, Porch, & Parris, September 2002).

Grunbaum et al. (2000) conducted a study for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called the Alternative High School Behavior Survey (AHS-YRBS) conducted as part of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance
System (YRBSS). They concluded that students in alternative high schools participated at a much higher level of risk behaviors than students in regular high schools. Grunbaum et al.; (2000) also report the following risk behaviors for 1,400 alternative education programs that participated in the study:

1. Over half had recently driven with a driver who had been drinking alcohol;
2. Approximately 25 percent had reported driving a car after drinking alcohol;
3. Approximately one-third reported recently carrying a weapon;
4. Approximately half reported recently engaging in heavy drinking;
5. More than half reported using marijuana and approximately one in seven had used cocaine;
6. Almost two-thirds reported cigarette use with slightly less than half reporting frequent use;
7. Slightly more than half who had reported they engaged in intercourse recently used a condom;
8. 25 percent reported eating the recommended servings of fruit and vegetables during the previous day, while nearly half had exceeded the recommended servings of foods high in fat; and
9. Less than half reported participating in vigorous physical activity. (Grunbaum, et al., 2000)

Given these higher incidences high risk behaviors exhibited by alternative school students, programs need to incorporate wellness activities that stress active student assistance and peer counseling; health programs that deal with practical issues such as the effects of tobacco, alcohol and drugs; relevant substance abuse programs; sex education and sexually transmitted diseases; and legal and life skills education (Quinn, Osher, Hoffman and Hanley, 1998).

As early as 1984, Gold and Mann were studying the effects alternative education programs on 'high-risk' 'at-risk' youth. They report that students enrolled in alternative schools do report less delinquent behaviors, and are more positive in their beliefs that they can succeed in school, as opposed to at-risk students not enrolled in alternative schooling. They further report that these positive school beliefs and behaviors continue for most students, even if they return to traditional school programs (Gold and Mann, 1984).
Characteristics of Alternative School Staffing and Curriculum

In addressing the need for alternatives Smith (1974) stated that the "American secondary school has for a long time attempted to do the impossible by attempting to teach every child in the same manner at the same time" (p. 74). Although traditional high schools are appropriate and successful for the majority of students, there exists a growing number of at-risk students who, for many reasons, have problems coping with the structure and do not respond to this contemporary form of education.

School environments that are ineffective have also been shown to contribute to the at-risk student's lack of success in the traditional school setting. Schools that alienate students and teachers, are unresponsive to student needs, maintain low standards, provide inadequate discipline and lack meaningful parental involvement will contribute to the at-risk student's failure and low self-esteem (Moore & Esselman, 1994; Lehr & Lange, 2000; Black 2002).

In reviewing a three-year study by Moore and Esselman (1994), the results indicated that schools with a history of poor achievement tended to have teachers who report a poorer image of the school. They claim that this poor
school image in turn contributes to lower perceptions of teaching effectiveness, which leads directly to poorer performance of the students, especially those who are already at a disadvantage.

Many effective teachers lack the necessary resources and are ill trained when dealing with the at-risk population. Most of the available programs for low-achieving students in these schools take the form of remedial classes that do nothing more than transfer information in the form of facts and procedures. These classes do little for providing the necessary skills for problem solving and are rarely relevant to the students’ daily lives (Pallas, 1989; Raywid, 1996). In a Phi Delta Kappa study of Youth-at-Risk, Frymier and Gunderseder (1989) found that many teachers did not employ effective instructional methods when dealing with at-risk students.

Ashcroft (1999) discussed previous studies he and others conducted that sampled various sub-groups of teachers who teach in state-operated juvenile detention facilities and county-operated alternative and correctional facilities in the State of California. Several hundred teachers were surveyed using a ‘Survey of Pre-service’ questionnaire. Almost all of the teachers reported that they were not adequately prepared to deal with the issues
they encountered with their students in their pre-service training. Although nearly all of the teachers reported that they received pre-service training, they reported that it was inadequate given the social, legal, and psychological issues of their students.

According to Quinn and Rutherford (1998), a highly trained and caring staff may be the single most determining factor in whether an alternative education student should decide to return to the regular school setting. Similarly, in discussing the role that teachers play in the alternative education setting, Barr and Parrett (1997; 2001) found that teachers who are well-trained, caring, able to set high standards and who are responsive to the particular needs of the at-risk student produce better achievement outcomes. Conversely, they found, teachers who are involuntarily assigned to teach in alternative education programs are less likely to produce positive outcomes.

Leone and Drakeford (1999) reported that alternative schools must become ‘meaningful’ alternatives to traditional education. Programs that are successful can easily become a ‘dumping ground’ for the district’s low-performing teachers. This in turn, will result in the school becoming a ‘dumping ground’ for low performing
students. Alternative schools need to maintain and exceed the high expectations, standards, and outcomes valued in the traditional school. To achieve this Leone and Drakeford (1999) recommend the attainment and maintenance of the following "4 essential elements:

1. Clear focus on academic learning;
2. Ambitious professional development;
3. Strong level of autonomy and decision-making; and
4. Sense of community" (p.86).

Keeping focused on these essential elements they suggest, will provide a foundation in alternative schools which could serve as a model of restructuring for all schools.

Goodman (1999) and Hartzler and Jones (2002) discussed the need to develop a curriculum in an alternative setting that is truly innovative and relevant. Integrated, experiential, and life skills learning concepts should be the essential elements of curriculum planning which, are especially effective in creating curricular relevance. When projects interest the student by including real life issues and situations, and are studied across the curriculum, students become engaged and are more successful in achievement.

Kleiner, Porch and Farris (2002) reported for the NCES that 86% of school districts with alternative schools and
programs for at-risk students employed, and in many cases trained, teachers specifically to teach in alternative education. Kleiner, Porch and Farris (2002) also reported that over 91% of alternative schools maintained a curriculum that lead to securing a high school diploma. The following additional curricular, extra curricular and related services were also reported:

1. Academic counseling (87%);
2. Policies requiring smaller class sizes (65%);
3. Remedial instruction (34%);
4. Opportunities for self-paced instruction (33%);
5. Crisis or behavioral intervention (79%);
6. Career counseling (79%);
7. Psychological counseling (58%);
8. Social work services (55%);
9. Vocational or skills training (48%);
10. Opportunity to take classes elsewhere (44%);
11. Preparation for the GRED exam (41%);
12. Peer mediation (37%);
13. Extended school day/year (29%);
14. Security personnel on site (26%); and
15. Evening or weekend classes (25%). (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002)
Quinn and Rutherford (1998) reported that a variety of factors are necessary for success in an effective alternative school. These factors include a dedicated and well-trained staff, effective curriculum, as well as, an array of support services in and outside of the school that connect the student with additional social services and agencies.

In addressing the additional special needs of the at-risk student, many alternative school programs collaborate with outside district agencies to offer the student an array of services that might not otherwise be available. These partnerships work in concert with the school staff and students to provide supportive services such as drug and alcohol counseling, psychological counseling, parenting services, and job placement - with the goal of assisting the student to stay in school and ultimately graduate (Barr and Parrett, 2001).

In a most recent work, Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), (2004), recommended as a core area, that high schools in conjunction with community agencies, assist to coordinate the delivery of physical, mental and social services for youth.
It should be noted that Duke and Griesdorn (1999) suggested practical consideration be given in the planning of, and student placement in, alternative schools to ensure that they are not too small (under 50 students). Programs that are this small are not able to employ a variety of community social services, qualified teachers, and related support staff to deal with the particular needs of at-risk students. They point out that many teachers report that their alternative students have reading and learning difficulties that require the services of reading and other related specialists. They report that these positions are usually not available in smaller programs and the students are not serviced appropriately.

Kleiner, Porch & Farris, (2002) reported the following percent of districts with alternative schools for at-risk students that collaborated with various agencies in order to provide services for enrolled students:

1. Juvenile justice system (84%);
2. Community mental health agency (75%);
3. Police or sheriff’s department (70%);
4. Child Protective services (69%);
5. Health and human services agency/hospital (65%);
6. Drug and/or alcohol clinic (59%);
7. Community organization (53%);
8. Family organizations or associations (52%);
9. Crisis intervention center (46%);
10. Family planning/child care/placement agency (46%);
11. Job placement center (40%); and
12. Parks and recreation department (23%) (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002).

In the State of Wisconsin, the Department of Public Instruction, made a commitment to take seriously the goal of educating all children. As a method to achieve this goal they joined with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UWW) to develop a program that "prepares teachers to meet that needs of students who are marginalized by traditional schools" (Chandler, Freiberg, Stinson, & Nelson, 2002, p.35). The goal of this program is to train and certify teachers in "recognizing, and developing the skills, attitudes, and knowledge, necessary to work in alternative settings" (p.38). Unlike many teacher-training programs, the pedagogical methods employed in this program are taught by utilizing its own concepts and methods.

the individual courses focus on helping teachers focus on students' individual interests, skills, strengths, and curiosities, as well as on students' needs, weaknesses, fears, and challenges. More important though, the courses
are designed to identify how schools, classrooms, instruction, and teachers often impede rather than support learning. Therefore, the goal becomes not how to fix children, or even fix schools, but rather how to free both teachers and students from the ingrained perceptions that something needs fixing. Education is to be viewed as taking students from where they are to beyond where they ever thought they would be. (Chandler, Freiberg, Stinson, & Nelson, 2002, p. 38)

By offering this program the University of Wisconsin hopes to develop a resource of qualified teachers trained in the methodology of, and committed to, the alternative education movement.

Research on Evaluating the Alternative School Model

One of the often-heard criticisms of the alternative school model has been the lack of meaningful and comprehensive evaluation. As early as 1981, Parrett, in discussing the variety and infancy of alternative programs, called for a comprehensive evaluation in that every program should “submit itself to a rigorous internal and external evaluation as well as continuous self-examination of instructional and operational procedures and outcomes” (p. 4).
As all educational programs struggle to coexist in times of limited resources and financial considerations, there is the ultimate determination that only those programs that are the most effective should be allowed to continue. The newest term recently added to the educational jargon in the State of New Jersey, are programs that are "demonstrably effective." They are defined as programs that have clear and demonstrated (proven) results.

Although, it appears clear from reviewing the literature that, generally, alternative programs are demonstrably effective in improving student attitudes toward school, improving attendance, improving credit attainment (when compared to the students performance in previous traditional programs), and in increasing the likelihood for graduation, there exist questions and concerns regarding the effects of alternative due to the lack of rigorous and comprehensive program evaluation methods (Cox, Davidson, & Bynum 1995; Kellymayer, 1995; Fashola & Slavin, 1988; Mitchell & Wiwaiole, 2003).

This criticism developed, according to Young (1990), because "The popularity of alternative education in the 1970s generated considerable research on the effectiveness of various schools and programs. As there newness wore off and the popularity of alternative education subsided, so


...d the research on the subject" (p. 37). Later discussions of program effectiveness during the 1980s had to rely on this older research. Young further stated, "These early evaluations were characterized by weak research designs and inadequate data collection. As a result, conclusions about the effectiveness of these programs are, at best, tenuous" (p. 37).

The early research regarding alternative school programs reviewed and analyzed data that was collected by the individual programs themselves, which lead to questions of validity and reliability. Since 1980, more comprehensive and rigorous studies have been conducted utilizing data generated and collected by independent investigators leading to more accurate research and results (Young, 1990; Smink & Stank, 1992).

Katsiyannis and Williams (1995) conducted a survey of state initiatives on alternative education and found that "Only 12 (31.6%) states reported the existence of procedures for program evaluation and/or monitoring compliance. Strategies for assessing quality or compliance with existing regulations included annual self-reports and periodic site visits" (p. 280). Quinn and Rutherford (1998) reported that while there does not exist any globally accepted tools to measure success, there are several...
indicators that measure increases in attendance, achievement, graduation rate, parental involvement, and overall program effectiveness.

Reimer and Cash (2003) stated that a program evaluation should be an active, evolving process that includes all of the stakeholders in the alternative school. Evaluation staff should be trained in the collection, understanding and analysis of data to provide an unbiased accurate view of all program elements. Reimer and Cash stated:

there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggesting that alternative schools have positive results on children at risk, long after they have left the program. In order to properly evaluate programs in the context for which they are designed, it is imperative that school leaders and program managers collect longitudinal data to document the positive impact of their school over time. (p.35)

Most importantly Reimer and Cash claim: Evaluation is an integral part of the day-to-day operation of the school...The results should be a working document that energizes all staff members to seek better ways of developing and
implementing strategies for meeting the needs of their students. (p.35)

Kellmayer (1995) stated that due to the variety of programs, research designs, and methodologies employed in studying achievement in alternative schools, "the results are often confusing and contradictory" (p.128). He also agrees with other observers in stating that keeping the student in school and eventually graduating is as equally important as the cognitive development. Kellmayer further stated that:

evaluators of alternative programs should conduct the most broad-based evaluation possible, including an analysis of all pertinent affective and cognitive data that are available. This is not to argue that academic achievement is not of importance in determining the success of a program. Academic achievement, however, should be considered one component of a comprehensive program evaluation. (p.128)

To conduct a comprehensive evaluation of an alternative program, Kellmayer (1995) suggested utilizing Schriven's 15 points of a Key Evaluation Checklist (KEC) as summarized:

1. Description: What is to be evaluated?
2. Client: Who is commissioning the evaluation?

3. Background and Context: Includes identification of stakeholders; function and nature of the program; believed performance; etc.

4. Resources: Sometimes called the "strength assessment" by contrast with needs assessment of point 6. Not 'what is', but rather, 'what could be'.

5. Consumer: Who is using or receiving the effects of the program?

6. Values: Sometimes called the "needs assessment" of the impacted and potentially impacted populations.

7. Process: What constraints and values apply to, and what conclusions can we draw about the normal operation of the program.

8. Outcomes: What outcomes are produced by the program?

9. Generalizability: To other people, places times, and versions.

10. Costs: Including dollar amounts and other areas such as psychological, personal, time, initial, direct, indirect, delayed etc.


12. Significance: A synthesis of all of the above.

13. Recommendations: May or may not be requested.
14. Report: includes length, format, medium, and so forth.


Although it is not required that all 15 points be utilized, this list provides a good framework for evaluating an alternative school. Providing a more comprehensive evaluation of alternative programs affords a more detailed picture of school performance and effectiveness as opposed to selecting only one or two areas for data selection and analysis. According to Kellmayer, (1995) "Effective alternative schools help students meet all their needs and goals" (p.133) and should be evaluated accordingly.

In any alternative school evaluation one should be cognizant that, if you believe that alternative schools exist for different audiences and purposes, as suggested by Duke and Griesdorn (1999), then, there is little reason to judge the effectiveness of all alternative schools using exactly the same criteria.

In order to address the need for comprehensive program evaluation the NDKC/N developed 'The Evaluation Handbook' which was developed solely for dropout prevention programs. This handbook provides a non-technical step-by-step
approach that affords a program sample forms and how-to lists in order to conduct both formative and summative program evaluations.

The evaluation process "focuses on 1) the stated goals of the program; 2) the critical elements and activities of the program as they are described in the proposal or program materials; and 3) additional areas requested by funding agencies, administrators, community agencies, social service agencies and other groups participating in the program" (Smink & Stunk, 1992; p.1). Utilizing this evaluation guide may assist alternative programs in evaluating whether they are effectively achieving what they claim that they are supposed to achieve.

In one of the most comprehensive works on alternative education, Barr and Perrett (1997) offered the following formula for success for which they view as "essential elements of alternative schools that have been identified, analyzed, evaluated, and replicated with such success that districts and communities can have total confidence in their investment in an alternative school" (p.32).

1. Voluntary Participation- Students and staff participate in the school voluntarily and take part in a more democratic, consumer-driven educational service.
2. Educational Diversity Based On Student Needs and Interests- Students should have choice, interest and participation in the development, design and implementation of the curriculum. Student selection and participation leads to more relevant objectives and accountability for student outcomes.

3. Caring and Demanding Teachers- Since teachers also choose to be part of alternative learning communities, they are able to teach and participate in programs that "reflects their own interests and beliefs" that "expands exponentially the school’s potential" (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p.37).

4. Small School Size- From their inception alternative schools utilized the plethora of research-based information on the benefits of small school size. This generally means that alternative schools enroll less than 200 students and allow no more than 15 students per class. (Note: Kellymayer, 1995; 1999; Lang & Sletton, 1999; 2002; suggested even smaller class sizes of not more than 10:1 student teacher ratio.)

5. Shared Vision- When students, parents, and teachers collaborate and reach consensus on the school’s mission, goals and objectives, it affords them the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.
6. Shared Governance/Local Autonomy- Community participation, parental involvement, and student commitment increase authentic ownership of the school. When these groups are actively engaged in the governance of the budget, curriculum, and instructional decisions, the more creative and positive the educational approach and outcomes will be.

7. Creative Instructional Approaches- Stakeholder participation and inclusion of: "the following approaches characterize instructional delivery in effective alternative schools:
- Focus on individual needs;
- Opportunities to accelerate learning/catch up;
- Creative use of time;
- Diverse instructional practices; and
- Involving Students as resources" (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p.43).

8. Relevant/Focused Curriculum- Whether non-traditional or proficiency-based, Barr & Parrett, (1997), stated "While curriculum varies, essential components of effective curricula include some degree of emphasis in each of the following areas:
- Basic skills through advanced academic preparation;
- Interdisciplinary, thematic content;
-Out-of-school learning;
-Understanding and using technology;
-An emphasis on healthy lives; and
-'Transition to work' (Barr and Parrett, p.46).

9. Comprehensive Programs- The alternative school is more effective when it provides permanent placements for students throughout the K-12 school years. Although students may, and should, be provided the opportunity to return to the regular school if so desired, the 'quick fix' stay and return to the regular school is deemed as counterproductive. Effective alternative schools also develop an array of social services and community connections that are available to all students/family.

10. Student Assessment- Non-traditional approaches to assessing student achievement are fully utilized. These methods of assessment for example, include non-graded classrooms, portfolios, projects, graduation competencies, walkabouts, community service and narrative appraisals.

According to Barr and Parrett (1997), this "research has been so successful in identifying the essential components of effective alternative schools that it is now possible to all but guarantee program effectiveness" (p.55). Thus, it is viewed that the implementation of these
unique components and characteristics can be quantified and measured for effective program evaluation. It should also be noted that the above model contains many of the elements that contributed to the successes of the early 'innovative' alternatives. Gregg (1999) suggested, utilizing the 'purpose and focus' of these early programs so that the successes may be duplicated- both behaviorally and academically.

Fashola and Slavin (1998) conducted a review of alternative dropout prevention programs and college attendance programs for students placed at-risk. They found that programs that conducted rigorous evaluations, many times over, had a substantial impact on improving dropout rates, college attendance, and other outcomes that reflect positive behaviors for at-risk students. They further identified common successful program elements that were most effective including: personalization, connecting students to an attainable future, providing employment opportunities for students in poverty, non-traditional academic assistance programs, and student recognition programs. It was clear they report, that when these approaches are intensive, comprehensive, and built around positive expectations, these interventions are successful
in improving school completion and college attendance rates
(Lister, 1994; Fashola & Slavin, 1998).

To achieve an effective evaluation Reimer and Cash
(2003) propose another model called a 'level one analysis',
which offers 10 major categories or essential elements of
effective practice for alternative schools developed by the
NDPC/N. Each of the 10 categories has an accompanying set
of best practices that can be rated as: Rudimentary (poor
performance); Developing (below expected standard);
Proficient (meets expected standard); Accomplished (above
expected standard); or N/A (does not apply).

These ratings can be applied to the following 10 categories
as summarized, in order to perform an effective alternative
school evaluation:

1. Accountability Measures- Includes test scores,
   completion rates, achievement data, suspensions, as
   well as, rating the availability of services that
   assist the affective and health related areas i.e.
   suicide prevention, substance abuse, depression, etc.

2. Administrative Structure and Policies- Indicators
   review the mission, objectives and purpose of the
   school. This review includes the enforcement of
   written policies, equity issues, administrative
   support empowerment of stakeholders etc.
3. Curriculum and Instruction- Includes a review of staff, student Individualized Education/Program Plans (not to be confused with the Individual Educational Plan, I.E.P. for handicapped students), class size, methods of assessment, and many other related non-traditional methods of instruction.

4. Faculty and Staff- Includes a review of staff recruitment, selection, experience, evaluation and proficiency. Reviews ongoing professional development activities and budgets related to such.

5. Facilities and Grounds- Reviews physical attributes of the school site to ensure appropriateness and effectiveness. School size, safety codes, technology equipment, maintenance, cleanliness and overall shape and view of the facility are rated.

6. School Leadership- This area rates the management of personnel and resources, the leadership ability including vision, capacity to move ahead despite obstacles and political interference, and the securing of resources to fulfill the school’s mission.

7. Student Support Services- Rates whether the school provides a broad range of student support services that address citizenship, behavior, and social/health issues. Guidance, counseling, effective parenting, and
community resources are rated also.

8. Learning Community- Rates the overall learning community including family involvement, community involvement, student government, communication issues between all stakeholders.

9. Program Funding- Rates the effectiveness in the planning, securing and execution of adequate funding to ensure the essential programmatic elements according to the mission are achieved.

10. School Climate- Assesses the positive relationships between students and teachers, the safety of the environment, degree of caring and concern on the part of teachers and staff, the degree of equity in terms of learning, etc. Feedback from all stakeholders is important, including parents and the community at-large.

The data collected from this evaluation instrument provides the program with a comprehensive view "for performance of both process and outcome measure effectiveness" (p. 30).

This evaluation model Reimer and Cash (2003) stated "serves as a framework and guide to begin the process of assessing areas of strength and weakness. As with any assessment instrument, the value of the information is in direct proportion to the honesty and integrity of the evaluator"
Recently the Florida Department of Education (2002), Division of Public Schools and Community Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, compiled one of the most comprehensive internal evaluation models to date. This evaluation model is specifically developed for dropout prevention programs called Quality Standards for Academic Intervention Programs and is available at: http://www.fln.edu/oe/bc/bc00614/pdf/dr-stand.pdf

Although new in the research, this model is the most comprehensive framework of evaluation because it identifies standards and provides indicators of quality for dropout prevention programs (Florida Department of Education, 2002):

The document represents practitioners' best thinking about what comprises quality academic intervention programs, rather than focusing on compliance and minimum standards. Quality standards are not intended to support any type of external accountability; rather, the intent is to provide users with a means for making internal program improvements. (p.1)

As a review of the literature is undertaken there are many program evaluations that have been conducted on the
alternative programs, utilizing many of the strategies listed above at both the local and state level. Some samples for review are as follows:

Foley and Crull (1984) reported on ten public alternative schools in New York City. They reported that overall students were highly satisfied with teachers and their school environment. Students were absent 40% less than in previous settings. They expressed positive feelings regarding school, curriculum and the nurturing concern of the teachers, ultimately leading to higher retention levels for a majority of the students.

Raywid (1999a) reported on the successes of the now famous Central Park East Secondary School (CPRESS), an alternative high school for at-risk minority students in East 'Spanish' Harlem, New York City. This school began in 1985, evolving from an equally famous elementary school, as a program to provide the autonomy and innovation from the regular and often bureaucratic NYC secondary school system. The results from this study report that the following factors contribute to the continued success of the school:
1. Autonomy in organization and planning;
2. Effective and caring staff;
3. A common mission and purpose;
4. Choice on the part of staff and students to attend;
5. Small school and class size; and

6. A thematic, inquiry based curriculum.

The graduation rate for CPESS is 90% and 97% of these graduates go on to college (Raywid, 1999a).

Linker and Marion (1995) studied the positive effects of being enrolled in Options, an alternative education program, and the personal success of the enrolled at-risk students. They utilized a tracking method with a cluster sample of 42 students and collected data on four areas for five years. They found that being enrolled in this alternative program reduced truancy, decreased court involvement, improved academic achievement, and improved school discipline. It also concluded that participation in the Options Alternative Program was effective in predicting future success and productivity.

Speckhard (1992) studied the effects of the Porter County, Indiana alternative education program by interviewing sixty-two of the seventy-two enrolled students. The interview covered such topics as attendance, future plans, program assessment, faculty assessment, and views of other students, programmatic aspects and comparisons with home schooling. Overall, the students answered positive responses at a much higher rate than negative responses, indicating that the program had some
effect on the elicitation of these responses. The responses were especially more positive in the areas of credit attainment and future plans to complete high school, as well as, plans to enroll in college. The positive results regarding the above areas indicated that the program is successful in completing its mission, as viewed by the students.

Schoenlein (1994) studied the effects of Hamilton Optional Program for Education (HOPE), a secondary alternative school in Hamilton, Ohio, for at-risk students. He focused on the "development and implementation of certain components that authorities generally agree to be critical to the success of at-risk education" (p.17). He utilized an evaluation based on the Discrepancy Evaluation Model of Malcolm Poyus by surveying seventy-two HOPE students and one hundred-fifteen non-HOPE at-risk students for comparison. His results indicated that the program was successful in assisting the students to complete high school and secure employment, which is the main objective of the program. However, the results also indicated that the program was not successful in building support networks within the community or establishing a sense of community connectedness in order for students to seek gainful employment beyond the fringe of the labor market.
The employability preparation afforded the HOPE students for employment qualifies HOPE students for employment only on the periphery of the economy. Successful, productive workers of the future will have to take initiative, work independently, be creative, work collaboratively, and solve problems. Of course, educational programs must begin with students at whatever level students are found to be on. And, statistically, young people are certainly better off with a high school diploma than without one. But to imply that a high school diploma or the HOPE school program, in and of itself, will enable a young person to acquire employment in a secure, quality position with compensation so as to provide a decent life for an individual and/or family may be a cruel hoax. (Schoenlien, 1994, P. 42).

Heger (1992) studied the effectiveness of Project Reach—an alternative program for severely at-risk students enrolled in the Socorro Independent School District, Texas. The program’s goals were to prevent students from dropping cut or being expelled and to facilitate their reintegration into the regular school program. Data was gathered from the
project proposal, classroom observations, attendance, and analysis of internal evaluation data. The program employs a "tough love" approach, which is commonly referred to as 'soft jails' in the literature. The results indicate that the program is successful in improving academic achievement, retention, self-esteem, student perceptions of school, and reintegration.

Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) utilized a meta-analytic assessment, a quantitative method of summarizing the findings of empirical research, to study the effects of alternative education programs on delinquency. The study focused on fifty-seven program evaluations, selected by established criteria, which provided the necessary statistics for the meta-analysis. The results indicated that:

alternative education programs can have a small effect on school performance, school attitude, and self-esteem, regardless of the research design. The highest pre-post and comparison group effect was attitude toward school. This finding is consistent with prior research on alternative schools, which suggests that most students enjoy going to an alternative education program. (p.229)

However, "the principle negative finding was that
alternative schools have been unable to affect delinquent behavior" (p. 229). They suggest that "even though alternative schools promote positive school attitudes, their effect on school performance and self-esteem is not large enough to influence delinquent behavior" (p. 229).

In 2002 the Portland Public School District conducted an evaluation of its nine alternative education programs for students at-risk of dropping out. Although the programs vary in terms of funding, locations, specialties and target population, the study evaluated common characteristics set by the district and reflective of the effective strategies for meeting the needs of at-risk students. Common characteristics that were evaluated included enrollment, attendance and achievement data. Overall the data indicated that the alternative schools are effectively and efficiently serving the needs of this special population (Mitchell and Waiwaiole, 2003).

In an evaluation report for the New Jersey Department of Education (1996), called Preventing Juvenile Delinquency Through Alternative Education Grant Program, the effects of alternative education programs throughout the State of New Jersey were evaluated. In this extensive report the results indicate improvements in attendance, more credits earned, higher student retention and higher graduation rates. The
results also indicate that the percentage of graduates enrolled in college programs has also increased.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher presented a comprehensive review of the available research regarding the characteristics of alternative schools. It reviewed the characteristics regarding the types of programs, including a brief history of the alternative school movement; the types of students; staffing and curriculum; program evaluation; and, the characteristics relevant to the at-risk student and dropout information in the State of New Jersey. It provided an operational and historical framework, and baseline theories, for determining the effectiveness and frequency of characteristics that may be available in the State of New Jersey.
CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

Introduction

Chapter III describes the methods and procedures utilized in the collection, analysis, and presentation of the data. This chapter includes a comprehensive description of the study design, data sources, survey instrument, and the procedures and statistical techniques.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of alternative secondary schools within the State of New Jersey, the types of programs, the students they serve, the curriculum, the staff, and any evaluative data these programs may utilize to measure their effectiveness.

Overview of the Study

This study utilized survey research as a vehicle for examining the characteristics of available secondary alternative programs within the state of New Jersey with the following considerations:

1. Design of the study
2. Development of the descriptive survey
3. Sample/population for the study
4. Procedures for the collection of data
5. Statistical techniques.

This research will provide students, parents, educators, community leaders and State Department of Education personnel with data that can inform them regarding the various program philosophies, practices, structures, goals and outcomes.

Design of the Study

The design of this study is a descriptive survey used to collect data on the characteristics of secondary alternative schools within the State of New Jersey. Surveys assist the researcher in determining the incidences of a characteristic in a target group, their distribution or frequency, as well as their possible relationship to other variables (Krathwohl, 1998). Rea and Parker (1997) stated "there is no better method of research than the sample survey process for determining, with a known level of accuracy, information about large populations" (p.3). This researcher utilized survey research to compile and compare information on the amount, types, and services offered by the various secondary alternative education programs that exist within the state.
Presently this type of program is viewed as locally based and disconnected from the larger educational community. This study attempts to provide a concise exposition of programs and review them in light of available literature on secondary alternative school programs.

Development of the Descriptive Survey Questionnaire

The survey questions were designed and developed based on program characteristics as they were found in the literature. The survey contains 36 questions covering the following four areas:

1. Program Information
2. Student Information
3. Staffing
4. Curriculum

Alternative Secondary Program Principals and Administrators were requested to respond to these questions in order to develop a more comprehensive description of the separate secondary alternative programs.

Although the data being collected by the descriptive survey is not of a confidential nature, the survey was randomly assigned a code for retrieval purposes only, and as such, was not to be used in the compilation of the aggregate data. This code was randomly assigned by a
computerized database program to insure the anonymity/confidentially of the respondent. The survey was field tested for clarity, accuracy of questions, suggestions, and completion time.

Sample/Population for the Study

The surveys were mailed to each program listed in the program guide provided by the New Jersey Department of Education. A review of this guide revealed that there existed 81 secondary alternative programs at this time. Although more programs were listed in this guide, many were middle school, some were specifically special education, and others were no longer in operation. This study focused solely on secondary alternative education schools or programs.

Fifty-seven programs responded to the survey. Rea and Parker (1997) indicate that one of the disadvantages in utilizing mailed surveys is that they can have a low return percentage. They suggest utilizing certain research-tested guidelines that could yield a higher return rate for specialized populations. This study utilized these suggested guidelines that, according to Rea and Parker (1997), and Krathwohl (1998), include creating a focus group preferably with knowledge of the subject area to be
studied, to formulate, clarify, and make recommendations regarding the survey instrument.

The survey questionnaire was then field tested with alternative school teachers and assistant principals to ensure questionnaire clarity, comprehensiveness, acceptability, and completion time. A cover letter accompanied the survey explaining who was conducting the research, the purpose of the research, the confidentiality of the information, the voluntary participation and an offer to send the aggregate data when completed. Also, a self addressed, postage paid return envelope accompanied the survey.

Zea and Parker (1997) further state that utilizing the above techniques can assist with an increased response rate. They suggested that a response rate of 50% to 60% can be considered satisfactory for purposes of analysis and reporting of findings. This researcher received a total of 57 returned surveys out of 81 that were mailed out, for a return rate of 70%.

Procedures for the Collection of Data

All data was tabulated through the use of a survey consisting of 36 questions (Appendix B). The survey was sent to the principal or administrator of 81 alternative schools that were listed with the State of New Jersey,
Department of Education. A cover letter from this researcher accompanied the survey explaining the reason and purpose for conducting this research (Appendix A) and as stated, a self addressed, postage paid return envelope accompanied the survey. Fifty-seven completed surveys were returned indicating a 70% return rate. The data was compiled by recording the occurrences and responses to each of the questions utilizing the following methods:

1. The frequency of responses for each question or item on the questionnaire was tallied and converted to a percentage where possible.

2. The responses to open-ended questions or items were reviewed, and where possible, were clustered with similar responses.

3. Where possible, the responses were arranged in rank order from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequently mentioned.

4. The ranking of these responses were reviewed in relation to descriptors and characteristics found in the literature.

Statistical Techniques

This researcher utilized qualitative descriptive statistics to collect, compile, analyze, present, and compare information based on the completed surveys to
determine the characteristics of the various secondary alternative education programs that exist within the state of New Jersey. Witte and Witte (1997) defined descriptive statistics as "The area of statistics concerned with organizing and summarizing information about a collection of actual observations" (p.3).

To ascertain characteristics of alternative schools, descriptive statistics assisted this researcher in determining the attributes of a set of observations in order to gain an understanding of them. Descriptive statistics also assisted in defining the characteristic of central tendency and those attributes around this central characteristic. Thus, the use of central tendency including the mode, median and mean, will frequently be utilized in the analysis of data. The analysis will also rely on measures of variability, including the range, standard deviation, and variance. Measures of relationship will also be employed in order to understand any relationship between two variables or characteristics. Additionally, as suggested by Krathwohl (1998), this researcher will frequently utilize tables and figures to convey more than one feature of a data set more effectively.
Summary

In this chapter the researcher described the methods and procedures utilized in the collection, analysis, and presentation of the data. The researcher included a comprehensive description of the study design, data sources, survey instrument, and the procedures and statistical techniques.
CHAPTER IV

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of alternative secondary schools within the State of New Jersey for the school year 1999-2000. The researcher will analyze and present data regarding the types of programs, the students they serve, the curriculum, the staff, and any evaluative data these programs may utilize to measure their effectiveness. As previously stated, this type of program is viewed as locally based and disconnected from the larger educational community. This study attempts to provide a concise exposition of programs and review them in light of available literature on secondary alternative school programs. Survey research is utilized as a vehicle for examining these characteristics to provide a better understanding of the alternative education programs that exist within the state.

The design of this study is a descriptive survey used to collect data on the characteristics of secondary alternative schools within the State of New Jersey. Surveys assist the researcher in determining the incidences of a
characteristic in a target group, their distribution or frequency, as well as their possible relationship to other variables (Krathwohl, 1998).

This chapter presents the data collected and the analysis of these findings utilizing descriptive statistical and qualitative data techniques. It will provide the reader with an understanding of how the sources of data translate into an interpretation of data. This study utilized qualitative descriptive statistics to collect, compile, analyze, present, and compare information based on the completed surveys. Additionally, as suggested by Krathwohl (1998), this researcher frequently utilized tables and figures to convey more than one feature of a data set more effectively. This researcher also choose to incorporate tables and figures at the appropriate place in the text as a convenience to the reader.

As delineated through the review of the literature, the survey was developed to collect information in four areas:

1. Program information (including data regarding program evaluation);
2. Student information;
3. Staffing;
Sample Population

A total of 57 surveys out of 81 that were mailed out were returned for a response rate of 70 percent. The following survey questions are presented in the four areas listed above and include the rate of response and the related statistical analysis of the responses. Witte and Witte (1997) define a population as the complete set of observations being studied indicated with the statistical symbol N (capital letter N). In this case N would equal the complete set of 81 alternative programs in the State of New Jersey if they all responded. They further define a sample population as a subset of observations from a population, being represented by the statistical symbol n (small letter n). In this study, with a subset of 57 respondents from the total population of 81 possible respondents, the statistical symbol n=57 represents the subset of all survey responders. In cases where all 57 survey responders did not answer or complete a particular question, n= the amount of respondents that answered a particular question or selected a response.

Program Information Data

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on alternative programs surveyed for the school year 1999-2000. It includes information on
the administration, operation, enrollment, availability of social, medical and counseling services, graduation rates, evaluation data and funding relative to the program.

1. Please indicate the title of the on-site administrator who directly supervises the day-to-day operations of the program:

(20/36%) Principal  (10/18%) Vice-Principal  (14/25%) Director
(7/13%) Supervisor  (5/9%) Other (please define title)

Figure 1: Title of On-Site Administrator (n=56)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{TITLE OF ON-SITE ADMINISTRATOR} & \text{Number of Responses} & \text{Percent of Responses in (\%)} \\
\hline
\text{Principal} & 20 & (36) \\
\text{Vice-Principal} & 10 & (18) \\
\text{Director} & 14 & (25) \\
\text{Supervisor} & 7 & (13) \\
\text{Other} & 5 & (9) \\
\end{array}
\]

Of the 57 completed surveys, 56 (98\%) responded to this question, 20 (36\%) reported a principal directly supervised the daily operations of the program; 10 (18\%) reported a Vice-Principal; 14 (25\%) reported a Director; 7 (13\%)
reported a Supervisor; and 5 (9%) reported 'Other' which included Administrator, Chairperson, Coordinator, Head Teacher, and Unit Leader.

2. How many years has the school/program been in operation?

All 57 (100%) of the respondents answered this question. For clarity, the responses were grouped in 5-year intervals within the response range of 1...20. As Table 1 indicates, the frequency and percentage for each interval are listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 Years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 Years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 Years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 15 Years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1...20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest number of programs (21/37%) began operation during the past 5 years preceding the collection of this research (1999-2000 school year). Eighteen (32%) of the programs reported being in the category of 6-10 years
old. Ten (18%) of the programs reported being within the
category of 11-15 years old and 8 (14%) of the programs
reported being in existence for more than 16 years. The
results indicate that alternative programs in the State of
New Jersey have been in operation, on average, for 8.2
years.

3. Briefly describe your school's mission or purpose:

Forty-eight (84%) of the survey completers responded to this
question. When grouped for similar responses, 16 (33%), reported
a mission statement that led solely to completing a high school
diploma and are sampled as follows:

1. To assist the students to earn a High School Diploma.

2. Work to keep students successfully in school through
   graduation.

3. To provide academics, vocational training, and support
   services including on-site child care to enable teen parents
   to complete their high school education.

4. To offer non-classified, non-successful (educationally)
   students a second opportunity to earn a regular high school
   diploma.

5. To provide young men and women dropouts with a second chance
   to earn their high school diploma and to learn skills needed
   for employment.

6. To help disaffected youth graduate high school.
Twelve (25%) of the responses indicated a mission statement that dealt with offering alternatives to finishing high school for at-risk or disaffected students and are sampled as follows:

1. To provide alternative education programs for students who are disaffected/disassociated/disruptive.

2. To provide a viable and suitable educational option for high school students who are not experiencing success in their home-school setting.

3. To provide alternative high school programs in the evening for regularly enrolled students.

4. To address the needs of students who for a wide range of reasons, are not functioning successfully in the traditional high school.

5. To serve disaffected high school students who, without an intervention, would not graduate.

Ten (21%) of the responses indicated a mission statement that suggested behavior changes as a goal of the alternative program and are sampled as follows:

1. Provide opportunities for students to change behaviors that have interfered with their success.

2. To provide closely supervised instruction for at risk students.

3. To modify behaviors and attendance records towards meeting district guidelines - improve academics and meet graduation requirements.

4. To modify and improve students behavior, academic achievement and attendance.
Six (13%) indicated that the mission of the alternative school included preparing the student to return to the traditional school program and are sampled as follows:

1. To prepare students with appropriate academic and social skills needed to return to a regular High School or to function productively in today's demanding world.

2. To identify at-risk students and give them an opportunity to succeed and re-enter the regular school population.

3. To identify and focus on the educational, emotional, and social skills needing improvement, and to provide the student with the means to improve these skills and return to their sending or out-of district school within a 3 semester time period.

4. To permit students a chance to return to a traditional high school.

4. Type of program: Full-time (49/86%) Part-time (8/14%)

Fifty-seven (100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. As Figure 2 indicates, 49(86%) reported that they maintain a full-time alternative program while 8(14%) reported that they maintain a part-time program.

**Figure 2: Type of Program (n=57)**
5. Please indicate the type of schedule you currently use:

- Full-day (40/70%)
- Half-day (8/14%)
- Evening (5/9%)
- Full-year (38/67%)
- Half-year (2/4%)

All 57 programs responded to this question. As Figure 3 indicates, 40 (70%) of the respondents reported being a full-day program and 8 (14%) responded being a half-day program; 38 (67%) reported being a full-year program; 2 (4%) reported being a half-year program; and 5 (9%) respondents reported offering an evening schedule. The highest number of respondents reported maintaining a full-day (70%), full-year (67%) program.

Figure 3: Type of Schedule (n=57)
6. What are the hours of operation that your program is available?

Days: (please circle) M T W Th F Sa Su

Fifty-five (96%) of the survey respondents replied to this question. All 55 (100%) reported that they operate an alternative school Monday through Friday. When grouped for frequency, 51 (99%) of the programs reported the time of operation ranging from 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM. Seven (13%) of the programs reported operation times during the evening hours ranging from 1:30 PM to 8:30 PM. It should also be noted that 3 (5%) of the programs reported hours of operation that included both daytime and evening hours of operation.

7. Does your program operate during the summer months?
Yes 4/7%   No 53/93%

All 57 (100%) survey completers responded to this survey question. Four programs (7%) reported that they operate during the summer months. Fifty-three (93%) of the programs reported that they do not operate during the summer months (see Figure 4).
8. Where is your school or program located? (check all that apply)

(20/35%) in a separate school building
(16/28%) in a school-within-a-school
(7/12%) in a non-school facility
(4/7%) on a local college campus
(6/11%) in a county vocational school
(5/9%) within a regional high school
(5/9%) other (please explain) ________________

All 57(100%) survey completers responded to this question. As Figure 5 indicates, 20(35%) of the programs reported their alternative schools operate in a separate school building, followed by 16(28%) programs that reported
that they operate in a school-within-a-school. Seven (12%) reported being located in a non-school facility, 6 (11%) in a county vocational school, 5 (9%) in a regional high school, and 4 (7%) on a college campus.

Figure 5: Location of School/Program (n=57)

Five (9%) indicated 'other' as a location which included (frequency):
1. Sharing the high school after school (2);
2. Share a school building with a small elementary program;
3. Looking for a separate building; and
4. A regional health fitness center.

Six of the programs responded to two choices, two reported operating in a separate school building in a non-school facility, one in a separate school in a regional high school (other), one in a non-school building on a
college campus, one in a separate school building within a county vocational school, and one in a regional high school that is continuing to look for a separate facility (other).

9. Students completing the program:

(53/98%) receive a regular High School Diploma

(1/2%) prepare for and complete the GED Examination

Fifty-four (95%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Fifty-three (98%) reported that students receive a regular high school diploma. One response (2%) reported that students receive a regular high school diploma or may choose to prepare for and complete the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) Test. One program reported that the program is only a transition program whereby students return to the sending high school for graduation. Three responses were left blank indicating no response. Overall the results indicate, as established in the literature review, that most programs assist the student in securing a regular high school diploma.

10. Enrollment in the program is:

49/86% Open (students may enroll at any time during the school year).

8/14% Fixed (students may enroll only at certain intervals, i.e. beginning of semester).
Figure 6: Enrollment in the Program (n=57)

Fifty-seven (100%) of the respondents completed this question. As Figure 6 portrays, 49 (86%) of the programs responding have an open enrollment policy wherein students may enroll throughout the school year. Eight (14%) reported a 'fixed' enrollment, wherein students may enroll only at predetermined periods.
11. Please indicate the selection process you use to select students:

(1/2%) Voluntary - everyone accepted who applies

(46/81%) Voluntary - interviews/admission criteria determine acceptance to program

(18/32%) Involuntary - students assigned by school or district

(10/18%) Other - please describe ________________________

All 57 (100%) survey completers responded to this question. As Figure 7 indicates, 46 (81%) of the respondents reported that the basis for the selection of students is ‘Voluntary- interviews/admissions criteria determine acceptance to the program’. Eighteen (12%) indicated ‘Involuntary - students assigned by school or district’, 1 (2%) indicated ‘Voluntary - everyone accepted who applies and 10 (18%) indicated ‘other’ as a selection process. This finding is consistent with the literature that has revealed that participation in an alternative should be voluntary, and there should be a selection process for enrollment.

Of the 57 responding programs 18 selected both the Voluntary- interviews/admission criteria determine acceptance to program and Involuntary - students assigned by school or district responses, for an overall total of 65 responses. This finding is also found in the literature describing programs
similar to Raywid's (1994) Type II category, wherein students are 'assigned' or 'sentenced' to the program as a last resort before expulsion. Additionally, this is also reflective of many 'zero tolerance' automatic student removal policies implemented in the State of New Jersey.

Figure 7: Selection Process in Selecting Students (n=57)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection Process in Selecting Students</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary everyone</td>
<td>46 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary criteria</td>
<td>18 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary</td>
<td>10 (18%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten of the responses (18%) selected the 'Other' selection and are sampled as follows:

1. Suggestion/urging of sending vice-principals and/or guidance counselors.

2. Many districts in this county have refused to send students to this program because they believe they don't have to provide childcare, yet without this service, students drop out of school. Many students apply and are turned down by their districts. This is very frustrating to all involved.

3. Students are also recommended by their home school districts.

4. Occasionally parents/counselors/students request placement.
5. Some students are “assigned” by central administration when they didn’t get admitted through regular channels. All of the “assigned” student did not have success here!

6. Combination of 3 processes above. Usually all students assigned by the contracted high school. Applicants must interview, and usually, all are accepted.

These ‘other responses’ were reflective of the areas listed above and are consistent with the findings in the literature. They also indicate that a student’s choice to attend an alternative school does suggest a higher incidence of success in completing high school for at-risk students.

12. Indicate the maximum number of students the school or program was designed to serve: _____________

As Table 2 indicates, 53 (93%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Consistent with the literature of Raywid (1999), Kellermayer (1995), (1999), and Barr and Parrett (2001), alternative schools that reflect the research on small schools and programs are more successful in educating at-risk students. The mean student enrollment that alternative schools in the State of New Jersey were designed to serve during the 1999-2000 school year was 53 students. Given a standard deviation of 35.3, it can be concluded that alternative schools during the 1999-2000 school year were designed to enroll between 18 and 88 students.
Table 2: Enrollment Alternative Schools Were Designed to Serve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n=57)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>12...150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Indicate the number of students enrolled as of June 2000 (include graduates or program completers):

Full-time Male __________ Female __________
Part-time Male __________ Female __________

Fifty-three (93%) of the 57 survey completers responded to this question. Forty-six (87%) of the programs reported having full-time students enrolled as of June 2000. Seven (13%) respondents reported their enrollment as part-time students.

Table 3: Number of Students Enrolled as of June 2000 (n=53), (includes graduates and program completers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th></th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th></th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>1226</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percent of</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-total of Full-time Students enrolled = 2179
Sub-total of Part-time Students enrolled = 195
Grand-total of all Students enrolled = 2374
Table 3 also indicates the numbers of male and female full-time and part-time students. Table 4 provides an analysis of these results.

Table 4: Analysis of Number of Students Enrolled as of June 2000
(includes graduates and program completers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time Male</th>
<th>Full-time Female</th>
<th>Part-time Male</th>
<th>Part-time Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>1...77</td>
<td>1...73</td>
<td>1...49</td>
<td>1...75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Does your program have a waiting list for enrollment?  
   ___ Yes   ___ No

   If yes, how many students in 1999-2000 remained on the waiting list for enrollment? ________

   Fifty-five (96%) of the survey respondents completed this question. Thirty-two (58%) of these respondents reported that they did not have a waiting list for student enrollment.

   Twenty-three (42%) of the respondents reported that they had a waiting list for student enrollment in the alternative program. Of these 23 programs that reported they have a waiting list, 18 reported a specific number of students that were on the waiting list. The range of
students on their waiting list was from 0 to 30 students with a mean of 8 and a standard deviation of 7.3. Table 5 represents an analysis of this data regarding program waiting lists.

**Table 5: Waiting List for Enrollment in Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Waiting list</th>
<th>Number on waiting list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n=55)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                                |              |
| Mean                           | 8            |
| Median                         | 5            |
| Mode                           | 5            |
| Standard Deviation             | 7.3          |
| Range                          | 0...30       |

15. Are there daycare services available for the children of students? ____ Yes ____ No

If yes, for what ages____________________

How many children can your facility accommodate?_____

Is a Parenting Skills Course required for student parents? ____ Yes ____ No

During the past school year have you had a waiting list for day-care services? ____ Yes ____ No If yes, how many?_____

All fifty-seven (100%) respondents completed this survey question. Forty-nine (86%) of the program reported
that they did not offer day-care services and 8 (14\%) reported that they did offer day-care services (see Figure 8). Of the 8 that reported day-care services available, the range in age, when translated into months, ranged from newborn to 5.5 years old. One program reported '3 years and older'. Seven (87.5\%) of the 8 programs offering day-care services reported that parenting classes were required of students.

**Figure 8: Availability of Day-Care Services (n=57)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY-CARE SERVICES AVAILABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Responses in (%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 6: Availability of Day-Care Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day-care Services available</th>
<th>Average Age of daycare children</th>
<th>How Many are in Day-care</th>
<th>Parenting skills class required</th>
<th>Waiting list for day care</th>
<th>How many on waiting list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n=57)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 29, Median: 20, Mode: 20, Standard Deviation: 22, Range: 0...6.5, 12...72, 6...8

Three (37.5%) of the 8 programs reported that they maintained a waiting list for their day-care program with a mean of 7.3 students on the waiting list.

16. Counseling services are available to students in the following areas: (check all that apply)

( ) School Social worker
( ) Required group meetings
( ) Required individual meetings
( ) School Psychologist
( ) Guidance Counselor
( ) Peer Mentors
( ) Adult Mentors
( ) Special Education Service
( ) School Nurse
( ) Other (please explain)
Table 7: Areas of Counseling Services Available Ranked:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counseling Service</th>
<th>Number of Responders</th>
<th>percent of Responders</th>
<th>Rank (1-11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Social Worker</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse Coord. (SAC)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurse</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required group meetings</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Mentors</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Individual Meetings</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Mentors</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the ranked results in Table 7 indicate, over 60% of the respondents reported offering multiple counseling services provided by a school social worker, substance abuse coordinator, school nurse, guidance counselor, and school psychologist respectively. The lowest reported counseling services reported were peer mentors, required individual meetings and adult mentors.

As Table 7 and Figure 9 indicate, all 57 respondents answered this question by selecting 3 or more from the above list of available counseling services.
Twelve (21%) of the programs also listed other counseling services and are sampled as follows:

1. 2 full-time social workers, working specifically with alternative program.
2. Staff meets everyday 12:30 - 1:00 p.m. to discuss students.
3. School to careers transition services.
4. School to careers - employment.
5. Staff meets everyday 12:30 - 1:00 p.m. to discuss students.
6. Crisis counselor.
7. School Based youth Services Family and Individual counseling available.
8. SBHS has a full time career counselor whose services are available to our students.

17. In addition to the school nurse, is there ongoing availability of comprehensive medical health care services for students?
   10 (18%) Yes 47 (82%) No

Figure 10: Availability of Comprehensive Medical Health Care Services (n=57)

Although 57 (100%) of the respondents answered this survey question, as Figure 10 visualizes, only 10 (18%) of the respondents reported any availability of health care services for students in addition to a school nurse.
18. Are there extracurricular activities available for students? 33(67%) Yes 19(33%) No
If yes, please give examples

Fifty-seven (100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. As Table 8 indicates, 30(67%) of respondents reported the availability of extracurricular activities for alternative program students. Nineteen (33%) of the respondents reported not having extracurricular activities.

Table 8: Availability of Extracurricular Activities for Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of responses (n= 57)</th>
<th>Were Examples provided?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fuller and Sabatino (1996) conducted a study of alternative high school students and found that over 62% had histories of poor academic achievement, in addition to other predominate characteristics such as poor attendance, anti-social behaviors, negative school attitudes, and truancy. Additionally, they found that 42% of the students did not participate in any extracurricular activities.
Participation in extracurricular activities, they observe, assist the student in staying connected to the school community and afford the student higher incidences of success, especially in areas that may measure areas other than academics.

Figure 11: Availability of Extracurricular Activities (n=57)

It should also be noted that of the 38 respondents that indicated the availability of extracurricular activities, 100% provided examples of available programs. They have been grouped for similarity and are sampled as follows:
Sports:

Athletics
Regular mainstream activities.
Eligible for all sports/activities
Weight lifting
Any and all main campus activities if academically eligible.
Bowling, Basketball, Skiing, Baseball
Basketball, Softball.
Basketball, Softball,
Regular sports of HS.
Football

Clubs and organizations:

Peer mentoring, VICA
All clubs and organizations
Theatre, School Newspaper, Yearbook lock-ins, after-school support groups.
Chess
School Play
Student council.
Students also participate in main high school activities.
School musical production,
JROTC, Choir - activities with approval.

Other Activities:

Students may participate in any extracurricular activities offered by Community College.
Field trips, Speakers, Picnics etc.
All the activities of the traditional high school, and
Project Adventure
Memory Book (mini yearbook) Prism-Poetry Anthology
Field trips (outward bound)
Field trips - recreational and educational.

19. Indicate the amount of graduates or program completers for your school during: 1999-2000 _______

Ultimately the goal of any high school program is to provide students the opportunity for success in an ever-changing world by graduating with a high school diploma. As
Derek for the 1999-2000 school year.

From these alternative school programs in the state of New

The results indicate that alternative schools graduate

and funding indicate across the available research, the

are, and the results of the

19.6. Due to the variety of programs, resources, program size

on average, 92.5% of students per year with a standard deviation of

The results indicated that alternative schools graduate,

Schools open competition.

Students do not graduate, rather they return to the sending

One program is a transition-only program, and therefore

Alternative answer the question as discussed previously.

As seen in Table 9, 92.6% of the 57 survey

"Feeling locked school.

Lever barriers to achieving their goals, and more positive

attending alternative schools reported a variety of goals.

Second chance (6.24% overall), the at-risk student

that an important goal of the school was to provide a

for students to succeed in life, and "students reported

students, found that at-risk students attending alternative

126
Table 9: Graduates/Program Completers

(includes the one program that offers students the option of completing a cED)

Number of responses (n= 56) 56  
Percentage of responses 98%  
Mean 17.55  
Median 12  
Mode 12  
Standard Deviation 19.6  
Range (1...88)  
Total number of Graduates 99-00 983

20. Indicate the percentage of students who dropped out of your school during: 1999-2000 ________.

As viewed in Table 10, 45(79%) of the 57 respondents answered this question, reporting ranges of 0 to 55% dropout rates and a mean of 12% with a standard deviation of 11. In reviewing the literature there were no available data on the percentage of dropout rates in alternative programs that could be utilized for comparison.

Table 10: Percentage of Students Who Dropped Out

Number of responses (n=45) 45  
Percentage of responses 79%  
Mean 12  
Median 9  
Mode 20  
Standard Deviation 11  
Range range(0...53)
Given the accepted variables throughout the research in trying to improve completion rates in alternative school programs, effective evaluation methods are indicated as the best approach to improving program effectiveness. Quinn and Rutherford (1998) report there are several indicators that measure increases in attendance, achievement, graduation rate, parental involvement, and overall program effectiveness.

**Evaluation and Funding Data**

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on evaluation data and funding relative to the program surveyed for the school year 1999-2000.

21. *Is there a formal method of evaluation incorporated into the Program?* 39 (53%) Yes 27 (47%) No

If yes, have you evaluated your program in order to measure its effectiveness during the 1999-2000 school year?

Yes 22 (73%) No 8 (27%)

Consistent with the findings in the literature regarding the lack of comprehensive evaluation, only 30 (53%) of the survey respondents reported that there is a formal method of evaluation incorporated into the Program.
Table 11: Evaluation Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal method of evaluation</th>
<th>If yes, has the program been evaluated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n=57)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-seven (47%) reported that no formal method of evaluation existed in the program (see Table 11 and Figure 12).

Figure 12: Formal Method of Evaluation (n=57)

FORMAL METHOD OF EVALUATION

No (27) 47%  Yes (30) 53%

Of the 30 (53%) of the programs that reported that they have a formal method of evaluation incorporated into the alternative program, 22 (73%) reported that they have evaluated
the program during the 1999-2000 school year. Eight (27%) of the 30 'yes' respondents reported that they had not conducted a formal program evaluation.

**Figure 13: Has Your Program Been Evaluated (n=30)**

![Diagram showing evaluation results]

22. What criteria or measurement indicators are used in determining the effectiveness of your program?

As discussed above and throughout the literature, evaluation criteria are viewed as essential elements of an effective alternative school. Fifty-two (91%) of the survey completers responded to this question. The frequency of responses to this question were grouped for likeness and tallied. They were then converted to a percentage of the 52
responders. Responses with a frequency rate of 10 or more are listed in order of the most frequently reported (see table 12).

Table 12: Evaluation Criteria/Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation criteria/indicator</th>
<th>Frequency of response</th>
<th>Percentage of response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation and completion rates</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance rates</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved grades and credit attainment</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student, teacher, parent, planning team formal and informal surveys</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved behavior, attitudes and lower incidences of suspensions</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout and student retention rates</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide HSPT/HSPA testing rates</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New student applications and referrals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. Funding for your program is derived from the following sources: (check all that apply)

____ local & state
____ federal
____ grants
____ school-business partnerships
____ other sources, please explain

______________________________
Table 13: Incidences of Funding Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of responses (n=57)</th>
<th>Percentage of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local and State Source</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Source</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Business Partnership</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sources</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 57 (100%) survey completers responded to this question. Forty-four (77%) of the respondents reported that they received state and local funding (see Table 13). It should be noted that 13 programs indicated on the 'other sources' line that they are tuition based, charging each sending district a fixed per-pupil amount per year in tuition.

A brief explanation of the funding system for public education in the State of New Jersey is required here for a more in-depth understanding of the responses. State aid flows to school districts in essentially two ways: 1) direct state aid based on the resident enrollment in the district, and 2) the monies raised by local property taxes for school purposes. Given this system funding in New Jersey and based on the particular type of school district, county Vocational and Regional School Districts have either a system of receiving state and local aid directly or
charge the districts a tuition amount. For those that charge a tuition amount, the 'sending district' then counts the student on its rolls and receives the state and local aid.

In light of this understanding of funding in the State of New Jersey, it can be stated that all 57 (100%) respondents receive state and local aid either directly or indirectly by charging tuition to the sending district wherein the student is domiciled. The sending district would then receive the state and local aid for that student. However, it should be noted that the tuition for the student can be more or less than the state and local aid or more or less than the normal per student cost for that sending district. Three of the programs reported tuition figures in the amounts of $10,000, $9985, and $9000.

As Figure 14 indicates, 7 (12%) of the programs reported receiving federal funding, 8 (14%) reported receiving grants, and 3 (5%) reported receiving funding through school-business partnerships. Of the 21 (37%) responses that selected other sources of funding, 13 reported tuition as funding, 7 reported regular state and local funding, and 1 reported, in addition to state and
local funding, that monies are raised by 'fund raising events and activities.'

Figure 14: Funding Sources for Program (n=57)

24. The three additional resources most needed to improve the services provided to the students are:

(please prioritize)

1) _______________________________________

2) _______________________________________

3) _______________________________________
Fifty-one (89%) of the survey completers responded to this question and listed one additional resource most needed on line one. Forty-Nine (86%) responded by listing two additional resources most needed on lines 1 and 2 prioritized. Thirty-two (56%) responded by listing three additional resources on all three lines prioritized. The following list represents the four most frequently requested resources when grouped for similarity for each priority (frequency in parenthesis).

First most requested resource (n=51):
1. Availability of additional counseling and social services (14).
2. Additional teaching and school-to-work staff (10).
3. Additional and more stable funding mechanisms (9).
4. Additional space/facilities (9).

Second Most requested resource (n=49):
1. Additional teaching and school-to-work staff (15).
2. Additional space/facilities (9).
3. Additional programs and more stable funding mechanisms (9).
4. Availability of additional counseling and social services (7).

Third most requested resource (n=32):
1. Updated technology curriculum and computers (8).
2. Additional Job Coordinator/Counselor to expand school-to-work and employment opportunities for students (5).

3. Additional funding for student transportation, lunch and extra-curricular programs (4).

4. Additional counseling and support programs for parents of students (3).

Student Data

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on students attending alternative schools for the school year 1999-2000, regarding age, ethnicity, free or reduced lunch status, and the type of geographic area they reside in.

25. Please indicate the age range of the students attending your program:
from age_____ to age_____

All 57(100%) survey respondents completed this question. The mean of the lowest age of students attending was reported as 15 years old, with a standard deviation of .46, and a range of 15 to 17.

The mean of the highest age of students attending was reported at 19 years old, with a standard deviation of 1.06 and a range of 17 to 21 (see Table 14).
Table 14: Lowest and Highest Age of Enrolled Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lowest Age</th>
<th>Highest Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n= 57)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>(15...17)</td>
<td>(17...21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. In the form of a percentage, please indicate the ethnicity of the student population:

- African American
  \[\frac{\mu}{37\%}\]
- Caucasian
  \[\frac{\mu}{46\%}\]
- Asian
  \[\frac{\mu}{1\%}\]
- Hispanic
  \[\frac{\mu}{16\%}\]
- Other
  \[\frac{\mu}{1\%}\]

\[\mu = \text{mean}\]

Fifty (89%) of the survey completers responded to this question with the following frequencies:

1. Fifty (88%) reported incidences of African American students enrolled for a mean of 37% African American enrollment.
2. Fifty (88%) reported incidences of Caucasian student enrollment for a mean of 46% Caucasian enrollment.
3. Fourteen (25%) reported incidences of Asian enrollment for a mean of 1% Asian enrollment.
4. Forty-six (81%) reported incidences of Hispanic students enrolled for a mean of 16% Hispanic enrollment.

5. Eleven (19%) reported incidences of 'Other' students enrolled for a mean of 1% "other" students enrolled.

**Figure 15: Mean Percent of Ethnicity of Student Population (n=50)**

**Table 15: Enrollment by Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n= 50)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Ethnic Group</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27. Check the statement that best describes your current student population:

- (21/37%) 0-25% of the students receive free or reduced lunch
- (12/21%) 26-50% of the students receive free or reduced lunch
- (8/14%) 51-75% of the students receive free or reduced lunch
- (10/18%) 76-100% of the students receive free or reduced lunch

Figure 16: Percent of Students Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (n=51)

Fifty-one (89%) of the 57 programs responding completed this question. As Figure 17 indicates, 37% of alternative schools report that 0-25% of the students receive free or reduced lunch; 21% of the programs reported that 26-50% of students receive free or reduced lunch and 14% report that 51-75% of the students receive free or
reduced lunch. Lastly, 18% of the programs reported that 76-100% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

28. The area where most of the students reside can be best described as:

(47%) Urban   (42%) Suburban   (11%) Rural

All 57 (100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Twenty-seven (47%) of the respondents reported that most of their students reside in an urban area, 24 (42%) reported a suburban area, and 6 (11%) reported a rural area.

Figure 17: Area Type Where Most Students Reside (n=57)
Staffing Data

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on the staffing in alternative schools for the school year 1999-2000. This data includes information on the selection, type, and amount of staff, and the availability, frequency and benefits of staff development activities.

According to Quinn and Rutherford (1998), a highly trained and caring staff may be the single most determining factor in whether an alternative education student should decide to return to the regular school setting. Similarly, in discussing the role that teachers play in the alternative education setting, Barr and Parrett (1997; 2001) found that teachers who are well-trained, caring, and able to set high standards, and who are responsive to the particular needs of the at-risk student produce better achievement outcomes. Conversely, they found, teachers who are involuntarily assigned to teach in alternative education programs are less likely to produce positive outcomes. Given these observations in the literature, the following questions address these issues within the State of New Jersey.
29. How are staff members selected: (check all that apply)

- 16/57 Assigned by district
- 28/57 Selected based on specific program criteria
- 26/57 Recruited from local teacher preparation programs, newspaper ads, etc.
- 10/57 Other, please explain

All 57 (100%) of the program respondents completed this question with the following frequencies:

- 37 programs selected one response;
- 17 programs selected two responses;
- 3 programs selected three responses;

for a total of 80 responses.

Sixteen (28%) reported that staff members are assigned by the district. Twenty-eight (49%) reported that staff members are selected based on specific program criteria. Twenty-six (46%) reported that staff members are recruited from local teacher preparation programs, newspaper ads, etc.

Table 16: Selection of Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of responses (n=57)</th>
<th>Assigned</th>
<th>Selected</th>
<th>Recruited</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ten (18%) of the programs reported 'Other' as a means of staff member selection and are listed as follows (with frequency of response):

1. All teachers volunteer and are assigned (3).
2. Teachers are interviewed and recommended (3).
3. Staff is hired specifically to work with the alternative program (2).
4. Served by the same staff as our Vo-tech students except for academics which is taught by part time teachers (1).
5. Recruited from local teachers (1).
6. Assigned and recruited, done so in a thoughtful manner (1).

30. Please indicate the number of school personnel serving the program during the 1999-2000 school year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Certified Staff (i.e. Secretary, clerk, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Support (i.e. guidance counselors, social worker, nurse etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Volunteers*  
(i.e. mentors, community resource people, parents etc.)

Outside Agency Workers*  
(i.e. Social Service Agency personnel, Probation workers, etc)

*Please explain

As Table 17 indicates, all 57 survey completers responded to this question. Thirty-five reported a full-time administrator and 22 (39%) reported a part-time administrator. Those programs reporting full-time certified teachers (45/79%), averaged 4.7 teachers per program with a standard deviation of 3.4 and a range of 1 to 18. Twenty-nine (51%) programs reported using part-time certified teachers at an average of 4.6 per program with a standard deviation of 4.6 and a range of 4 to 22. It should also be noted that 17 of the responding programs reported utilizing a combination of both full and part-time certified teachers. Thirty-one (54%) respondents reported utilizing full-time non-certified staff and 24 (42%) reported utilizing part-time non-certified staff.
Table 17: Number of School Personnel Serving Program —Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time professional support</th>
<th>Part-time professional support</th>
<th>Full-time volunteers</th>
<th>Part-time volunteers</th>
<th>Full-time outside agency</th>
<th>Part-time outside agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>(1...18)</td>
<td>(1...8)</td>
<td>(0...15)</td>
<td>(0...25)</td>
<td>(0...3)</td>
<td>(1...12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 18 indicates, 27(47%) of the programs responding reported utilizing full-time professional support staff and 31 reported utilizing part-time professional support staff. Again, many programs reported utilizing a combination of both full- and part-time staff.

Table 18: Number of School Personnel Serving Program —Part 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time professional support</th>
<th>Part-time professional support</th>
<th>Full-time volunteers</th>
<th>Part-time volunteers</th>
<th>Full-time outside agency</th>
<th>Part-time outside agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>(1...18)</td>
<td>(1...8)</td>
<td>(0...15)</td>
<td>(0...25)</td>
<td>(0...3)</td>
<td>(1...12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six (11%) and 11(19%) of the responding programs reported utilizing full- and part-time volunteers respectively. As the range in Table 20 indicates, one
respondent reported using 25 volunteers on a part-time basis. In the 'please explain' section this respondent indicated that "many outside speakers throughout the school year and partnerships with community agencies" as the explanation of this figure.

Five (9%) of the programs responding reported utilizing full-time outside agency staff and nine (16%) reported utilizing part-time outside agency staff. Eleven of these programs provided an explanation of these services and are listed as follows:

1. Students have access to vocational programs in district (off-site) depending on schedule, interest and whether or not students are conducive to such.
2. Outside speakers come into school throughout the school year; partnerships with community agencies.
3. Social Service intern students at Rutgers University serve as volunteer tutors and monitors. Probation officers work closely with alternative school staff.
4. DEA and FBI provided voluntary programs to our students.
5. Guest speakers, service agencies and community groups.
6. Family Health Center - referral; doctors; dentist; probation; HIV testing.
7. Utilize college social worker interns throughout school year; utilize probation officers to run scared straight programs.
8. Probation officers where applicable, DYFS where necessary, BARS officers, outside speakers and programs, students individual CST's of LCS, Social Workers, Psychologist etc.
9. Service learning, co-op employers and reading tutors.
10. Probation officers visit.
11. Innumerable, we have an excellent working relationship with all social service agencies, as well as JJC and military recruiters.
31. Are staff development and in-service activities available to the staff of your program?

_________ Yes  _________ No

How often? (i.e. Monthly, Bi-monthly)

If yes, are these staff development and in-service activities beneficial to you in meeting the needs of the alternative student?

_________ Yes  _________ No

Please explain

Staff-development and in-service activities that are frequent and relevant in dealing with the needs of the alternative program are discussed throughout the literature.

Table 19: Availability, Frequency and Significance of Professional Development Activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Available?</th>
<th>Frequency of Professional Development</th>
<th>Is Professional Development Beneficial?</th>
<th>Explanation of Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n=55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;Yes&quot; responses</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of &quot;No&quot; responses</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 19 indicates, 55(96%) of the 57 survey completers responded to this question. Of the 55 responding programs, 51(93%) responded 'yes' professional development activities are
available and 4 (7\%) responded 'no' they are not available. Of the 51 programs reporting professional development, 41 (75\%) reported the frequency of professional development activities.

Additionally, of the 51 respondents reporting professional development activities, 48 (87\%) responded as to whether the professional development is beneficial. Of these 48 responders, 40 (83\%) indicated 'yes', the professional development is beneficial and 8 (17\%) indicated 'no', it is not beneficial (see Table 19 and Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Reported Frequency and Percentage of Professional Development (n=57)**

![Chart showing frequency of professional development activities](chart.png)

As indicated, 27 (49\%) of these 48 respondents provided a response in the 'please explain' section and are sampled
as follows (if applicable, frequency of response in parenthesis):

For the 'yes' responders, professional development is beneficial:

1. Crisis Prevention/Intervention, Teaching Techniques, Technology Training; (3)
2. Gives staff a forum in which to give and receive feedback; (3)
3. They are designed to meet staff needs; (2)
4. We plan our own-purchase books, video workshops, & visit other schools on professional days; (2)
5. Provides skills to help staff to assist students with non-school related issues which impacts on their academic performance;
6. Curriculum updates, review strategies to improve student behavior.

For the 'no' responders, professional development is not available;

1. They are designed for 'regular' high school students and teachers; (3)
2. It is not consistent or planned;
3. Most are "jargon" or "knee-jerk" depending on the problem of the week.

Curriculum Data

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on curriculum in alternative schools for the school year 1999-2000 relative to type, atmosphere, offerings, class size, and methods of evaluation and assessment.
32. The curriculum is best described as

(24/60%) "Traditional"   (23/40%) "Non-traditional"

Throughout the literature there are references to non-traditional curriculum in various forms. Whether it is portfolio assessment, proficiency based, thematically-approached, or technology-based, the research suggests innovative ways of instruction and learning in a positive school environment. The purpose of this question is to review the type of curriculum being offered in alternative schools in the State of New Jersey.

Figure 19: Curriculum Type (n=57)

All 57(100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Of this total 34(60%) reported that the curriculum is best described as 'traditional' and 23(40%) reported the curriculum as 'non-traditional.'
33. Which of the following most clearly describes the school/program atmosphere:

- Highly structured (20/36%)
- Moderately structured (34/62%)
- Without structure (1/2%)

Table 20: School/Program Atmosphere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Highly structured</th>
<th>Moderately structured</th>
<th>Without structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses (n=55)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of responses</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 20 indicates, 55 (96%) of the 57 survey completers responded to this question. Twenty (36%) reported that their program is highly structured. This would be reflective of what Raywid (1994) classified as type II programs that are highly structured and sometimes referred to as ‘soft jail.’ Thirty-four (62%) of the respondents indicated that the school or program is moderately structured and 1 (2%) of the respondents reported that the program is without structure. These two former descriptions are reflective of Raywid’s classification of Type I ‘innovative schools’ and possibly Type III ‘remedial programs,’ depending on the curricular approach.
34. Please indicate the types of curriculum offered at your school: (please check all that apply)

- Accelerated learning ( )
- Art, Dance, Music ( )
- Competency/Proficiency based ( ) Traditional High School Courses ( )
- Remedial Instruction ( ) School-to-work experiences ( )
- Community Service ( ) Special Education ( )
- Other

Table 21: Type of Curriculum Offered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Type</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Responses</th>
<th>Rank of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional High School Courses</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-to-work experiences</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency/Proficiency based</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial Instruction</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Dance, Music</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated learning</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 57(100%) respondents completed this question. As Table 21 indicates, Traditional High School Courses (47/82%) and School-to-Work experiences (44/77%) ranked the highest in the type of curriculum offered.

Competency/Proficiency Based (41/72%) and Remedial Instruction (41/72%) followed with equal amounts of
responses. Special Education (31/54%) and Community Service (26/46%) followed by ranking 5th and 6th in the amount of responses. Lastly, Accelerated Learning (17/30%) and Other (4/7%) received the least amount of responses respectively (see Table 21 and Figure 20).

Figure 20: Types of Curriculum Ranked (n=57)

Four (7%) of the respondents selected the 'Other' selection and are reported as follows:

1. College courses, individual make-up packets, field trips and guest speakers in place of physical education.
2. Electives are selected by students and taken the last period of the day.
3. Independent study.

4. High Interest Activities.

35. Indicate the average class size for your program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Size</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>5/9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>26/49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>17/30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>7/12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This question is significant since the issue of class size is discussed throughout the literature. Many of the researchers have indicated that alternative schools utilize the plethora of research-based information on the benefits of small school and class size.

Figure 21: Average Class Size (n=57)
All 57(100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Five (9%) reported the smallest class size of 1-5 average students and 7(12%) reported 16-20 average students per class, which was the highest class size reported, since none of the respondents selected the 21-25 and 26-30 class size indicators. The majority of the selections were for the '6-10 average class size' with 26(49%) selected and the '11-15 average class size' with 17(30%) selected.

36. Indicate the methods used to evaluate student progress in your program: (please check all that apply)

Grades (53/93%)
Report cards (47/32%)
Written reports by teacher (37/65%)
Self-evaluation (10/18%)
Parent-teacher conferences (41/73%)
Student-teacher conferences (42/74%)
Peer group evaluation (4/7%)
Portfolios (23/40%)
*Other (8/14%)

*Please explain (8 responses)

All 57(100%) respondents completed this question, selecting an average of 5 responses per respondent with a range of 1-6, a median of 5 and a mode of 4. Table 22 represents the number of responses for each area, the
percentage of responses and the rank order of the most frequently reported method used to evaluate student progress to the least reported.

As indicated by Table 22, grades, report cards, student-teacher conferences, parent-teacher conferences and written reports by the teacher are the five most frequently utilized methods to evaluate student progress for the alternative programs that responded to the survey. Portfolio assessment was selected by 23 (40%) of the respondents as a method of student evaluation.

Table 22: Methods Used to Evaluate Student Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method Used to evaluate Student Progress</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Responses</th>
<th>Rank of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report cards</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written reports by teacher</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-teacher conferences</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-teacher conferences</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer group evaluation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self evaluation, peer group evaluation, and other methods were the least frequently utilized methods of evaluation.

The following is a list of the 6 'Other' explanations provided by the respondents:

1. Meetings with student and entire staff to go over progress.
2. Bi-weekly reports mailed home (one page summaries of pupil progress and demeanor).
3. Parents have to come to 5 conferences per year.
5. Administrative team reviews student progress (Principal, Head Teacher, Guidance Counselor, and Social Worker.
6. Discipline folder, daily progress, ownership of their actions and consequences, helping others, willingness to listen or change. Annual review meeting of progress reports.
7. Percentage of courses completed - progress reports and warning notices.
8. Drug and HIV testing for health - also physiological measures, such as body composition, height, weight, B/P.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher presented the data collected by a descriptive survey completed by 57 of 81 secondary alternative schools within the State of New Jersey for the 1999-2000 school year. To achieve this
presentation, the researcher utilized qualitative descriptive statistics to collect, compile, analyze, present, and compare information based on these completed surveys to determine the characteristics of these programs.

The researcher utilized tables and figures, whenever possible, to convey more than one descriptive feature of the data set more effectively. This presentation of data has provided for a comprehensive analysis and exposition of the characteristics of existing alternative schools in the State of New Jersey in order to review them in light of available literature on secondary alternative school programs.
CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion and summary of the data presented in the previous chapter. This discussion includes descriptors of the characteristics, implications for alternative programs, and recommendations for further study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the characteristics of alternative secondary schools within the state of New Jersey for the school year 1999-2000. The researcher presented and analyzed data regarding the types of programs, the students they serve, the curriculum, the staff, and any evaluative data these programs may utilize to measure their effectiveness. As previously stated, this type of program is viewed as locally based and disconnected from the larger educational community. In this study the researcher provided a concise exposition of programs and review them in light of available literature on secondary alternative school programs. Survey research was utilized
as a vehicle for examining these characteristics to provide a better understanding of the alternative education programs that exist within the State.

The design of this study utilized a descriptive survey to collect data on the characteristics of secondary alternative schools within the State of New Jersey. Surveys assist the researcher in determining the incidences of a characteristic in a target group, their distribution or frequency, as well as their possible relationship to other variables (Krathwohl, 1998). This study utilized qualitative descriptive statistics to collect, compile, analyze, present, and compare information based on the completed surveys in order to provide the reader with an understanding of how the sources of data translate into an interpretation of data.

As delineated through the review of the literature, the survey was developed to collect information in four areas:

1. Program information (including data regarding program evaluation);
2. Student information;
3. Staffing;
A total of 57 surveys of the 81 that were mailed were returned for a response rate of 71 percent.

Review of the Findings and Conclusions

The results are based on the responses made on the survey instrument as they are analyzed and presented in Chapter IV. The discussion and presentation of the results will follow the same format covering the four areas as listed above. In the discussion of these findings the researcher will, whenever possible, make a comparison to the relevant review of the research for both frequency and effectiveness of the characteristic.

Program Information Findings

This area included 21 survey questions soliciting general information regarding program characteristics as delineated through the review of the literature. They incorporated characteristics regarding the administration, type and location of program, number of students, funding, availability of social and medical services, and graduation and completion rates (see appendix B). This section also included questions regarding program evaluation.

According to Barr and Parrett (1997), "alternative schools have served as research and development centers for pioneering innovative practice in public education" (p.17) since their beginning. This section of the survey describes
these characteristics as they exist within the State of New Jersey for the 1999-2000 school year.

The first question of the survey collects data on the supervision or administration of the alternative school. Of the 57 completed surveys, 56 (98%) responded to this question. Twenty reported a Principal (36%) directly supervised the daily operations of the program; 10 (18%) reported a Vice-Principal; 14 (25%) reported a Director; 7 (13%) reported a Supervisor; and 5 (9%) reported 'Other' which included Administrator, Chairperson, Coordinator, Head Teacher, and Unit Leader. Overall, the results indicate that most alternative school programs are administered by a Principal (see Figure 1).

The results also indicate that alternative programs in the State of New Jersey have been in operation, on average, for 8.2 years. These findings are consistent with the research in that alternative schools have been growing in record numbers, being widely accepted as the most available opition for at-risk youth, and have begun their operation within the past 10 years (Barr & Parrett, 2001, Larg & Sletton 2002, NDPC/N 2003).

Throughout the literature the need for a shared vision and mission is stressed for a program to achieve effectiveness. Lange and Sletton (2002) and Kellymayer
(1995) stated that alternative programs should be distinct in the selection of their mission. Alternative schools that have a clear purpose and mission stand a better chance of succeeding. School's with no purpose or mission run the risk of becoming a mere 'dumping ground' for troubled children (Rayvid, 1994).

Many define mission as the process whereby students, parents, and teachers collaborate and reach consensus on the schools' goals and objectives, which in turn, affords them the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential (Peglin & Fager, 1997, Barr & Parret, 1997).

Regardless of the time necessary to achieve and develop a substantive mission for an alternative school, it is time well spent when all participants agree on what they expect to achieve and work diligently to monitor progress.

When asked to describe the schools mission or purpose, 48.04% of the survey completers responded. When grouped for similar responses, 16(33%). reported a mission statement that led solely to completing a high school diploma. Twelve (25%) of the responses indicated a mission statement that dealt with offering alternatives to finishing high school for at-risk or disaffected students and 10(21%) of the responses indicated a mission statement that suggested behavior changes as a goal of the program.
In reviewing the data regarding the type of programs, the majority, 49 (86%) reported that they were a full-time program that maintained a full-time schedule (40/70%) with hours of operation that usually ranged during the regularly scheduled school day. However, it should be noted that 10 (18%) reported evening and combination of daytime and evening hours of operation. Only 4 (7%) of the programs reported that they offer summer programs. It should be noted here that this researcher could not find available research dealing with types of programs and operational issues such as schedule, hours of operation, or alternative schools offering summer programs.

In reviewing the data on the location of alternative schools all 57 (100%) survey completers responded to the question. Twenty (35%) of the programs reported their alternative schools operate in a separate school building, followed by 16 (28%) programs that reported that they operate in a school-within-a-school. Seven (12%) reported being located in a non-school facility, 6 (11%) in a county vocational school, 5 (9%) in a regional high school, and 4 (7%) on a college campus. Five (9%) indicated ‘other’ as a location. Barr and Parrett (2001) best summarize this finding in the literature by stating that:
"In a very real sense, effective at-risk programs must personalize learning and help to insulate students from the negative factors and influences of traditional schools; they must serve to incubate student learning and growth. Alternative education programs emphasize the importance of small, personalized learning environments" (p. 76).

Overall, the programs in the state of New Jersey in the 1999-2000 school year reflected this trend in that most programs operated separately from the traditional day programs.

Ultimately the goal of any high school program is to provide students the opportunity for success in an ever-changing world by graduating with a high school diploma. Lehr and Lange (2000), in comparing at-risk and not at-risk students, found that at-risk students attending alternative schools reported that their school "encouraged a broad goal for students to succeed in life" and "students reported that an important goal of the school was to provide a second chance" (p. 14). Overall, the at-risk students attending alternative schools reported a variety of goals, fewer barriers to achieving their goals, and more positive feelings toward school.
When asked if students who complete the program receive a regular high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), 54 (98%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Fifty-three (98%) reported that students receive a regular high school diploma. One response (2%) reported that students receive a regular high school diploma or may choose to prepare for and complete the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) Test. One program reported that the program is only a transition program whereby students return to the sending high school for graduation. Three responses were left blank indicating no response. Overall the results indicate, as established in the literature review, that most programs assist the student in securing a regular high school diploma.

In light of the research on high school completion rates, the enormous cost of dropping out on personal and societal levels, and the economic and quality of life concerns, the questions concerning graduation and program completion rates are invariably the most significant questions of the study.

As surveyed, 56 (98%) of the 57 survey completers responded to the question regarding program completion rates. As discussed previously, one program is a transition-only program, and therefore students do not
graduate; rather they return to the sending school upon completion.

The results indicated that alternative schools graduate, on average, 18 students per year with a standard deviation of 19.6. Due to the variety of programs, resources, program size and funding indicative across the available research, the range of graduates from 1 to 88 is not only understandable, but reflective of this research.

Overall, the results of the 56 survey completers indicate that 983 students graduated from these alternative school programs in the State of New Jersey for the 1999-2000 school year. The New Jersey State department of Education reports that 74,420 total students graduated from all public high schools for 1999-2000 school year. The 56 survey completers who completed this survey question equal 1.3% of this total number of graduates (New Jersey State Department of Education, 2004).

Similarly, alternative schools also struggle to lessen dropout rates. Faeshola and Slavin (1998) conducted a review of alternative dropout prevention programs and college attendance programs for students placed at-risk. They found that programs that conducted rigorous evaluations, many times over, had a substantial impact on improving dropout rates. It was clear they report, that when these approaches
are intensive, comprehensive, and built around positive expectations, these interventions are successful in improving school completion and college attendance rates (Lister, 1994; Fanhola & Slavin, 1998).

As the data indicates, 45(79%) of the 57 respondents answered the question regarding the percentage of dropout rates. They reported a range of 0 to 55 percent dropout rates and a mean of 12% with a standard deviation of 11. In reviewing the literature there were no available data on the percentage of dropout rates in alternative programs that could be utilized for comparison.

As reviewed, given the accepted variables throughout the research in trying to improve completion rates in alternative school programs, effective evaluation methods are indicated as the best approach to improving program effectiveness. Quinn and Kurtherford (1998) report there are several indicators that should be utilized measure increases in attendance, achievement, graduation rate, parental involvement, and overall program effectiveness.

Question number 10 pertained to data collected regarding open or fixed enrollment policies of the alternative school. Fifty-seven (100%) of the respondents completed this question. As the data portrayed, 49(86%) of the programs responding have an open enrollment policy.
wherein students may enroll throughout the school year. This is consistent with the literature, in that Kelmeyer, 1995, 1998; Raywid, 1996; 1999a; 2002; Barr and Parrett, 1997; Black, 1997; Pizzell and Raywid, 1997; Paglin and Fager, 1997; Lange, 1998; 2002; Lange and Lehr, 1998; May and Copeland, 1998; Lehr and Lange 2000, all recommend that enrollment be open to the student on an as needed basis. Eight (14%) reported a 'fixed' enrollment, wherein students may enroll only at predetermined periods.

Across the research there is discussion of how important it is for the student to choose the alternative program. To every degree possible the program should be the choice of the student to participate. Although many programs do and should, have entrance and acceptance requirements, participation should be strictly voluntary on the part of the student, hopefully with input and support from family. The same observation applies to the staff and teachers. They should be highly motivated and trained in the various techniques for dealing with this population.

Barr and Parrett (2001) summarize this finding best in stating that:

For maximum success, at-risk programs should be developed and made available both to teachers and students who have the opportunity to choose to
participate. For at-risk youth, the element of choice affords considerable power toward stimulating their desire to be in school and, once there, the willingness to learn. (p.61)

All 57(100%) survey completers responded to this question of voluntary or involuntary participation. As the data indicated, 46(81%) of the respondents reported that the basis for the selection of students is 'Voluntary-interviews/admissions criteria determine acceptance to the program'. Eighteen (32%) indicated 'Involuntary - students assigned by school or district', 1(2%) indicated 'Voluntary - everyone accepted who applies and 10(18%) indicated 'other' as a selection process. Again, this finding is consistent with the literature that has revealed that participation in an alternative program should be voluntary, and there should be a selection process for enrollment.

Eighteen of the 57 responding programs selected both the Voluntary - interviews/admission criteria determine acceptance to program and Involuntary - students assigned by school or district responses, for an overall total of 65 responses. This finding is also found in the literature describing programs similar to Raywid's (1994) Type II category, wherein students are 'assigned' or 'sentenced' to
the program as a last resort before expulsion. Additionally, this is also reflective of many 'zero tolerance' automatic student removal policies implemented in the State of New Jersey.

In discussing the data on the program size, the researchers suggest that the program should be small enough to provide for individual instruction and foster community spirit and social interaction. The "Research has consistently found that students at small schools are less alienated than students in large schools - and this positive effect is especially strong for students labeled 'at-risk'" (Raywid & Oshiyama, 2000, p. 2). Inclusion of small schools research is viewed as an essential practice in the formulation of alternative schools and programs. In discussing the small schools movement, Nowaczewski (2003) stated "Small schools research unequivocally demonstrates that small schools are a powerful force in reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates" (p.36). Smaller schools and alternative programs Raywid (2002) suggested, are synonymous, and are much more successful at retaining students until graduation.

As the data collected indicates, 51(91%) of the survey completers responded to this question of program size. Consistent with the literature of Raywid (1999). Kellymayer
(1995), (1999), and Barr and Parrett (2001), alternative schools that reflect the research on small schools and programs are more successful in educating at-risk students. The mean student enrollment that alternative schools in the State of New Jersey were designed to serve during the 1999-2000 school year was 53 students. Given the standard deviation of 35.1, it can be concluded that alternative schools during the 1999-2000 school year were designed to enroll between 18 and 88 students, a finding consistent with the research.

The survey also elicited data regarding enrollment. In summary, the enrollment data for 53 alternative schools that responded to this survey question indicate 2,179 full-time (1,226 male/953 female) students and 195 part-time (91 male/104 female) students for a total of 2,374 students enrolled as of June 2000. Twenty-three (42%) of the respondents reported that they had a waiting list for student enrollment in the alternative program. Of these 23 programs that reported they have a waiting list, 18 reported a specific number of students that were on the waiting list. The range of students on their waiting list was from 0 to 30 students with a mean of 8 and a standard deviation of 7.3.
An often cited need in the planning of an alternative school program is ability to provide child care services for at-risk students who have had children. The literature indicates that this service serves two purposes. First, that it provide the student-parent with the necessary child care so that they may continue with their education and not be at a greater risk of dropping out. Second, many research studies as cited in Barr and Parrett (2001) indicated that early intervention for children of at-risk parents assists in reversing the trend of poor school performance. This early intervention also exposes the parent and child to a wider variety of parenting, health and social services that might otherwise not be taken advantage of.

In this regard the data does not reflect this cited need in the literature in that 49(86%) of the programs responding reported that they did not offer day-care services. Only 8(14%) reported that they offer day-care services. Of the 8 that reported day-care services available, the range in age, when translated into months, ranged from newborn to 5.3 years old. One program reported '3 years and older'. Seven (87.5%) of the 8 programs offering day-care services reported that parenting classes were required of students. It should also be noted that 3(37.5%) of the 8 programs reported that they maintained a
waiting list for their day-care program with a mean of 7.3 students on the waiting list.

As previously stated, a common theme that is prevalent throughout the literature on alternative schools is the incorporation of the higher order needs such as the psycho-social, self-actualization, and emotional aspects of the at-risk student. Most of the programs reviewed utilize a 'student-centered approach' as an integral aspect of the learning environment. Successful programs are ones that build individual strengths and self-confidence, stress individual interests and learning styles, account for student needs and desires, encourage coping and conflict resolution skills, as well as, academic goals and achievements. Gaston (1987) stated that: "the structure of a school most suitable for retaining potential dropouts is one that shows a great deal of care and concern for the student" (p. 3). In light of this finding, counseling services are viewed as an essential element of a successful alternative program.

In reviewing the literature in this regard, Battin-Pearson and Newcomb (2000) suggest that, although it is clear from previous research that poor academic achievement is important in the etiology of dropping out, other psychological variables such as family socialization,
deviant affiliation, personal deviance and structural strains may also be associated with dropping out of school. Thus, the need for effective counseling services available in school and referrals to community agencies are viewed as effective elements of alternative programs.

As the ranking of results indicate, over 60% of the respondents reported offering multiple counseling services provided by a school social worker, substance abuse coordinator, school nurse, guidance counselor, and school psychologist respectively. The lowest reported counseling services reported were peer mentors, required individual meetings, and adult mentors.

As indicated throughout the literature, there exist higher incidences of 'high risk behaviors' by alternative school students. It is suggested that programs incorporate wellness activities that stress: active student assistance and peer counseling; health programs that deal with practical issues such as the effects of tobacco, alcohol and drugs; relevant substance abuse programs; sex education and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases; and legal and life skills education (Quinn, Osher, Hoffman & Hanley, 1998).

Although 57(10%) of the respondents answered this survey question, only 10(18%) of the respondents reported
the availability of health care services for students in addition to a school nurse. Again, in this regard, this data on the availability of health care does not reflect the review of the literature which suggests that comprehensive health care programs be 'school-based' and available for all alternative education students.

In a review of the literature, Black (1997) found that students enrolled in alternative schools had common characteristics in that they:
1. previously attended large schools;
2. were placed in low or nonacademic tracks;
3. associated with dropouts or other at-risk students;
4. viewed teachers and principals as unsupportive; and
5. did not participate in school related or extra-curricular activities.

Black further suggested, that higher incidences of participation in extracurricular activities be afforded the at-risk alternative education student at as high a level as would be found in a traditional high school setting.

Similarly, as stated, Fuller and Sabatino (1996) conducted a study of alternative high school students and found that over 62% had histories of poor academic achievement, in addition to other predominant characteristics such as poor attendance, anti-social
behaviors, negative school attitudes, and truancy. Additionally, they found that 42% of the students did not participate in any extracurricular activities. Participation in extracurricular activities, they observed, assists the student in staying connected to the school community and afforded them higher incidences of success, especially when measuring this success in the areas other than academics.

Fifty-seven (100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. As the data portrays, 38 (67%) of respondents reported the availability of extracurricular activities for alternative program students. It should also be noted that of the 39 respondents that indicated the availability of extracurricular activities, 100 percent provided examples of available programs. Nineteen (33%) of the respondents reported not having extracurricular activities.

In light of this observation, having only 67 percent of programs offering extracurricular activities available for students would be viewed as significantly less than ideal given the high level of suggestions throughout the literature.
Evaluation and Funding Findings

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on evaluation data and funding relative to the program surveyed for the school year 1999-2000.

One of the often-heard criticisms of the alternative school model has been the lack of meaningful and comprehensive evaluation. As early as 1981, Parrett, in discussing the variety and infancy of alternative programs, called for a comprehensive evaluation in that every program should "submit itself to a rigorous internal and external evaluation as well as continuous self-examination of instructional and operational procedures and outcomes" (p. 4).

Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) conducted a survey of state initiatives on alternative education and found that: "Only 12 (31.6%) states reported the existence of procedures for program evaluation and/or monitoring compliance."

Consistent with the findings in the literature regarding the lack of comprehensive evaluation, only 30 (53%) of the survey respondents reported that there is a formal method of evaluation incorporated into the Program. Twenty-seven (47%) reported that no formal method of evaluation existed in the program (see Table 11 and Figure 12).
Of the 30 (53%) of the programs that reported that they have a formal method of evaluation incorporated into the alternative program, 22 (73%) reported that they have evaluated the program during the 1999-2000 school year. Eight (27%) of the thirty yes respondents reported that they had not conducted a formal program evaluation.

Kellymayer (1995) stated that due to the variety of programs, research designs, and methodologies employed in studying achievement in alternative schools, "the results are often confusing and contradictory" (p.128).

Barr and Parrett (1997) offered a formula for success when developing "essential elements of alternative schools that have been identified, analyzed, evaluated, and replicated with such success that districts and communities can have total confidence in their investment in an alternative school" (p.32).

To achieve an effective evaluation, Reimer and Cash (2003) proposed another model called a 'level one analysis', which offers 10 major categories or essential elements of effective practice for alternative schools developed by the NDPC/N. This evaluation model, Reimer and Cash (2003) stated, "serves as a framework and guide to begin the process of assessing areas of strength and weakness" (p.30).
The data collected from this evaluation instrument provides the program with a comprehensive view "for performance of both process and outcome measure effectiveness" (p. 30).

In reviewing the data collected on the criteria or measurement indicators that are utilized to determine program effectiveness 52(91%) of the survey completers responded to this question. The frequency of responses to this question were grouped for likeness and tallied. They were then converted to a percentage of the 52 responders. Responses with a frequency rate of 10 or more are listed in order of the most frequently reported:

1. Graduation and completion rates (33/64%);
2. Attendance rates (24/46%);
3. Improved grades and credit attainment (24/46%);
4. Student, teacher, Parent, planning team formal and informal surveys (16/31%);
5. Improved behavior, attitudes and lower incidences of suspensions (14/27%);
6. Dropout and student retention rates (13/25%);
7. Statewide HSPT/HSFA testing rates (13/25%);
8. New student applications and referrals (10/19%).

Although many of the noted experts in this area would purport differing criteria referenced list in addressing
program evaluation, the above set of criteria are found in various forms throughout the literature as effective models of evaluation for successful alternative schools (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Kellymayer, 1995, 1998; Lehr & Lange, 2000). Moreover, Barr and Parrett (2001) suggested that many of the recent restructuring efforts taking place throughout public secondary education have their roots in effective practices that have been developed, implemented and evaluated in alternative schools. This belief is based on the fact that modern alternative schools have been evaluated more extensively than any other type of public school and these programs have implemented and refined their programs based on this feedback. Additionally, many of these same researchers feel that the stigma of programs being less rigorous no longer applies given the vast array of research-based conclusions from the alternative school movement.

Although funding is addressed anecdotally throughout the literature, most notably in program evaluations that mention the need for more enhanced and consistent funding sources, and, the zero tolerance policies that mandate alternative programs, there appears to be very little study done on the funding of alternative education programs. Tindall (1988) identified funding as one of the five key components of successful alternative programs. In light of
this observation, it was determined that it would be
beneficial for this study to, at least peripherally,
collect data on the funding sources within the State of New
Jersey.

Given the aging of the baby-boomer population with
fewer adults having school aged children, the escalating
rise in property taxes that fund education, combined with
the public’s perception to fund only the minimum
requirements for educational programs, at-risk programs
have to compete more than ever for the necessary financing
(Smink & Stank, 1992; Reimer & Cash, 2003).

In seeking information on funding sources all 57(100%)
survey completers responded to this question. Forty-four
(77%) of the respondents reported that they received state
and local funding. It should be noted that 13 programs
indicated or the 'other sources' line that they are tuition
based, charging each sending district a fixed per-pupil
amount per year in tuition.

In light of the funding system in the State of New
Jersey, it can be stated that all 57(100%) respondents
receive state and local aid either directly or indirectly
by charging tuition to the sending district wherein the
student is domiciled. The sending district would then
receive the state and local aid for that student. However,
it should be noted that the tuition for the student can be more or less than the state and local aid or more or less than the normal per student cost for that sending district. Three of the programs reported tuition figures in the amounts of $10,000, $9985, and $9000. It should be noted that the state average per pupil cost for the school year 1999-2000 was $12,066 for vocational pupils and $8,805 for regular per pupil costs (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004).

Seven (12%) of the programs reported receiving federal funding, 8 (14%) reported receiving grants, and 3 (5%) reported receiving funding through school-business partnerships. Of the 21 (37%) responses that selected other sources of funding, 13 reported tuition as funding, 7 reported regular state and local funding, and 1 reported, in addition to state and local funding, that monies are raised by ‘fund raising events and activities’.

Again given the lack of available research on alternative school funding, it is difficult to make any interpretative statements from this data. However, it is useful in describing the various programs throughout the state that most funding sources are from state and local aid.

In requesting information on the three most needed
additional resources to improve services. 51 (89%) of the survey completers responded and listed one additional resource most needed on line one. Forty-Nine (86%) responded by listing two additional resources most needed on lines 1 and 2 prioritized. Thirty-two (56%) responded by listing three additional resources on all three lines prioritized. Overall, additional counseling, social services, teaching staff, school-to-work staff, stable funding sources and facilities rank as the most needed additional services requested.

Student Findings

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on students attending alternative schools for the school year 1999-2000, regarding age, ethnicity, free or reduced lunch status, and the type of geographic area they reside in.

As the data indicates, the mean age range for students enrolled in alternative schools in the State of New Jersey for the 1999-2000 school year ranged from 15 years old to 21 years old. This finding was fairly typical, as reflected in the review of literature, and similar to the traditional day school programs throughout the state.

In discussing the ethnic diversity of alternative schools it is important to note the demographic data
available as a result of the 2000 Census, and it becomes
clearer that a whole new world is emerging in our midst.
Every year our schools and classrooms contain increasing
numbers of poor, single-parent, non-english speaking, and
culturally different children. Additionally, a large
majority of parents of school-aged children work leading to
a whole generation of 'latch-key' homes wherein the
children return from school with no adult supervision
(Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002).

In discussing this data this researcher has included
the Department of Education, Fall Report (New Jersey
Department of Education, 2004) data available for the 1999-
2000 school year as it pertains to the percentages of
ethnic populations throughout the State for this school
year.

1. Fifty (88%) of the survey completers responded to this
ethnicity question with the following frequencies:

2. Fifty (88%) reported incidences of African American
students enrolled with a mean of 77% African American
enrollment. The state average equals 18%.

3. Fifty (88%) reported incidences of Caucasian students
enrolled with a mean of 46% Caucasian enrollment. The
state average equals 60%.
4. Fourteen (25%) reported incidences of Asian enrollment with a mean of 1% Asian enrollment. The state average equals 6%.

5. Forty-six (81%) reported incidences of Hispanic students enrolled with a mean of 16% Hispanic enrollment. The state average equals 15%.

6. Eleven (19%) reported incidences of 'Other' students enrolled with a mean of 1% 'Other' students enrolled. The state data does not include an 'Other' category, although for statistical purposes it does list the category of American Indian/Alaskan Native at .002%.

In comparing the information above it appears that the percentage of African Americans attending the 50 responding programs are enrolled at a higher rate than the state average. This is indicative of the available research on the at-risk and drop-out rate percentages when discussing this minority group. However, the percentage of Hispanic students attending the 50 responding programs is 1% lower than the percentage of state enrollment for this sub-group. This data does not reflect the trend in the literature for this minority group which usually indicates significant increases in the amount of Hispanic students at-risk of, or have recently dropped-out. Although Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provansnik, Sen, and Tobin, (2004) stated in
a recent report for the NCES, *The Condition of Education* 2003, that "the percentage of Hispanic youth neither enrolled nor working was lower than the percentages of black and American Indian youth" (p.vi).

In discussing the effects poverty on education this same report (Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, and Tobin, 2004) summarized the literature best in stating:

The poverty level of students and their schools presents a challenge to students' educational progress and achievement. Children with family risk factors, such as poverty, start kindergarten with fewer reading and mathematics skills and end the 3rd grade with smaller gains. In the early part of the decade, high school students living in low-income families dropped out of school at six times the rate of their peers from high-income families. (p.x1)

This observation is reflected throughout the literature and is most often cited when discussing the need for alternative schools.

In collecting data on poverty levels the survey requested respondents to check the statement that best describes their student population who are receiving free or reduced lunch. The free or reduced lunch data was selected for three reasons:
1. for the availability of the information;
2. for the commonality of the data in that all school
districts in this state utilize the same form; and
3. for the standardization in the federal formula utilized
to calculate qualification of free and reduced lunch.

The selections were presented in the form of a
percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch and
included the choices of 0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75% and 76-100%.
Fifty-one (89%) of the 57 programs responding completed
this question. The responses indicated, 21 (17%) reported
that 0-25% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.
Twelve (21%) of the programs reported that 26-50% of
students receive free or reduced lunch and 8 (14%) report
that 51-75% of the students receive free or reduced lunch.
Ten (18%) of the programs reported that 76-100% of the
students receive free or reduced lunch. Again in reviewing
the data supplied in the Fall Report for the school year
1999-2000, the state average of students receiving free or
reduced lunch is 23% (New Jersey State Department of

By adding the number of programs that report a
percentage that is over the 25% item, it can be determined
that at least 61% of the programs who responded to this
question, have student populations above the state average
(23%) of students who receive free or reduced lunch. This characteristic is reflective of the literature in that alternative schools have traditionally served a student population at-risk of school failure due to socioeconomic factors.

Moreover, it should also be noted here that the literature review also indicates that, based upon the above discussion of poverty levels, alternative programs are effective and should be more available in urban and rural areas to address the particular needs of this at-risk population (Kellymayer, 1995; 1999; Lang & Sletton, 1999, 2002). To collect data on this characteristic the survey requested the responder to indicate whether most of the students reside in an urban, suburban or rural area. The question was structured specifically to seek information on where the majority of students reside and not the type of area where the program is located. All 57 (100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Twenty-seven (47%) of the respondents reported that most of their students reside in an urban area, 24 (42%) reported a suburban area, and 6 (11%) reported a rural area. Overall, that data reflects the types of areas discussed in the review of the literature.
Staffing Findings

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on the staffing in alternative schools for the school year 1999-2000. This data includes information on the selection, type, and amount of staff, and the availability, frequency and benefits of staff development activities.

Again, Quinn and Rutherford (1998), reported that a highly trained and caring staff may be the single most determining factor in whether an alternative education student should decide to return to the regular school setting. Similarly, in discussing the role that teachers play in the alternative education setting, Barr and Parrett (1997; 2001) found that teachers who are well-trained, caring, and able to set high standards, and who are responsive to the particular needs of the at-risk student produce better achievement outcomes. Conversely, they found, teachers who are involuntarily assigned to teach in alternative education programs are less likely to produce positive outcomes. Given these observations in the literature, the survey elicited data on how staff members
are selected, as well as, the amount of school personnel available.

Regarding teacher selection, all 57 (100%) of the program respondents completed this question. Sixteen (28%) reported that staff members are assigned by the district. Twenty-eight (49%) reported that staff members are selected based on specific program criteria. Twenty-six (46%) reported that staff members are recruited from local teacher preparation programs, newspaper ads, etc. Ten (18%) of the programs reported ‘Other’ as a means of staff member selection and reflected the recruited, selected and interviewed response. Overall, most programs reported that teachers are selected based on specific criteria and that they are recruited based on their ability and willingness to serve.

Throughout the literature it is suggested that when teachers are fully involved in the shared vision of the school and display a high level of care for their students, the achievement level of the students tend to increase (Barr and Parrett, 2001). In researching the domains of competence and caring levels in teacher training programs Noddings (1999) stated that:

students have needs that go beyond the demands of the subject matter; and some of these needs must be met by
teachers. As persons, students should be treated with care and respect, and as young, inexperienced people they need to learn how to treat others with care and respect. But a paradox arises. Current demands for improved student test scores drive teachers to ignore many of the social and emotional needs of the students. (p.216)

Teachers and staff in alternative programs that are successful, are able develop a framework that is responsive to the needs of at-risk student by promoting a proactive and empathic school culture that is non-traditional, caring and academically challenging. A caring teacher Noddings (1999) stated, "must be prepared to respond to the needs of students as both learners of subject matter and young persons learning to live meaningful lives" (p.219). This view is similar to the earlier work of Glasser (1992), who advocated that a quality school allows students to succeed by encouraging them to work together in a warm and supportive environment without coercion.

In collecting data on the amount, position, and type of school personnel, all 57 survey completers responded. Thirty-five reported a full-time administrator and 22 (39%) reported a part-time administrator. Those programs reporting full-time certified teachers (45/79%) averaged
4.7 teachers per program with a standard deviation of 3.4 and a range of 1 to 18. Twenty-nine (51%) programs reported using part-time certified teachers at an average of 4.6 per program with a standard deviation of 4.6 and a range of 4 to 22. It should also be noted that 17 of the responding programs reported utilizing a combination of both full and part-time certified teachers. Thirty-one (54%) respondents reported utilizing full-time non-certified staff and 24 (42%) reported utilizing part-time non-certified staff.

Twenty-seven (47%) of the programs responding reported utilizing full-time professional support staff and 31 reported utilizing part-time professional support staff. Again, many programs reported utilizing a combination of both full- and part-time staff.

In addressing the additional special needs of the at-risk student, many alternative school programs collaborate with outside district agencies to offer the student an array of services that might not otherwise be available. These partnerships work in concert with the school staff and students to provide supportive services such as drug and alcohol counseling, psychological counseling, parenting services, and job placement, with the goal of assisting the student to stay in school and ultimately graduate (Barr & Parrett, 2001).
Of the responding programs, 6 (11%) and 11 (19%) reported utilizing full and part-time volunteers respectively. As the range for part-time volunteers indicated, one respondent reported using 25 volunteers on a part-time basis. In the 'please explain' section this respondent indicated that “many outside speakers throughout the school year and partnerships with community agencies” as the explanation of this figure.

Five (9%) of the programs responding reported utilizing full-time outside agency staff and 9 (16%) reported utilizing part-time outside agency staff for a total of 14 programs. Eleven of these programs provided an explanation which, to provide examples, included volunteers, interns and speakers from local colleges and community agencies, as well as, representatives from various law enforcement agencies offering outreach programs to schools.

Effective community partnerships, collaborations and affiliations, provide learning opportunities, improve delivery of health and social services, improve the shared responsibilities of parents and citizens, and increase workforce readiness and college placements by collectively supporting students to remain in school and ultimately graduate with a high school diploma. Whether it be
counseling or health care, internships or opportunities for civic engagement, the providing of relevant community connections are an essential characteristic of successful alternative school programs.

Given the strong mention of the need for affiliations with outside agencies throughout the literature, having only fourteen respondents reporting any affiliation could be viewed as low. However, since there was no baseline data available at this time it would be difficult to make any comparison regarding the programs within the State of New Jersey. Ultimately, schools and institutions don't change adolescents' relationships do. To this end the research indicates, that by pursuing vital partnerships and by involving the community of caring relationships, we create the potential for change and success in which our secondary students will flourish.

Staff-development and in-service activities that are frequent and relevant in dealing with the needs of the alternative program are discussed throughout the literature. In discussing the educational and professional development of teachers for the next century, Linda Darling-Hammond (1999) summarized the effort best in stating that:
it is increasingly clear that schools must become dramatically more successful with a wide range of learners if many more citizens are to acquire the sophisticated skills they need to participate in a knowledge-based society. Most reformers now agree that increasing teachers’ expertise and effectiveness is critical to the success of ongoing efforts to reform American education. (p. 221)

In a Phi Delta Kappa study of Youth-at-Risk, Prymier and Gandsneder (1986) found that many teachers did not employ effective instructional methods when dealing with at-risk students. Ashcroft (1999) discussed in his research that alternative school teachers reported they were not adequately prepared to deal with the issues they encountered with their students in their training. Although nearly all of the teachers reported that they received training, they reported that it was inadequate given the social, legal, and psychological issues of their students.

In reviewing the data collected by the survey, 55(96%) of the 57 comitters responded to this question. Fifty-one (93%) of the 55 responded 'yes' professional development activities are available and 4(7%) responded 'no' they are not available. Of the 51 programs reporting professional development, 41(75%) reported the frequency of professional development activities.

Additionally, of the 51 respondents reporting professional development activities, 48(87%) responded as to whether the professional development is beneficial. Of these 48 respondents, 40(83%) indicated 'yes', the professional development is beneficial and 8(17%) indicated 'no', it is not beneficial. As indicated, 27(45%) of these 48 of the respondents provided a response in the 'please explain' section and are sampled as follows (if applicable, frequency of response in parenthesis):

For the 'yes' responders, professional development is beneficial:
1. Crisis Prevention/Intervention, Teaching Techniques, Technology Training;(3)
2. Gives staff a forum in which to give and receive feedback;(3)
3. They are designed to meet staff needs;(2)
4. We plan our own-purchase books, video workshops, & visit other schools on professional days; (2)

5. Provides skills to help staff to assist students with non-school related issues which impacts on their academic performance;

6. Curriculum updates, review strategies to improve student behavior.

For the ‘no’ responders, professional development is not available;

1. They are designed for "regular" high school students and teachers; (3)

2. It is not consistent or planned;

3. Most are "jargon" or "knee-jerk" depending on the problem of the week.

Professional staff development that is comprehensive and relevant is viewed as one of the most critical characteristics in effective alternative programs for at-risk students. Caring and demanding teachers, who believe that their students can learn and support them with high expectations, improve their teaching practice significantly when provided with highly focused staff development. This outcome is especially effective when the training is relevant to the best practices in teaching at-risk
students. In working with the alternative student, teachers need to be able to align curriculum to their student’s individual learning needs, maintain high standards and be competent in assessing student progress towards these standards. Effective teachers need to use a variety of strategies to engage students and incorporate the use of technology to improve student learning (What matters most: Teaching for America’s Future, 1996. Barr and Parrett, 2001, Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform, 2004).

Overall, of the 87% of the respondents who indicated that they take part in staff development, 80% of them reported that the staff development is beneficial. It should be noted that when viewed as 40 of the total number of 57 responding programs that stated that staff development is reported as beneficial, the overall number drops to 70%. Although significant, the literature review would indicate that nothing less than all (100%) of the programs should be engaged in a comprehensive and relevant program of staff development. The value of various trends and pedagogy may sometimes be debated, the research concludes, but the need for comprehensive professional staff development relevant to the teacher’s practice has never been in question, except for there not being enough
Curriculum Findings

This section of the survey elicited general descriptive information on curriculum in alternative schools for the school year 1999-2000 relative to type, atmosphere, offerings, class size, and methods of evaluation and assessment.

Throughout the review of literature it is suggested that the curriculum, method of instruction, and management should be different than the traditional or home school. Kleiner, Porch, and Farris, (2002) reported that over 91% of alternative schools maintained a curriculum that lead to securing a regular high school diploma, most in non-traditional settings. This provides the school with a focus and a unique identity. The curriculum should be affective, providing for personal, emotional and academic development. It should also be individualized, emphasizing the at-risk student's needs on both the cognitive and affective levels. Additionally, the curriculum should incorporate the use of technology whenever possible. At-risk students in alternative programs are sometimes separated from the technology services of the traditional or home school.
because of the cost involved. (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002; Lange & Sletton, 2002). Barr and Parrett (1997) synthesized this view in stating:

How instruction is delivered often becomes the deciding factor in the learning process. Central to this concept is the commitment on the part of the alternative school staff to provide a menu of instructional opportunities. The small size of these schools, low pupil-teacher ratios, voluntary enrollment of students and a focus on addressing individual needs create a framework for delivering a personalized, flexible, and relevant course of study—a course of study that offers many students their first opportunity to connect with educators in a serious learning partnership. (p.43)

This learning partnership includes, but is not limited to: a focus on individual needs; opportunities for accelerated learning; creative use of time; diverse instructional practices; and the involvement of students and community as resources.

In discussing the types of curriculum offered, either traditional or non-traditional, the review of the literature indicates that there is a close connection to
the type of program offered. More traditional programs tend to offer more traditional types of study, while programs that describe themselves as non-traditional tend to offer more non-traditional courses of study (Kellmayer 1995, 1998; Raywid, 1994, 2001). In collecting data on the type of curriculum offered, all fifty-seven (100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Of this total thirty-four (60%) reported that the curriculum is best described as 'traditional' and twenty-three (40%) reported the curriculum as 'non-traditional.'

In order to further define the program characteristic, the survey elicited data on whether the program would describe itself as 'highly structured', 'moderately structured', or 'without structure.' Fifty-five (96%) of the 57 survey completers responded to this question. Twenty (36%) reported that their program is highly structured. This would be reflective of what Raywid (1994) and Kellmayer (1998) classified as type II programs that are highly structured and sometimes referred to as 'soft jails.' Thirty-four (62%) of the respondents indicated that the school or program is moderately structured and 1(2%) of the respondents reported that the program is without structure. These two former descriptions are reflective of Raywid's classification of Type I 'innovative schools' and
possibly Type III 'remedial programs,' depending on the curricular approach, that tend to utilize more non-traditional courses of study.

The survey also elicited data regarding the types of course offerings in order to further define the characteristics of programs throughout the State of New Jersey. All 57 (100%) respondents completed this question. As Table 23 indicates, Traditional High School Courses (47/82%) and School-to-Work experiences (44/77%) ranked the highest in the type of curriculum offered. Competency/Proficiency Based (41/72%) and Remedial Instruction (41/72%) followed with equal amounts of responses. Special Education (31/54%) and Community Service (26/46%) followed by ranking fifth and sixth in the amount of responses. Lastly, Accelerated Learning (17/30%) and Other (4/7%) received the least amount of responses respectively.

Kellymayer (1998) summarized the research in this regard in cautioning alternative programs to go beyond being "alternative in name only" (p.26), and challenged them to offer meaningful and relevant non-traditional approaches in program planning, practice and curriculum. It should be noted, in this regard, that although most programs have described themselves as offering traditional
approaches, the data does suggest that many do so in non-traditional formats. This is indicative of the majority of the programs that selected four or more responses to this question. It should also be noted that the four programs that listed 'other' supplied approaches such as college courses, field trips, electives, independent study and high interest activities as being offered.

Overall, the data indicated that although the programs appear to reflect the literature by offering "non-traditional" approaches to instruction, it is difficult to determine from the information provided how 'innovative' these approaches are.

A common characteristic that is prevalent throughout the literature on alternative schools is the incorporation of research on small class size. This characteristic by and far, is one of the costliest, and many-times controversial issues throughout American education. Piddle and Berliner (Winter, 2002), in a report as part of the In Pursuit of Better Schools: What Research Says series summarized the studies and research in stating:

Theories such as these suggest that the small-class environment is structurally different from that of the large class and that this structural difference generates conditions favoring education. Among others,
within small classes we should expect to find less time spent on management, higher levels of student participation, more time spent on instruction, more teacher support for learning, and more positive relations among students. And these processes should lead both to greater subject-matter learning and to more positive attitudes about education among students. And again, these effects should be greater for students from groups that are traditionally disadvantaged for education and more substantial in the early grades, when students are just learning to cope with classrooms. (p.23)

However, this position is not without debate. Biddle & Berliner (2002) report that, although diminishing, the view that there are not conclusive enough results to require the significant expenditures of public monies required to support small schools and smaller class sizes, still exist among many education policy makers and politicians. Raywid (2002) criticized this position and, further proposed, that not only do small schools and classes matter, but we also need to provide the "conditions, controls, and supports" (p.48) to sustain their success.

Thus there exists significant agreement that the inclusion of research on small schools and small class size are essential characteristics in the formulation of
alternative schools and programs. The program size should be small enough to provide for individual instruction and foster community spirit and social interaction. "Research has consistently found that students at small schools are less alienated than students in large schools- and this positive effect is especially strong for students labeled 'at-risk'." (Raywid & Oshiyoma, 2000, p. 2).

In reviewing the data all 57(100%) of the survey completers responded to this question. Five (9%) reported the smallest class size of 1-5 average students and 7(12%) reported 16-20 average students per class, which was the highest class size reported, since none of the respondents selected the 21-25 and 26-30 class size indicators. The majority of the selections were for the 6-10 average class size with 26(49%) selected and the 11-15 average class size with 17(30%) selected.

The responses to this question are significant since the issue of class size is discussed throughout the literature. Many of the researchers have indicated that alternative schools utilize the plethora of research-based information on the benefits of small class size. This generally means that alternative schools allow no more than 15 students per class and that the program/schools remain less than 200 students (Barr & Parrett, 1997). Other
researchers suggest even smaller class sizes of not more than 10 students per class (Kellymeyer, 1995, 1999; Lange and Sletton, 1995, 2002).

Achilles, Finn, and Paté-Bain (2002) would suggest that, as a result of this available research, the most promising characteristic of small schools and class sizes is the benefits for minority, low-income, at-risk students, who have traditionally not been served well in large schools. Vander Ark (2002) and Raywid (2000) indicated that small schools maintain lower dropout rates, significantly fewer incidences of school violence, and lower discipline reports—especially for those students at-risk of school failure and prone to violence. Wasley (2002) viewed the emergence of the small schools research as the signature characteristics of the alternative school movement, which is stated, developed from the need of school communities to provide for a caring environment while being able to increase the achievement levels of the students. Overall, the data provided does reflect the literature in the area of small class size for at-risk students.

The last question of the survey collected data on the types of assessment utilized by the alternative program. All 57 (100%) respondents completed this question, selecting an average of 5 responses per respondent with a range of
1.8, a median of 5 and a mode of 4. As indicated by Table 23, grades, report cards, student-teacher conferences, parent-teacher conferences and written reports by the teacher are the five most frequently utilized methods to evaluate student progress for the alternative programs that responded to the survey. Portfolio assessment was selected by 23 (40%) of the respondents as a method of student evaluation. Self evaluation, peer group evaluation, and other methods were the least frequently utilized methods of student evaluation.

In reviewing the literature, many researchers cite the need for alternative forms of student assessment. However, very little empirical data exists on the specific forms or types of assessments that are recommended for alternative at-risk students. Raywid (2001), Barr and Parrett (2001), and Lange and Sletton (2002), do cite the need for alternative schools to incorporate alternate forms of student assessment which include, but are not limited to the following: technology and work skills; portfolio assessment; basic skills; community involvement awareness; grades and attendance; completed credits towards graduation; in addition to standardized testing.

To simply measure student achievement and success in alternative settings by a high-stakes test continues the
ineffective and inefficient process that has contributed to their students being at-risk in the first place. In this regard many reflect the view that the forms of assessment should be as diverse and reflective as are the goals and objectives of the program and not be connected to any standardized form of assessment (Florida Department of Education, 2002; Hadderman 2002; Kellnayer 1998; King, Silvey, Holliday, & Johnson, 1998).

Summary

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to describe the characteristics of alternative secondary schools within the State of New Jersey, the types of programs, the students they serve, the curriculum, the staff, and any evaluative data these programs may utilize to measure their effectiveness. This study utilized survey research as a vehicle for examining these characteristics to provide a better understanding of the alternative education programs that exist within the State. The review of the literature afforded the opportunity to compare these characteristics to the available research to determine their frequency and effectiveness.

After an in-depth review of the literature on the characteristics of alternative schools, and a thorough presentation of the data collected, it is this researcher's
position that alternative schools continue to be the most promising strategy at the secondary level for preventing at-risk students from dropping out of school. From the early alternatives that grew from the humanism movement in the sixties, to the thematic academies that exist in the present, alternative programs continue to grow as a viable and available option for completing high school. Mary Anne Raywid (1994), who is a pioneer in this field stated:

Amid all the current talk of school restructuring, alternatives are the clearest example we have of what a restructured school might look like. They represent our most definitive departure from the programmatic, organizational and behavioral regularities that inhibit school reform. Moreover, many of the reforms currently pursued in traditional schools—downsizing the high school, pursuing a focus or theme, students and teacher choice, making the school a community, empowering staff, active learner engagement, authentic assessment—are practices that alternative schools pioneered. (p.26)

Although there does exist a vast array of alternative programs with varying goals and objectives, it is possible
to offer an operational framework on the characteristics of successful programs. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N):

"There does appear to be a consistent profile of the most successful schools. The profile includes the following characteristics:

1. a maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10;
2. a small student base not exceeding 250 students;
   a clearly stated mission and discipline code;
3. a caring faculty with continual staff development;
4. a school staff having high expectations for student achievement;
5. a learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style;
6. a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support; and
7. a total commitment to have each student be a success. (NDPC/N, 2004)

Barr and Garrett (2001) would suggest adding voluntary participation on the part of staff and students; a shared mission/vision and governance by the stakeholders; relevant curriculum; and, a comprehensive and ongoing process of program evaluation to this list of characteristics. It can
be stated with a level of confidence that based on the review of the literature and the data as compiled and analyzed, alternative programs within the State of New Jersey reflect these effective characteristics.

To summarize, Farris-Berg (2003), in discussing the proliferation of alternative schools in the State of Minnesota, stated so poignantly:

Alternative education programs can alter the culture and basic ground rules that can stifle change in public education. For three decades their pioneers have been creating personalized, flexible learning environments for students who are 'at-risk' of not completing high school. And their tremendous growth and high levels of student and parent satisfaction help make the case for having a conscious policy of creating new and different schools to improve student outcomes. (p. 2)

Education in our country, like many of our treasured institutions, has a long history of experimenting with various methodologies and pedagogies in order to find the best, most efficient, cost effective way to educate its citizens. And while the present trend continues to stress accountability, core content standards, and state-wide tests are developed to determine who should graduate, and
for that matter, who should teach, the alternative movement continues to flourish.

Given the often perceived disconnectedness of the alternative movement from the mainstream educational establishment, and the wider call for restructuring throughout the educational community, the NDPC/N (2004) is on target in stating: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if each traditional school could share these characteristics and operate with the best practices outlined above—maybe there would be no need for alternative schools" (p. 4).

At the onset of this study it was indicated that alternative schools operate outside of, and are often disconnected from, the wider educational community. As the study continued, this observation was widespread throughout the literature review and the collected data. In light of this observation, and this researcher's intuition as an alternative education administrator, it was a goal to conduct a study that provided the wider educational community with a fuller understanding and appreciation of what secondary alternative programs are and what they do to make them successful. By providing this comprehensive description on the characteristics of alternative school programs, this researcher believes that the goal, as stated in Chapter I, that "This study is significant because it
provides students, parents, educators, community leaders and the State Department of Education with data that can inform them regarding various program philosophies, practices, structures, goals and outcomes has been met.

It is this researcher's sincere hope that this contribution bridges this gap and assists the alternative school movement in providing at-risk students with the vital resources for educational success and improved quality of life. Lastly, this researcher has provided the following recommendations that indicate areas in need of further review based upon this comprehensive study.

Recommendations for Future Research

In reviewing the available research on the characteristics of alternative schools in the State of New Jersey, it is apparent that based on the descriptors and data provided, there exists a need to expand the study of these characteristics. For the purpose of clarity and identification, this researcher provides the following list of characteristics, based on a review of the available research on alternative education, as a framework for future studies. The characteristics are listed in the same format areas of program information (including data regarding program evaluation); student information; staffing; and, curriculum.
With regards to program information, there exists a need to further study the following areas:

1. Operational issues such as the type of schedule, hours of operation, and the offering of extended year or summer programs for alternative at-risk students.

2. In the review of the literature, there did not exist any research to utilize as baseline data for comparison in the presentation of dropout and students' retention rates.

3. There were no available studies on the need and availability of day-care services for youth who have left or are at-risk of leaving high school due to pregnancy or parenting issues.

4. Only ten (18%) of the respondents reported the availability of health care services for students in addition to a school nurse. Again, in this regard, this data on the availability of health care does not reflect the review of the literature which suggests that comprehensive health care programs be 'school-based' and available for all alternative education students. Further study is indicated here to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this finding.

5. In light of the need for extracurricular activities available for alternative students, having only 67 percent of programs offering extracurricular activities
would be viewed as significantly less than ideal and in need of further study.

6. Although improving, given the research provided by the NEPC/N (2002) and Barr and Parrett (2001), there continues to be a need for a comprehensive and on-going process of program evaluation. Further, given that only 53% of the responding programs reported a formal method of evaluation, there exists a need for further research in this regard.

7. In regards to the funding of alternative schools, there is a lack of available research in order to make any interpretative statements from the data. Thus, it is recommended that this area be researched further.

With regards to student information, there exists a need to further study the following area:

1. There are considerable differences across the research in defining the methods of dropout and out-of-school youth data. It becomes further complicated when discussing the research data on ethnic and socioeconomic factors contributing to the increases in these rates.

With regards to staffing, there exists a need to further study the following areas:

1. In discussing the staffing types and numbers, the researchers suggest including a multitude of affiliations
with community agencies to improve the delivery of services for at-risk students enrolled in alternative schools. The data indicates that only 14 programs reported an affiliation with a community agency. This low number suggests the need for further study to determine issues and areas for possible improvement.

2. In discussing the characteristic of staff development, the data suggest that only 70% reported an ongoing in-service program. Thus, comprehensive, relevant and ongoing staff development programs for alternative schools are areas suggested for further study.

With regards to curriculum, there exists a need to further study the following areas:

1. Although many programs defined themselves as 'non-traditional' and 'innovative,' this researcher could only locate one study published by the NDPC/N in 2004 that offers a 'best practices' and 'effective strategies' guide developed specifically for alternative schools. Thus, it is suggested that additional research be conducted to determine the most effective strategies for program and curriculum development specifically for alternative schools.

2. Similarly, in reviewing the literature, many researchers cite the need for alternative forms of student
assessment. However, very little empirical data exists on the specific forms and types of assessments that are recommended for alternative at-risk students.
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Evaluators Publications.


Appendix A

Letter to Alternative School Administrator
Dear Program Administrator/Director:

I am the principal of the KAS Prep Alternative Program at the above named school in Hudson County and I am very much aware of how limited your time and resources are. As an Alternative Educator, I administer your student population challenges you to continuously renew your efforts to provide successful and effective programs. With this in mind, I thoughtfully request your assistance.

Presently, I am attempting to complete research on Alternative Secondary School Programs as my dissertation topic for the Ed.D degree at Seton Hall University. The purpose of this study is to survey school administrators regarding the Characteristics of Secondary Alternative Schools in the State of New Jersey. This research will assist in developing a more comprehensive description of available programs and serve as the baseline data for comparison to related research on Secondary Alternative School Programs. The survey has been pilot tested for clarity, accuracy of questions, suggestions, and completion time.

Based on the listing provided by the New Jersey State Department of Education, I am surveying every Secondary Alternative School Program in the state. There are 36 questions to this survey, which takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. All information will be kept in the strictest confidence. The survey has been randomly assigned a code for retrieval purposes only and, as such, will not be used in the analysis and presentation of data.

Although your participation is strictly voluntary, I would be most grateful to you for completing the survey and returning it in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. I would be more than willing to send you a copy of the summary results, an option you may elect by checking the box on page one of the survey.

Thank you and please be assured of my best wishes for a healthy and restful summer vacation.

Sincerely,

James P. Dunne
Researcher

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research adequately safeguards the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of the office is (973) 794-4909.

Completion and return of the survey will indicate that respondents understand the research and agree to participate in the study.

Mission Statement: To provide a quality educational environment which prepares our community of learners to succeed in an ever changing world.

OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL • TELEPHONE (201) 854-5900 • FAX (201) 854-8894

North Hudson Center 10th Street
North Bergen, New Jersey 07047

Jersey City Center Earl W. Byrd School
506 Montgomery Street
Jersey City, New Jersey 07304

Hudson Center Harrison High School
1 North 5th Street
Harrison, New Jersey 07029

Belleville Center
301 Bridge Road
Belleville, New Jersey 07109
Appendix B

Alternative Education Survey
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

Characteristics of Secondary Alternative School Programs in the State of New Jersey
Directions

The purpose of this study is to survey school administrators regarding the Characteristics of Secondary Alternative Schools in the State of New Jersey. It will assist in developing a more comprehensive description of available programs and serve as the baseline data for comparison to related research on Secondary Alternative School Programs. The survey has been pilot tested for clarity, accuracy of questions, suggestions, and completion time.

Please respond to each question by checking the appropriate response. In some instances you will be requested to provide a brief reply. All information will be kept in the strictest confidence. The survey has been randomly assigned a code for retrieval purposes only; it will not be used in the analysis and presentation of the data. When completed, please mail the survey in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

Although your participation is strictly voluntary, I would be most grateful to you for completing the survey.

Please return the completed survey to:

James P. Doran
Hudson County Schools of Technology
2000 85th Street
North Bergen, NJ 07047-4738

☐ Check here if you wish to receive a summary of the survey results.

Thank You
for your time and cooperation!
Program Information

1. Please indicate the title of the on-site administrator who directly supervises the day-to-day operations of the program:

( ) Principal  ( ) Vice-Principal  ( ) Director
( ) Supervisor  ( ) Other (please define title) ____________________________

2. How many years has the school/program been in operation? __________________

3. Briefly describe your school's mission or purpose: __________________________

4. Type of program: Full-time ( ) Part-time ( )

5. Please indicate the type of schedule you currently use:

Full-Day ( )  Full-year ( )
Half-day ( )  Half-year ( )
Evening ( )

6. What are the hours of operation that your program is available? __________________

Days? (please circle) M T W Th F Sa Su

7. Does your program operate during the summer months? Yes ______ No ______

8. Where is your school or program located? (check all that apply)

( ) in a separate school building  ( ) in a school-within-a-school
( ) in a non-school facility  ( ) on a local college campus
( ) in a county vocational school  ( ) within a regional high school
( ) other (please explain) ____________________________

9. Students completing the program:

_______ receive a regular high School Diploma

_______ prepare for and complete the GED Examination

10. Enrollment in the program is:

_______ Open (students may enroll at any time during the school year)

_______ Fixed (students may enroll only at certain intervals, i.e. beginning of semester)
11. Please indicate the selection process you use to select students:

____ Voluntary – everyone accepted who applies
____ Voluntary – interviews/admission criteria determine acceptance to program
____ Involuntary – students assigned by school or district
____ Other – please describe ________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

12. Indicate the maximum number of students the school or program was designed to serve:____

13. Indicate the number of students enrolled as of June 2000 (include graduates or program completers):

    Full-time    _________ Male    _________ Female
    Part-time    _________ Male    _________ Female

14. Does your program have a waiting list for enrollment? _____ Yes _____ No
    If yes, how many students in 1999-2000 remained on the waiting list for enrollment? ______

15. Are there daycare services available for the children of students? _____ Yes _____ No
    If yes, for what ages __________________________
    How many children can your facility accommodate? _____
    Is a Parenting Skills Course required for student parents? _____ Yes _____ No
    During the past school year have you had a waiting list for daycare services? _____ Yes _____ No
    If yes, how many? ______

16. Counseling services are available to students in the following areas. (check all that apply)

    ( ) School Social worker    ( ) required group meeting    ( ) required individual meetings
    ( ) School Psychologist    ( ) Substance Abuse Co. (SAC)    ( ) Guidance Counselor
    ( ) Peer Mentors    ( ) Adult Mentors    ( ) Special Education Service
    ( ) School Nurse    ( ) Other (please explain) __________________________
17. Is there ongoing availability of comprehensive medical health care services for students?  
   ____ Yes  ____ No  

18. Are there extracurricular activities available for students?  ____ Yes  ____ No  
   If yes, please give examples:  

19. Indicate the amount of graduates or program completers for your school during: 1999-2000.  


21. Is there a formal method of evaluation incorporated into the Program?  ____ Yes  ____ No  
   If yes, have you evaluated your program in order to measure its effectiveness during the 1999-2000 school year?  ____ Yes  ____ No  

22. What criteria or measurement indicators are used to determining the effectiveness of your program?  

23. Funding for your program is derived from the following sources: (check all that apply)  
   ____ local & state  ____ federal  ____ grants  ____ school-business partnerships  
   ____ other sources, please explain:  

24. The three additional resources most needed to improve the services provided to the students are:  
   (please prioritize)  
   1.  
   2.  
   3.  

Student Information

25. Please indicate the age range of the students attending your program:
   from age _____ to age _____

26. In the form of a percentage, please indicate the ethnicity of the student population:
   African American   _____
   Caucasian          _____
   Asian              _____
   Hispanic           _____
   Other              _____

27. Check the statement that best describes your current student population:
   ____ 0-25 % of the students receive free or reduced lunch
   ____ 26-50 % of the students receive free or reduced lunch
   ____ 51-75 % of the students receive free or reduced lunch
   ____ 76-100 % of the students receive free or reduced lunch

28. The area where most of the students reside can be best described as:
   ( ) Urban           ( ) Suburban      ( ) Rural
29. How are staff members selected? (check all that apply)

_____ Assigned by district
_____ Selected based on specific program criteria
_____ Recruited from local teacher preparation programs, newspaper ads, etc.
_____ Other, please explain

30. Please indicate the number of school personnel serving the program during the 1999-2000 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Certified Staff (i.e. Secretary, clerk, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Support (i.e. guidance counselors, social worker, nurse etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers* (i.e. mentors, community resource people, parents etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Agency Workers* (i.e. Social Service Agency personnel, Probation workers, etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please explain

31. Are staff development and in-service activities available to the staff of your program?

_____ Yes _____ No  How often? (i.e. Monthly, Bimonthly)

If yes, are these staff development and in-service activities beneficial to you in meeting the needs of the alternative student?

_____ Yes _____ No

Please explain
CURRICULUM

32. The curriculum is best described as __________ "Traditional" ________ "Non-traditional"

33. Which of the following most clearly describes the school/program atmosphere:

   - Highly structured ( )
   - Moderately structured ( )
   - Without structure ( )

34. Please indicate the types of curriculum offered at your school; (please check all that apply)

   - Accelerated learning ( )
   - Art, Dance, Music ( )
   - Competency/Proficiency based ( )
   - Traditional High School Courses ( )
   - Remedial Instruction ( )
   - School-to-work experiences ( )
   - Community Service ( )
   - Special Education ( )
   - Other ____________________________

35. Indicate the average class size for your program:

   - 0-5 ( )
   - 6-10 ( )
   - 16-20 ( )
   - 21-25 ( )
   - 26-30 ( )
   - 11-15 ( )
   - Other ____________________________

36. Indicate the methods used to evaluate student progress in your program; (please check all that apply)

   - Grades ( )
   - Report cards ( )
   - Written reports by teacher ( )
   - Parent-teacher conferences ( )
   - Peer group evaluation ( )
   - Student-teacher conferences ( )
   - Self-evaluation ( )
   - Portfolio ( )
   - *Other ____________________________

   *Please explain ____________________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. 1000000