An Analysis of Public Alternative Education Schools and Programs in the State of New Jersey: A Comparison to National Data

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AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SCHOOLS
AND PROGRAMS IN THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY: A COMPARISON TO
NATIONAL DATA

BY

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of the Requirements for the Degree
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submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Public Alternative Education Schools and Programs in the State of New Jersey: A Comparison to National Data

Providing educational services to students at-risk of education failure within an alternative school or program setting has a more than forty year history in our nation's education system. Education leaders and researchers have been examining such schools and programs for a better understanding of factors such as, the availability of alternative schools/programs, enrollment, and services provided to enrolled students. The only national study to date examining alternative schools and programs for at-risk students in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education (NCES). The NCES study, Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, established a national profile of alternative schools and programs specific to factors of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration with other agencies. The purpose of this study was to establish a profile for New Jersey's alternative schools and programs paralleling the factors examined in the national profile and to provide comparisons to the national profile. Using the survey instrument from the NCES study, surveys were distributed to New Jersey alternative school and program administrators. The returned surveys provided data for the establishment of a state profile. This profile also provided for comparison to the national profile. Overall, the findings indicate that there are both similarities and differences across the New Jersey and National profiles, including the northeast region, for the aforementioned factors.
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Dr. Leonisa Ardizzone and I first met in a child study team meeting so many years ago and continue to remain connected through the public school. Dr. Ardizzone’s passion for education, instruction, and educational leadership has added enthusiasm to my work. In spite of how much she does in the various areas of her life she was willing to take on being part of my dissertation committee. Dr. Ardizzone’s willingness and commitment to this process is, and always will be, very much appreciated. Tanti grazie.

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DEDICATION

It is with heartfelt gratitude that I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, husband, and children.

Mom and Dad, you have raised me in a fashion that gave me the core values of independence, strength, courage, and an overall spirit of determination. This achievement would have never been possible without these.

Mom, you have always been a source of strength and a driving force in my ambitions. Not only have you stood behind me but many times stood alongside me. I am, and always will be, grateful for all you have given me. There is a tradition we have from Grandma, to you, and me, for raising successive generations to be stronger and more determined in pursuit of our dreams while embracing and maintaining our family values. I hope to follow in your example and continue this with my children. I’m lucky to have the best mom – thank you.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of the Study

All across the United States educational demands and accountability measures are increasing. While efforts within schools are being made to narrow gaps, schools are still facing the challenge of meeting the needs of non-traditional learners, discipline demands, and disaffected youth. Students presenting with these challenges have traditionally been identified as at-risk youth and equated with high school dropouts.

Within the past decade, there has been a rise in the number of alternative education programs serving at-risk youth (Foley & Pang, 2006). Across the United States between the 1993-1994 school year and the 1997-1998 school year, a forty-seven percent increase in alternative education programs was observed (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). Concern among the public, educators, and policymakers about student achievement balanced alongside safe schools, violence and vandalism, and the high school dropout rate has brought greater attention to and interest in alternative education programs.

A growing number of students do not find success in traditional high school programs. These students have dissimilar capacities and motivations for learning. A mismatch between learner and learning system should prompt schools to question whether the schools are at risk of failing students (Kerka, 2003). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that about five out of every 100 students enrolled in high school in October 2000 left school before October 2001 without successfully completing a high school program. The NCES also notes that from 1990 through 2001,
between 347,000 and 544,000 students in grades 10 through 12 left school each year without successfully completing a high school program. Student dropouts tend to fall into general patterns of academic underachievement and social and emotional problems. These students generally perform below grade level and have problems making social adjustments. A perception by students that the standard high school lacks relevance is the usual reason given for dropping out (Knutson & College, 2006).

Public high schools are providing instruction to regular education students based on a comprehensive curriculum aligned to core curriculum content standards. The students receive a prescribed number of courses and credits necessary to fulfill the requirements of a state endorsed high school diploma. While there is an increasing trend to reach the diverse needs of learners, public high schools across the country in general require that the student fit the level of service. Included in this is a tradition of separate period classes in the major content areas of English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education and Health, and Foreign Language alongside electives in subject areas such as art, music, and technology.

Curricular offerings of the standardized, traditional high schools in the United States tend to be isolated subject matters taught with an emphasis on rote memory and with a student management system focusing on compliance with authority. This model of a high school dates back to a time when the factory was the major metaphor for organizations (Knutson & College, 2006). High schools typically run the risk of becoming large, impersonal environments. The classroom setting is largely designed to meet instructional demands of providing subject content and lecturing continues to be a primary instructional method. The primary mode of performance assessment continues
to be tests and exams with little emphasis on alternative forms of assessment. As greater attention is given to the needs of the subject, there is less attention given to the needs of the individual.

High school status completion rates are noted at 87.6% for students across the United States (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, and Chapman, 2007). Simultaneously, 12.4% of United States high school students are leaving school without a successful outcome (Laird, J. et. al, 2007). Dropping out of school is often the result of a long process of disengagement. Such disengagement is predisposed by significant risk factors including: low academic achievement; low educational expectations; retention/over-age for grade; learning disability or emotional disturbance; parenthood; poor attendance; misbehavior and early aggression (Hammond, Linton, Smink & Drew, 2007). While all individual status variables such as age, disability/ability, and gender cannot be altered, there is recognition of alterable variables such as behavior, retention, engagement/sense of belonging, grades and absenteeism (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Alternative education programs are geared toward addressing and reducing students’ alterable variables impacting upon education performance and retention in school.

Concern among the public, educators, and policymakers about at-risk youth, high school graduation rates, violence, weapons and drugs on school campuses balanced with concern about sending disruptive and potentially dangerous students away from school has spawned an increased interest in alternative education programs and schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Alternative education programs are often viewed as individualized opportunities designed to meet the educational needs for youth identified as at-risk for school failure (Foley & Pang, 2006). The nature of an alternative education
program is to offer students personal and individualized support, both academically and emotionally. Programs vary as they strive to implement a more individualized approach to education and the curriculum for students who have not experienced success in the traditional school setting (Skiba, 2001). Because of their uniqueness, administrators face the challenge of designing and implementing programs capable of meeting the diverse needs of the at-risk student population. Among these considerations, administrators would be wise to turn their attention to program characteristics to enhance the services within alternative schools and programs (Sommerville & McDonald, 2002).

A major goal of alternative schooling is to provide opportunities for non-traditional students, those students who are not succeeding in the traditional classroom setting, to obtain academic credit, career exploration, and vocational work experience, among teacher and peer support. A major goal of these activities is for the student to obtain a high school diploma. A student-centered approach to learning is the emphasis of such programming. The nature of an alternative high school is to offer students very personal and individualized support, both academically and emotionally. Sensitivity to the variety and diverse needs of the learners and their learning style is key. While learning self-discipline and responsibility are also emphasized, the students learn about their individual potential, learning style, and strengths. These strengths are built upon to develop a level of success whereby the students become invested in future growth.

Academic support is typically ongoing and extensive in alternative schooling. A primary focus of alternative schooling is to help students remain in school and focus their attention toward receiving a high school diploma by becoming motivated and by experiencing success. A variety of teaching strategies, an environment of acceptance,
respect for differences and the freedom to make choices give students a sense of community and ownership.

While some alternative schools and programs are designed for the gifted and talented, most public alternative education programs are geared toward the non-traditional learner, or at-risk student. These students are learners who are having difficulties in the traditional school environment. Typically, these students are identified as the behaviorally challenged, potential dropouts, and/or pregnant teens/adolescent parents. Though, there is an added dimension of students who are experiencing learning challenges yet do no fit the level of disability needed for special education services. Add to this a level of students who are experiencing emotional and/or family life stressors that impede learning, manifesting in poor attendance, habitual truancy, and academic lags, and there are multiple variations of diverse needs for the adolescent learners.

The National Center on Educational Statistics, for the academic year 2000-2001, reported 10,900 public alternative schools and programs, serving 612,000 students, were operating in the United States, demonstrating a threefold increase since 1997-1998 (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002). With the growth of alternative schools, questions remain about the characteristics of these programs, how the students are being educated, and the extent to which students’ needs are being served in varying alternative settings across the nation (Lehr & Lange, 2003 in Hughes & Adra, 2006).

American economic leaders have identified the characteristics they value in the workplace as oral and written communication skills, problem solving ability, self-management capacity, and a cooperative working style (Knutson & College, 2006). A
large, impersonal environment resembling a factory model tends not to produce those outcomes. Furthermore, such an environment leaves too much latitude for the at-risk student to continue on an unsuccessful academic path, dropping out, and risking longer term societal repercussions.

As our nation grows to recognize the diverse needs of learners, the student challenges rendering them as disaffected or at-risk, the drop-out rates and its costly societal effects, and the characteristics desirable in the workplace, educators are turning some attention to establishing programming in which all students can experience growth and success. Providing an alternative education program within public schooling is a consideration that educators and educational leaders are examining. Toward such consideration, educational leaders are turning attention to the examination of alternative education program characteristics, types of programs, and program accountability.

Statement of the Problem

There is an increasing concern within the education community that as the at-risk population grows existing educational programs and schools are becoming less adept at addressing the needs of the nontraditional learners. Some educational leaders are responding accordingly and nontraditional programs are increasing in number and size. While public education is experiencing a rise in alternative schooling, the practices and characteristics of these programs are not so widely known.

Alternative education has been evolving largely in practice and not particularly through theory (Raywid, 2001). Such a difference in the evolution of alternative education has brought forth advantages and disadvantages for alternative education programs. Alternative education programs have been criticized for development and
implementation without sound planning, adequate staffing, and other organizational flaws (Raywid, 2001). Additionally, as alternative education programs grow in servicing at-risk youth populations, there is speculation that there is a shift in focus away from program factors not specifically tied to educational accomplishment (Raywid, 2001) and more toward resolving social ills. A shift in educational resources, including funding to support alternative education programs, often receives a critical eye.

A review of the literature indicates few studies have been conducted to determine the characteristics and effectiveness of alternative education programs, particularly in New Jersey (Doran, 2005). Given the challenge of keeping students in school and a rise in dropout prevention efforts, it is reasonable to examine alternative measures aimed at keeping students in school, increasing academic achievement, and reducing behavioral challenges. Prevatt and Kelly (2003) conducted a thorough review of the research evaluating dropout prevention programs and found that few studies have evaluated programs, their effectiveness, and that schools are not adopting research based prevention programs. School efforts and responses aimed at reducing dropouts are designed and developed at the local level, and effective intervention strategies may not be getting noted or replicated.

The usefulness and value of alternative schools is worth questioning. Questioning and examining the characteristics of alternative education schools and programs can provide information of practices and establish a framework of what alternative schooling is offering in the state of New Jersey. This information can then be applied to help educators better determine services that can be approximated or even replicated for the advancement of all learners.
Purpose of the Study

This study will determine and establish a framework of characteristics of alternative education schools and programs for at-risk students in the state of New Jersey. A specific focus is upon program characteristics of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. This study will also provide a comparison of these characteristics to the national norms established by the National Center for Education Statistics for public alternative education schools and programs for at-risk youth. Accordingly, the research questions are:

1. What are the program characteristics of New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs for: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration?

2. How do New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs compare to the national statistics studied, identified, and published by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education?

The collection, analysis, and comparison of data will serve to provide information to educational leaders seeking to establish alternative education schools/programs or improve upon practices for already established alternative education schools/programs. This study will serve the New Jersey Department of Education with information regarding practices being implemented within the States alternative schools/programs and how these schools/programs in New Jersey compare to those across the nation and in the northeast region.
Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to describe program characteristics of public alternative education schools and programs in the State of New Jersey and to establish a comparison of New Jersey's public alternative education schools and programs to the national statistics available through the National Center for Education Statistics.

This information may help educational leaders, the New Jersey State Department of Education, policy makers, community leaders, educators, students, and parents. Educational leaders may be better informed of characteristics for the design, development, and implementation of alternative education programs. Educators may use the information to guide new strategies or expand upon existing strategies within already existing alternative programs. For the State Department of Education this study is significant in that it establishes information on public alternative education school and program characteristics, as well as a comparison to national data, is beneficial for making educational policy decisions and recommendations. State and local policy decisions can also be enhanced with this information. Moreover, students and parents/guardians may be better able to explore educational options and make informed decisions regarding the future of their education.

Furthermore, educational leaders and policy makers, within and outside New Jersey, may find this research helpful when considering alternative school or program development. In this regard, educational leaders may be better able to identify varied approaches, policy initiatives, and programming options for helping at-risk students. Educational leaders may also find this research helpful in addressing what kind of alternative school or program should be offered to a district’s at-risk student population.
This assessment can occur alongside developing and implementing programming that coordinates the characteristics of availability and enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and collaboration with agencies outside the school.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the public alternative education schools and programs within the State of New Jersey as compiled by way of personal contact by this researcher with all twenty-one of New Jersey’s Department of Education County Offices. Within each County Office, an Education Specialist, contacted by telephone during the fall and winter of 2007, supplied information of alternative education programs within the county. No existing centralized data base of New Jersey’s alternative education schools and programs was available. Only public alternative education schools dealing with at-risk students were surveyed.

In addition, the only national data available for public alternative education schools and programs for at-risk students are from 2002. These data reflect national trends during the 2000-2001 school year. The New Jersey data collected will reflect the 2007-2008 school year. Therefore, comparisons will span a seven year difference. Any shifts or changes in national trends over the last seven years are unknown. The comparison of more current state data to seven year old national data presents a limitation.

Lastly, 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.
Organization of the Study

This study, An Analysis of Public Alternative Schools and Programs in the State of New Jersey: A Comparison to National Data, is provided within five chapters.

Chapter I provides an introduction of the study, including background and definition of the problem along with definitions of terms. This introduction also states the purpose and significance of the study. Limitations of the study are also identified.

Chapter II provides for a comprehensive review of the literature on the program characteristics of alternative education schools. Incorporated in this review is a brief history of the development of alternative education programs and students that attend alternative programs. Alternative education program characteristics for enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum, and collaboration is also included. The review of the literature provides a theoretical basis and relevant research.

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

Chapter IV offers presentation of data collected and the analysis of these findings through statistical techniques. This analysis of data will provide an understanding of how the sources of data translate into an interpretation of data.

Lastly, Chapter V provides a discussion and summary of the data previously presented. This discussion offers implications for alternative education programs and recommendations for future study.
Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to clarify terms used in this study:

*Alternative education program/Alternative schools:*

According to Education Week’s online glossary (these terms broadly refer 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.

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 Individual 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).

The National Center for Education Statistics, as noted by Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (2002) identify alternative schools as being “usually housed in a separate facility where students are removed from regular schools”, and alternative programs defined as being “usually housed within regular schools” (p. 3).
At-risk Student:

Describes a student with socioeconomic challenges, such as poverty or susceptibility to 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 (Education Week's online glossary). 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 (Doran, 2005).

Dropout:

For the purposes of research, the U. S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (Laird, J., DeBell, M., and Chapman, C., 2006) describes the dropout in two ways, the event dropout and the status dropout. The event dropout descriptor represents students who left school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or its equivalent such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. The status dropout descriptor represents individuals who are not enrolled in high school and who do not have a high school credential, irrespective of when they dropped out.

Dropout Rate:

The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (1996) reports three types of dropout rates:

1. event rates reflect the percentage of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school;
2. Status rates reflect the percentage of the population in a given age range who have not finished high school or are not enrolled in school at one point in time; and

3. Cohort rates reflect the percentage of a single group of students who drop out over time.

Evidence Standards:

The US Department of Education (2008) identifies evidence standards through studies that provide the strongest evidence of effects: primarily well conducted randomized controlled trials and regression discontinuity studies, and secondarily quasi-experimental studies of especially strong design.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA):

Functional Behavioral Assessment is a systemic process for describing problem behavior, identifying environmental factors and events that predict problem behavior, and guiding the development of behavior support plans (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 20).

High School Completion Rate:

Defines the percentage of students who graduate within four years of entering high school.

Individual Education Program (IEP):

An IEP is a special education program that is tailored to each student’s needs according to his/her disability(s) (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 10).

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.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive review of the literature on the characteristics of alternative education schools and programs. Included in this review of the literature are program characteristics for availability and enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. These characteristics are reviewed for an examination of services in alternative education schools and programs as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) relevant to the population of at-risk students.

History of Alternative Education

For the 2000-2001 school year, 10,900 public alternative schools and programs serving 612,000 students were operating in the United States with 39 percent of public school districts administering at least one alternative school or program for at risk students (Kleiner et al., 2002, iii). The growth of these programs turns attention to the evolution of alternative education. In so doing, it is appropriate to review the historical role of alternative education as a basis for understanding these programs, learning of their original purpose, and understanding how and why they have evolved and grown. It is also noteworthy that the history of alternative education programs presents a critical view of these schools and programs.

Alternative education programs have existed outside public education well before gaining recognition within the public school system. They existed for diverse reasons associated with personal, moral, religious or spiritual, intellectual, and/or social
differences and choice. As a matter of choice, parents would elect whether to send their child(ren) to school and the type of schooling the child(ren) would receive. The type of school could be private, religiously affiliated, gifted and talented, or one of social privilege. Over time, the public school movement grew and was to be established as the best system in which to educate America’s youth. This coincided with the growth of our country’s industrial system and industrial revolution. This movement produced a model of schooling based on rote memorization and recitation and was aimed at developing capital for the sake of economic, political, and social advancement.

Early proponents of alternative education, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel, believed education should support a child’s natural growth rather than the demands of society. Similarly, Francis Parker and John Dewey brought forth the progressive education movement, a movement based upon a belief that education should serve the needs of the children. The progressive movement of the 1940’s was replaced by the “cold war era”. The launching of Sputnik in 1957 brought forth a political drive for technological superiority furthering the distance from the progressive movement (Young, 1990).

By the 1960s alternative education had grown into a widespread movement of social and civil rights. The public school system was criticized for being insensitive to minorities and designed for the success of only a chosen few. Mary Ann Raywid (1981) stated schools were “cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions largely indifferent to humanity and the ‘personhood’ of those within them” (p. 551). At a national level, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 emphasized excellence instead of
equity. By the late 1960s the alternative movement was both within and outside the public education system (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Freedom Schools, alternative education programs outside the public education system, were established in the late 1960s to provide quality education to minorities (Tissington, 2006). These schools operated in churches, storefronts or community centers and were intended to give children freedom to learn and freedom from restrictions. Freedom Schools came as a direct response to the uncaring, unresponsive and often oppressive public school system (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The notion that not all students learn or should be expected to learn in the same way was central to these schools. Freedom Schools, though well intended and purposeful, and most early nonpublic alternative education programs had short lifespans (Raywid, 1981; Young, 1990). However, Freedom Schools and other nonpublic alternative education programs inspired reform within the public school system and laid the foundation for the present day alternative program movement.

Free Schools, another non-public schooling alternative beginning in the late 1960s, were considered to be school programs structured in such a way as to allow students to freely explore their natural intellect and curiosity. The Free School Movement focused on discovery learning to seek self-determined fulfillment without controls, consequences, and evaluative measures customary within the public school system. This period has been described as innovative, basing many of the theories on the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and others who viewed children “not as empty vessels, but as ceaselessly active, seeking organisms” (Korn, 1991, p. 22). During this same time,
the public school system began developing alternatives and alternative schooling for the same reasons.

Alternative schooling within the public school movement was characterized as “open schools”. Parent, student, and teacher choice as well as pacing, noncompetitive evaluation, and child-centered curriculum were the design of these nontraditional schools allowing for autonomy in learning without critical evaluation (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Young, 1990 in Tissington, 2006). The open schools movement brought forth a variety of alternative education program models. Included here is a synopsis of the various types of “open schools” alternatives:

1. Schools Without Walls are schools and programs stressing community-based educational experiences. Such schools allow for members of the community to enter the schools to teach and mentor students.

2. Schools Within A School emerged from a process of making large, ineffective schools into smaller school communities. These schools can be based on a particular theme, student interest, or learning community.

3. Multicultural Schools are schools that attempt to integrate culture and ethnicity throughout the curriculum.

4. Continuation Schools are individualized school programs geared to those students in need of remediation and at-risk of failing or dropping out of the regular school program.

5. Learning Centers offer the student special resources and services such as vocational and technical training in addition to academics.
6. Fundamental Schools developed in response to the perceived lack of rigor of the Free Schools. These programs emphasize a back-to-basics approach.

7. Magnet 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 in Doran, 2005).

Given the thrust of new programs developing alongside a societal need for equal educational opportunities, alternative education had begun a new movement in education. Alternative education school growth was rapidly expanding (Raywid, 1981). Another factor contributing to the growth of alternative schooling was a rejection of the conventional views of education in lieu of different, or "alternative visions grounded in a genuine desire to support children’s natural ways of learning and growth" (Miller, 2000, p. 339). Though, this quest for innovation and a student centered approach began to lose momentum in the early 1970s. The emphasis shifted to a more conservative approach as federal education policies began to place greater emphasis on achievement standards. Alternative education schools and programs would soon become more synonymous with "drop-out prevention programs", focusing on remediation over individual growth and creativity.

Within the last decade alternative education programs have reemerged. Though still often associated as a measure of drop-out prevention, alternative education schools and programs 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" (NDPC/C, 2003, p. 2). Yet, due in large part to its flexibility, alternative education faces criticism and is not fully accepted within public
education. Alternative education has never achieved institutional legitimacy (Raywid, 1999).

In spite of criticism, the alternative education movement is increasingly regaining momentum resulting in a proliferation of schools and programs (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Lang & Sletton, 2002; Raywid, 1994). Public schooling was established to bring forth the opportunity for all youth to learn, to achieve an improved quality of life, and to become productive citizens. It should then be the same for students who present as at-risk, given a variety of life's challenges. Just as with regular public schooling, Dynarski (1999) notes, "alternative schooling is not an option, but an absolute requirement in every American community. Alternative schooling opportunities will be needed to accommodate the educational needs of its youth because the traditional school system, and particularly the traditional high school, can no longer serve the needs of the students and their family lifestyles common in the 1990s" (p. 6).

Alternative schooling meets the diverse needs of today's students and their families, as well as the social behaviors required for the youth of our nation to become productive citizens. There is much anecdotal literature about the effectiveness of alternative schools in keeping students in school. Alternative schools have been successful in reducing truancy, improving attitudes toward school, accumulating high school credits, and reducing behavior problems (Cash, 2004). Alternative education schooling also affords the public school system and its leaders a way to fulfill its responsibility to provide equal access to education with the added benefit, for all involved, of reducing the dropout rate. Therefore, it seems to only leave to question what kind of alternative schooling should be designed and made available within the public
school system. Taking a closer look at the characteristics of alternative schools and programs within the public system would serve to establish a framework upon which to design and build alternative schooling.

**Federal Policy**

For more than twenty years educational leaders, policy makers, and federal and state officials have been making efforts to address the dropout rates. Through the National Commission on Excellence in Education the widely accepted report, "A Nation at Risk" (1983), a movement had begun to address the dropout rates as a national problem and priority. By 1990 President George H. Bush proposed the "National Education Goals" through which the National Association of Governors set six Education Goals. Goal number two of these was that all schools should attain a high school graduation rate of 90% by the year 2000 (Gronlund, 1993). In 2002 President George W. Bush signed the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB). This Act is described by the United States 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 NCLB 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 Education, NCLB 2001: Part D, Sec.1401, A.3).

The NCLB Act (2001) mandated that accountability standards and data-driven decision practices constitute the underlying principles driving educational programming.
Alternative education programs and schools were not immune to the requirements of this Act. Such a requirement would reasonably be greeted with varied responses of criticism from educators and educational leaders associated with alternative programs. On the one side would be reactions associated with concern that the accountability measures would be too stringent and not allow latitude for the demonstration of educational gains among students with such diverse and challenging needs. Opposite that would be critics of alternative education with perspectives of the need for accountability for all students' achievement levels and no school or program being immune to such a requirement.

As national educational reform efforts were implemented many within the field of education grew increasingly concerned that such a movement of excellence would widen the gap for already low achieving students and serve as a catalyst for increasing dropouts. The accountability movement is viewed as doing a disservice to public education. Raywid (2001a) notes that due to an emphasis on test scores notably portrayed in the news media as the only measure of success, the public evaluates a school with limited information based on only one measurement indicator.

Critics of alternative education tend to view these schools and programs as lesser than the regular school setting, as having a watered down education, or as mere holding places for the regular school's at-risk youth. Opponents would disagree and critics would likely rely on the accountability standards to settle the debate. However, when accountability measures for student achievement levels are required for all students the question to be raised is not whether the alternative education students' achievement should be measured but what the most appropriate measure is (Hughes, et al., 2006). The push for accountability alongside the increasing challenges of educating students who
exhibit emotional and behavioral challenges leaves schools with little choice but to consider alternative educational options.

*Theoretical Framework*

Alternative education schooling has theoretical and philosophical differences from traditional public schooling yet does not have a specific theoretical frame unto itself. Rather, alternative schools and programs tend not to be rooted in a traditional way of learning and have mixed theoretical and philosophical principles guiding varied teaching methods and instructional approaches. Alternative education has been evolving largely in practice and not particularly through theory (Raywid, 2001). Such a difference in the evolution of alternative education has brought forth advantages, disadvantages, and criticism of alternative schooling.

Upon review of literature and research commonalities of the guiding principles of child/student-centered, progressive, and holistic educational theories are evidenced in approaches to alternative schooling. While the intellectual aspects and identity of the student are primary within traditional schooling, alternative schooling views the student as a whole person, including the emotional, physical, social, and intellectual aspects of the student. Students are engaged in a world as it presents itself, not the world as divided into separate categories or disciplines. Alternative schooling is often distinguished from traditional schooling based on the emphasis upon human development. Alternative schools and programs focus more on the interests and capacities of the developing person than on adult expectations or views of what children need to know and to be able to do (Crain, 2003). Such a developmental perspective is not unfamiliar to educational theory and related movements. As noted by Ron Miller,
Throughout the 200 year history of public schooling, a widely scattered group of critics have pointed out that the education of young human beings should involve much more than simply molding them into future workers or citizens. The Swiss humanitarian Johann Pestalozzi; the American Transcendentalists, Thoreau, Emerson, and Alcott; the founders of “progressive” education, Francis Parker and John Dewey; and pioneers such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, among others, all insisted that education should be understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the developing child (Miller, 2008, 71).

Often reflected in approaches to alternative schooling is the theoretical frame and movement of progressive education initially developed by Francis Parker and John Dewey. John Dewey observed that children take a lively interest in activities outside of school and believed that schools should be places where children also find learning exciting and meaningful (Dewey, 1959, p. 53). As part of this belief emerged a key aspect of progressive education called the projects approach. In the projects approach, Dewey emphasized children’s active engagement in projects such as writing plays and newsletters, building and constructing, conducting experiments, gardening, painting, and cooking. Dewey supported such an emphasis by noting that children learn a great deal of conceptual material through such projects. For instance, students can learn geometry through the design of a garden plot or a kite (Dewey, 1916, 199-202). Through project learning constructive activities students begin to see relevance in their work while satisfying a natural need for creativity and establishing value in learning as a process.
Another theme in progressive education is cooperation and the establishment of a democratic community. Within progressive education, school is considered an instrument of reform of which democratic participation and community mindedness would become essential components. Dewey (1959, p. 39) thought of the best social organization as a cooperative workplace in which students work together on projects that have real meaning to them. Dewey’s ideas had a tremendous impact on American education in the early to mid 1900’s. While his ideas continue to be implemented and debated, mainstream education adopted progressive education in diluted form, limiting evaluation studies and research of progressive education within public education. In its true form, progressive education was the focus of an historical evaluation of educational reform called the Progressive Education Association’s Commission on the Relation of School and College of 1942, more commonly referred to as the Eight Year Study. Through this study, regarded as one of the most rigorous longitudinal studies within education, the Commission examined thousands of graduates from thirty school systems around the United States over an eight year period. These graduates had received waivers from traditional college entrance requirements and had experienced a high school education in a traditional public high school that was willing to shift its pedagogical approach and curriculum away from conventional methods and measures. The graduates were matched with graduates from traditional programs, and characteristics from specific aspects of thinking to social sensitivity were closely tracked and evaluated. The answer was encouraging as the results showed that:

graduates of the Thirty Schools did as well as the comparison group in every measure of scholastic competence, and in many aspects of
development, which are more important than marks, they did better.

The further a school departed from the traditional college preparatory
program, the better was the record of its graduates (Aiken, 1942, 5:xvii).

Non-academic areas in which students in progressive schools outperformed those in
conventional schools included problem solving skills, creativity, intellectual curiosity,
drive and resourcefulness. These students were even more likely to become leaders on
their campuses.

Alternative schooling, borrowing developmental and progressive perspectives,
highlights a regard for all students as individuals. Traditional schools, while recognizing
students as individual people, tend to be dominated by a standards movement in which all
students are expected to meet the same measurable goals within the same time frame
tending to place an emphasis on same-ness over individuality.

Program Models, Standards, and Characteristics

Alternative education programs have suffered criticisms for having been developed
and implemented with insufficient planning, inadequate staffing, and other organizational
flaws (Raywid, 2001). Yet, descriptions of alternative education programs suggest such
programs exhibit specific structural and programming characteristics. The most common
form of alternative school operating today to serve youth in at-risk situations is designed
to be part of a school district's comprehensive dropout prevention program (NDPC/N,
2007). The alternative schools and programs tend to be part of the middle or high school.

Alternative education programs have often been characterized as small enrollment
programs (Foley & Pang, 2006). Reports have suggested that most program populations
served two hundred or less students (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Franklin, 1997). Supportive environments that build or strengthen peer to peer and teacher to student relationships are often reported (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Franklin, 1992). Other descriptions of alternative education programs identify characteristics of individualized instruction meeting the students' unique academic and social-emotional needs (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Franklin, 1992).

Mary Anne Raywid (1994), writing a synthesis of Research for Educational Leadership, provides a descriptive listing of popular alternative schools. The three types described are:

1. Schools of Choice, offering different specialized learning opportunities for students usually in a magnet school;
2. Last-Chance Schools, designed to provide continued education program options for disruptive students; and
3. Remedial Schools, having a focus on the student's need for academic remediation or social rehabilitation.

Various models of alternative schools have been developed to serve local needs and are operating with varied degrees of success. Hefner-Packer (1991) has studied these models and has described five models of alternative schools:

1. The Alternative Classroom, designed as a self-contained classroom within a traditional school, simply offering varied programs in a different environment;
2. The School-Within-a-School, housed within a traditional school, but having semiautonomous or specialized educational programs;
3. The Separate Alternative School, separated from the regular school and having different academic and social adjustment programs;

4. The Continuation School, developed for students no longer attending traditional schools, such as street academies for job-related training or parenting centers; and

5. The Magnet School, a self-contained program offering an intensified curriculum in one or more subject areas such as math or science.

In one of the most comprehensive works on alternative education, Barr and Parrett (1997) offered key features of alternative programming design and implementation in the form of a formula that would insure success. These “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” (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p. 32). These essential elements are noted as:

1. Voluntary Participation. When both students and staff voluntarily join an alternative school or program a more democratic, consumer-driven educational service emerges.

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 selections 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 schools’ 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. A maximum teacher to student ration of 1:15 is recommended.

5. Shared Vision. When students, teachers, and parents 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 curricular and instructional decisions and budget, 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 “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 & Parrett, 1997, p. 46).

9. Comprehensive Programs. The alternative school is more effective when it provides permanent placements for students throughout the school year. Although, students may and should be provided the opportunity to return to the regular school if so desired, recognizing though that the short term or quick-fix stay and return is counterproductive. Effective alternative schools also develop an array of social services and community connections that are available to all students and their families.

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

It is noteworthy that the above model contains many of the elements contained within the early, innovative school movements and their successes. Barr and Parrett (1997) assert that 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). These essential elements and characteristics can be quantified and measured for effective program evaluation.

A review of the literature indicates there are some commonalities and consistencies among the standards and models for the development and implementation
of alternative schools and programs. The NDPC/C has identified the following program standards as key elements of successful programs (NDPC/N, 2007):

1. a maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10,

2. a small student base not exceeding 250 students,

3. a clearly stated mission and discipline code,

4. a caring faculty with continual staff development,

5. a school staff having high expectations for student achievement,

6. a learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style,

7. a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support, and

8. a total commitment to have each student be a success.

Considering the aforementioned characteristics, the NDPC/N (2007) posits that were all schools to “share these characteristics and operate with the best practices, maybe there would be no need for alternative schools” (2007, p.11). Such a statement is powerful in that it brings attention to the need for alternative schooling in the face of historical and present day traditional public schooling. Returning to the work of earlier reform efforts, such as the progressive movement with related developmental and projects approach, may bring forth change in traditional schools program standards that could reduce or eliminate the need for the differences in educational programs, characteristics, and services.

Examining program characteristics is not meant to be aimed at the development of a model alternative school. Rather, such examination will serve to develop greater understanding of more widely used program characteristics demonstrating applicability
and benefiting the students’ needs. Raywid (2001) notes, “programs are not to be looked at as models in the contemporary sense of replication”. Characteristics of one program may serve a particular student population but may not meet the needs of another. Replication may even diminish the success potential of new alternatives (Raywid, 2001). Therefore, an approximation of models would be more appropriate. Alternative schools need to be homegrown, suggesting they cannot really be replicated or modeled. The examination of characteristics would then serve to provide a selection of general ideas that may be adapted to fit the more specific needs of other newly created or established programs.

Foley and Pang (2006) conducted a study of characteristics of alternative education programs among schools in Illinois. Alternative education program principals served as respondents to a survey. Six domains were established to examine the alternative education program characteristics. The first domain, program administration, found the predominant management approach governing alternative education programs appears to be site-based management with 78% of the respondents indicating they engaged in this style of management. Also, within this domain Foley and Pang (2006) found a majority, 80%, of alternative education programs operate in off-campus facilities with adequacy of the facilities rated as slightly above average. However, accessibility to physical education, library, and science laboratory facilities were rated below average. Characteristics of students, the second domain, found alternative education programs appear to primarily serve adolescents within the twelve to twenty-one age range. The size of the programs varied significantly, from eleven to four hundred fifty eight students. Youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities comprised a larger portion, nearly 50%,
of the students’ with disabilities population. Male students were greater in number than females with an average of 53.6 and 35.5, respectively.

Within the third domain, school program characteristics, attention is given to entrance and exit criteria. Foley and Pang (2006) note the three most frequently identified criteria for admission to alternative programs were history of social-emotional problems, truancy problems, and referred by home district. Other criteria included expulsion, suspension, school dropout or potential to be a school dropout. Program supports, a fourth domain, notes that one third or less of the programs actively involved or supported parents in their adolescent’s education (Foley & Pang, 2006). The predominant educational support service was that of social workers (74%) followed by counselors (58%), and paraprofessionals (50%). The most frequent community agency working with alternative school youth is juvenile justice. Program staff characteristics, comprised of instructional staff and school leadership, establish the fifth and sixth domains respectively. Instructional staff persons holding certification to teach general education comprised a larger portion of faculty of alternative education programs. Here, Foley and Pang’s findings are supported by earlier works suggesting site-based management is a defining characteristic of alternative education (Franklin, 1992; Raywid, 1983). As Foley and Pang note, “Site-based management was the primary administrative structure identified by over 75% of the respondents. The results suggest that administrators and program personnel have the authority to make decisions about various parameters of the program such as admission standards, coursework, behavior standards, and integration of support services” (p. 16). Alternative education schools and programs administrators and their personnel have a high level of autonomy over curriculum, course
offerings, grading and evaluation, instructional methodology, and student behaviors (Lange, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006).

The New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE) established requirements for the application process and approval of alternative education programs in middle and high school settings. These program requirements (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1) are identified as:

1. Student to teacher ratio of 10:1 (middle school programs only).
2. Student to teacher ratio of 12:1 (high school programs only).
3. An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) that focuses on attendance, behavior and curriculum, must be developed for each student enrolled in the program.
4. Individualized instruction that engages each student in the learning process and addresses all areas of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, per N.J.A.C. 6A: 8-3.
5. Comprehensive support services and programs which address each student’s health, social development and behavioral needs.
6. Case management and referral services, including but not limited to monitoring and evaluating student progress and coordinating services (middle school programs only).
7. Work-based learning experiences (high school programs only).
8. Instruction by staff that are appropriately certified.
9. Compliance with attendance policies pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6.3-9.3.
10. Hours of operation for an alternative middle school program should mirror those of the traditional middle school; hours of operation for an alternative high school
program can be conducted during the day or evening to accommodate the
schedules of the students.

11. Credits based on the program completion options (high school only).

12. Transitional services designed to reintegrate students back into traditional class
and the traditional academic environment (middle school programs only).

13. Placements for students who are removed from general education for a firearms
offense, and students removed from general education for assault with weapons
offense, pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.5 and N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.6 respectively.

Also required for application approval is an Alternative Education Program Statement
of Assurances which notes a district’s commitment to the aforementioned requirements.
The NJ DOE identifies the need for the Statement of Assurances as “an effort to maintain
consistency across all of New Jersey alternative education programs and to bring
uniformity to the responsibilities of alternative education program administrators and
sending school district administrators” (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-2.2). The NJ DOE suggests that
multiple alternative models may be warranted to adequately address the diverse needs of
students. As such, New Jersey’s alternative education schools/programs may be
countywide alternative education programs, local alternative education program, or
collaborative regional alternative education programs. Within each of these models the
configuration and delivery system may differ, affording each program the opportunity to
meet the identified and diverse needs of their alternative school’s student population.

While the NJ DOE’s program requirements and recognition of diversity for
program models echoes the standards identified within research and literature for
alternative education schools, at-risk youth, and dropout prevention (Raywid, 1994;
Foley & Pang, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Hefner-Packer, 1991; NDPC/N, 2007), there is no State Department mechanism for collecting data and researching alternative education schools/programs in New Jersey nor for determining program characteristics and related practices. Furthermore, since no such information is researched, it is unknown how New Jersey's alternative education schools/programs for at-risk youth compare to national norms of these same schools/programs.

A "New Jersey Department Policy Initiative", as identified within the Commissioner's Annual Report to the Education Committees of the Senate and General Assembly On Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse In New Jersey Public Schools notes:

Alternative education programs offer a necessary and viable educational option for students who have been removed from school due to conduct violations, who are not engaged in school, who have lost their commitment to school or who have not succeeded in school, and provide them with a program to address their individualized needs. Regulations for alternative education programs were revised and adopted in 2006 at N.J.A.C. 6A:16-9 to assure available quality programs for at-risk students. The revised rules change the program approval process, permit non district educational agencies to establish programs, and strengthen program standards of alternative education programs. (Davy, 2007, p. 36)

New Jersey's alternative education schools and programs application process no longer needs State Department or county office approval. The authority for approving
the establishment of alternative education schools and programs in New Jersey now rests with the local education agencies boards of education. Thus, further removing the NJ DOE from a connection to alternative education schools and programs, the opportunity to establish and oversee recommended program standards and best practices for alternative education students, having data available to determine the effectiveness of these alternative education schools and programs across the state, and developing an understanding of how New Jersey’s at-risk students being serviced in alternative education schools and programs compare to similar students and schools/programs across the nation.

National and State Research

There have been efforts to assess and improve alternative education schools. These efforts have focused on attempting to define program components, characteristics, and strategies essential to providing quality alternative programs (Hughes & Adera, 2006). Program components and characteristics that tend to represent effective alternative education programs are identified (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Gregg, 1999; Hawes, Dillard, Brewer, Cobb, & Neenan, 2000; Hughes, Baker, Crise, Huffty, Link, Piripavel, 2006; Hughes & Adera, 2006) as (a) the provision of a comprehensive student referral system and procedures that identify the target student population whose needs can best be met in alternative settings, (b) provision of coursework and educational activities relevant to students’ real world experiences and goals that include a variety of nontraditional curriculum as well as use of effective and efficient instructional strategies, (c) provision of effective programming that facilitates students’ social, emotional, and behavioral growth, that establishes a safe, positive, non-
punitive environment, and that creates a sense of belonging, empowerment, and value for students and their families, (d) provision of initial and ongoing relevant staff development, training opportunities, and support, (e) use of policies, procedures, and practices that effectively support students in their transition from the alternative setting to a mainstream campus, employment, or third-level educational setting, and (f) use of ongoing program evaluation and data-driven decision making as a program component.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement conducted a national study on public alternative schools and programs. This is the “first national study of public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure” (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, iii). No other studies have been conducted since. This study, The Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, a Statistical Analysis Report (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002), presented findings about public alternative schools and programs in the areas of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit procedures; staffing; curriculum services; and collaboration. These findings are based on survey questionnaire data for 848 public school districts providing services to at-risk youth in an alternative school or program during the 2000-01 school year. The survey results, which were weighted to produce national estimates, provide the following findings:

1. Availability and Enrollment: Overall, 39 percent of districts had alternative schools or programs for at-risk students, enrolling a total of 612,900 students during the 2000-01 school year. Of the 39 percent of districts having alternative schools and programs for at-
risk students, 65 percent had only one alternative school or program, and 18 percent had two schools or programs. While this may be an indication that some districts are able to address the needs of their at-risk population with one alternative school or program, it may also be an indication that districts are reluctant to expand their offerings of alternative education (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 33). Raywid (1994, p. 30 in Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 34) asserts "...alternatives have continued to lack institutional legitimacy. Even districts that are pleased to have one or two alternatives remain cool to the prospect of multiplying them or converting the district entirely".

2. Entrance and Exit Criteria: Reasons for students entering and exiting alternative schools and programs are diverse and individualized. A variety of behaviors are typically sufficient reasons for entrance into an alternative school or program. More notable among the behaviors considered to be disruptive to others are possession or use of firearm or other weapons, possession or distribution of alcohol or drugs, physical attacks or fights, and disruptive verbal behavior. Large districts, districts with high minority enrollment, and districts with high poverty concentration were more likely to cite these reasons for placement in an alternative school or program. Factors of improved attitude, behavior and student motivation had the highest percentages (82%
and 81% respectively) in determining whether students could return to a regular school. Seventy-four percent of districts have a policy allowing students to return to the regular school, though twenty-five percent allow only some students, and one percent of districts do not allow any students to return (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 34).


4. Curriculum and Services: The findings indicate that efforts are being made to ensure students are supported by a network of services and innovations in curriculum that help promote their success. Over 75 percent of the districts had policies requiring curricula leading toward a regular high school diploma, academic counseling, remedial instruction, smaller class size, opportunity for self-paced instruction, career counseling, and crisis/behavior intervention.

5. Collaboration: While larger districts are more likely than small ones to collaborate with various agencies, many districts appear to be collaborating with agencies to provide services to students. Overall, districts collaborated with a mean of 6.9 agencies (out of 12 listed in the survey) in providing services with public alternative schools and programs (p. 35).
As Kleiner, Porch & Farris (2002) note:

“This study has presented a snapshot of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure during the 2000-01 school year. Since this is the first national survey of its kind, it is difficult to say in which direction districts are moving with respect to various facets of public alternative education. Future research will need to employ similar measures to determine whether public alternative education is becoming more or less established in the nation’s public school system and whether it is progressing in its service to the nation’s at-risk students.”

(p. 35).

In the state of Vermont, alternative education schools and programs have been researched prior to the release of the NCES study and related report. The research was conducted in response to a legislative request for a study on alternative schools in Vermont. There was a specific interest in “learning more about the national literature on alternative learning environments as well as about the characteristics of Vermont’s alternative programs, including organizational structures, cost factors, relationship to state quality standards, and learning opportunities for students” (Hasazi, Proulx, Hess, MacKinnon, Morgan, Needham & O’Regan, 2001, p. 1).

Vermont’s research, using qualitative and quantitative methods through interviews, observations, and questionnaire, was designed to acquire information on the following characteristics of alternative programs: (a) student characteristics, including age, gender, and disability status; (b) program design elements, including staff-student ratio, curriculum, assessment strategies, instructional approaches, professional
development, interagency collaboration and policies regarding entrance and exit criteria, and (c) program accountability including supervision of staff, program evaluation, and funding strategies (Hasazi et al., 2001).

With regard to student characteristics, Vermont’s alternative education schools and programs found students to be predominately male (69%), and 52% of alternative school services were provided at the high school level. While 52% of the students serviced were special education eligible, the vast majority were identified as emotionally-behaviorally disabled.

Program design and elements indicated 55% of students in alternative programs in Vermont attend off-site locations. Seventy-two percent of these programs had been in operation for three or more years, accounting for a near 40% growth in Vermont’s alternative schools and programs in a three year period between 1998 and 2001. Students typically entered the program through varied processes associated with a school’s educational support systems. Approximately 70% of the programs reported having reintegration policies while nearly 30% reported having no such policy.

Approaches related to assessment, curriculum, and instruction varied based on program philosophy, objectives, location, and resources. “Schools often provided multiple choices related to learning content and pedagogy based on high expectations for both academic and social goals” (Hasazi et al., 2001, p. v).

Lastly, program accountability measures indicated responsibility for program supervision varied across programs with 51% of programs supervised by principals. The programs located within a middle or high school setting received greater supervision from a principal while off-campus programs appeared to have the least amount of
supervision. Program funding sources included local resources, Medicaid reinvestment funds, and state funds reimbursed through special education funding.

Data across Vermont's alternative education schools and programs for student performance and effectiveness varied significantly. Common across the programs is the collection of information regarding attendance, graduation and drop-out rates, individual goal attainment, and disciplinary actions. At the same time, Hasazi et. al. (2001) point out,

"Given the varied and individualized approaches to teaching and learning represented across alternative school and programs, paired with the lack of a consistent data base, it would be difficult at this time to assess the state-wide impact of alternative programs on student performance and continuation in school." (vi).

This statement supports a need for a mechanism and a centralized method for data collection of state alternative education schools and programs for assessing student performance relevant to program effectiveness.

Kentucky's initiatives to conduct research on alternative education schools and programs were established prior to the national study conducted by the NCES. In Kentucky, the first phase in an attempt toward aligning regular school standards and indicators to improve alternative education programs began in 2001. In this respect Kentucky, along with Vermont, appears to have been a frontrunner in its recognition of need to research such programs. The study, Phase I Report: A Preliminary Investigation of Alternative Education Programs in Kentucky (Swarts, 2002), researched sixty-six alternative schools and programs with the purpose of devising an instrument consisting of
research-based standards and indicators to evaluate alternative education programs. The findings indicate that alternative education programs can be evaluated using research-based standards and indicators, and that the results obtained from evaluation can be used to improve alternative education programs and student outcomes.

By August of 2006 the Kentucky Department of Education entered into a contract with Kentucky Youth Advocates for the purpose of conducting an in-depth study of alternative education in Kentucky. Prompted by the Kentucky Board of Education, the driving purpose of the study was to determine the quality of services provided in alternative education programs. The Kentucky Department of Education and Kentucky Board of Education acknowledged the growth of alternative education in recent years and have expressed recognition of the need for oversight "...to ensure equitable services are provided to the increasing numbers of students served in these programs" (Kentucky Department of Education, 2007, p. 1).

Through a qualitative analysis of alternative education schools and programs, identified as "district-operated and district controlled facilities designed to provide services to at-risk populations with unique needs," in Kentucky, the Kentucky Department of Education sought to establish information about the services and facilities in existence, including disaggregated information about the numbers and types of students served in these programs, and both short-term and long-term recommendations for improvement of services. A component of the study included a review of the quality of services provided nationwide in alternative programs alongside suggestions for improvements for Kentucky’s programs (Kentucky Department of Education, 2006). While public release of the aforementioned study and its results are pending, the
Kentucky State Department of Education’s initiative is noteworthy as a continued effort to ascertain data on alternative schools and programs.

The Indiana Department of Education’s Division of Educational Options has conducted research on the alternative education schools and programs in Indiana. In its most recent publication, 2006-2007 Survey of Teachers in Alternative Education Programs (Clement, Chamberlain & Foxx, 2008), teachers were asked to complete a survey created by the Indiana Department of Education in partnership with the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy and Indiana University. The survey was given in order to better understand the following about alternative education programs:

the ways in which each alternative education program uses assessment data; the structural and organizational features each alternative education program uses most and least commonly; the ways in which each alternative education program supports student learning; the constituents who participate in the decision making process for each alternative education program; the instructional features each alternative education program uses most and least commonly; and how strong the sense of school community is in each alternative program (Clement, Chamberlain & Foxx, 2008, p. 6). While each of Indiana’s 291 alternative education programs is unique, they share characteristics identified in the research as common to successful alternative schools (Foxx, 2008). They are as follows:

1. Maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:15.

2. Small student base.

3. Clearly stated mission and discipline code.

4. Caring faculty with continual staff development.
5. School staff having high expectations for student achievement.

6. Learning program specific to the student’s expectations and learning style.

7. Flexible school schedule with community involvement and support.

8. Total commitment to have each student be a success.

While the Indiana Department of Education has conducted research for alternative schools and programs, it is also a state that has an array of services available to monitor and support the development and continuation of alternative schools and programs within the state through the Division of Educational Options. The Indiana Department of Education’s website for alternative education schools and programs (http://www.doe.in.gov/altered/alteredlinkpg.html) has extensive material, including: research, surveys, fact sheets, outcome data, an on-site visit rubric and site visit reports, a directory of approved alternative programs, and professional development resources for alternative education schools and programs, including a video workshop for alternative education administration, readily available and easily accessible to provide support and guidance for alternative education schools and programs within the state. A review of this state department’s efforts to conduct research, and offer programming support services at the state level suggests that the Indiana Department of Education’s response to alternative education is that of recognition and responsiveness to an increase in alternative education schools and programs.

The New Jersey State Department of Education (NJ DOE), as mentioned earlier, does not maintain or collect data on its state’s alternative education schools and programs. The NJ DOE Office of Special Programs specialist, Lovell Pugh-Bassett, reported:
“The State Department does not have any information that would be useful to your study because the last time the state compiled lists of alternative programs spans back at least seven to ten years, and since the revision of regulations in 2006, the State Department does not have a role in approving alternative programs. Approval of these programs has been at the local level since then though the state is trying to presently revamp its role.” (personal communication on April 8, 2008).

The New Jersey Department of Education, unlike Vermont, Kentucky, and Indiana, has not conducted research on alternative education schools and programs. It is unclear how New Jersey’s alternative education school program requirements, identified earlier as detailed within N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1, appear in practice. Although the publication of the NCES Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, along with other research identified earlier, cite the importance of conducting research on alternative education schools and programs, any such research from the New Jersey Department of Education is in need of documenting.
Summary

In this chapter, a comprehensive review of the related literature regarding alternative education schools and programs was presented. Specifically presented was a brief review of the history of alternative schooling; theoretical application for the establishment and implementation of alternative schools and programs; alternative education program models, standards, and characteristics; and related research establishing national norms as well as individual state studies. This chapter presented an identified need for study of alternative education schools and programs in New Jersey as a basis for determining existing practices.
CHAPTER III
Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter on Research Methodology provides descriptions of the methods and procedures used in the collection, analysis, and presentation of the survey data. This chapter also provides a 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 determine and establish a framework of characteristics of alternative education schools and programs for students at risk of education failure in the state of New Jersey. A specific focus is upon program characteristics of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. This study will also provide a comparison of these characteristics to the national norms, established by the National Center for Education Statistics for public alternative education schools and programs for at-risk youth.

The research questions addressed are:

1. What are the program characteristics of New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs for: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration?

2. How do New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs compare to the national statistics studied, identified, and published by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education?
Overview of the Study

This study will utilize survey research as a tool for identifying the characteristics of available alternative education schools and programs for at-risk youth within the state of New Jersey. Considerations for this study were given to the: design of the study; development of the survey; sample/population for the study; procedures for the collection of data; statistical techniques.

This research will provide educational leaders, the New Jersey State Department of Education, policy makers, community leaders, educators, students, and parents with data on the characteristics of alternative schools within New Jersey alongside a comparison to national norms. This information can serve to inform the educational community regarding the various alternative education schools and programs availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration.

Design of the Study

This study utilizes a descriptive survey questionnaire, designed and developed by the United States Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, to collect data on public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure. The data sought and collected by this survey is specific to alternative education school/program characteristics for availability and enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. This survey research is utilized to compile information specific to the aforementioned characteristics within public alternative schools and programs in the state of New Jersey and compare these results to
national norms made available through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Development of the Alternative School Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002) and was distributed through the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). The survey was pilot tested with three hundred and thirty-seven districts from the 1998-99 NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) Public Universe File. After the pilot study a sampling frame was constructed and stratum sample sizes were determined. A final sample of 1,609 districts was systematically selected from the sorted file using independent random starts. The questionnaires were distributed in January of 2001 and completed questionnaires were received from 1,540 districts with a weighted response rate of 97 percent (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, A-6).

The NCES survey was reproduced with permission from Bernard Greene, Project Officer from the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement. According to Mr. Greene: “No written permission is needed to reproduce and administer this questionnaire to a sample population and compare results to national norms. This survey was funded by U.S. tax dollars and is in the public domain.” (personal communication, March 14, 2008).

This survey was reproduced in its entirety. There are 16 questions covering the following areas: program information; enrollment; entry and exit procedures; staffing; curriculum and services offered. The survey has a response burden of approximately thirty minutes per respondent (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, A-5). No changes were
made to the questions or the format of the survey. The only change to the survey was for the reporting school year. The NCES survey in questions 4, 5, 7a and 7b asked respondents to provide information for the school year of 2000-2001, October 1, 2000, and 1999-2000, respectively (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, C-5). This study's survey changed the dates on the same questions (4, 5, 7a and 7b) to have participants respond for the 2007-2008 school year.

The data collected by the descriptive survey is not of a confidential nature. However, measures were taken to insure anonymity and confidentiality. The survey was randomly assigned a code for data retrieval and data entry purposes to insure the anonymity of the respondent. This code was not used in the compilation of the aggregate data. All returned surveys and related collected responses have been and will continue to be confidentially maintained by this researcher in accordance with the Institutional Review Board's requirements, including the storing and maintenance of data on a CD or USB memory key and maintained in a locked, secure physical location.

Population for the Study

This research focuses on public alternative education schools and programs for at-risk youth in the state of New Jersey. A letter of request for participation (Appendix A) with survey questionnaires (Appendix B) were mailed to alternative education administrators throughout New Jersey. The request for participation and recipients of this survey questionnaire were determined from the establishment of a listing of the public alternative education schools and programs within the State of New Jersey as compiled by way of personal contact between this researcher and all twenty-one of New Jersey's Department of Education County Offices. Within each County Office, an
Education Specialist, contacted by telephone during the fall and winter of 2007, supplied information of alternative education programs believed to be operating for the 2007-2008 school year within the county. Only public alternative education schools or programs providing educational services to students at risk of education failure were included in the population of this study through voluntary survey participation.

**Procedures for the Collection of Data**

All data was tabulated through the use of a survey consisting of 16 questions (Appendix B). The District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs was mailed to the administrators of 80 alternative schools and programs as identified by the researcher's personal contact and communication with every education specialist in each of the 21 County Offices of Education in New Jersey. The mailed surveys were accompanied by a cover letter (Appendix A) and a self-addressed, pre-stamped return envelope. Each returned survey was examined for eligibility and completion. Completed survey responses were recorded and compiled according to responses to each of the questions for frequency of responses as each question was tallied and converted to a percentage (where possible), and rank order from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequently mentioned (where possible).

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002) were utilized for comparison of the National and Northeast region statistics to the data collected for alternative education schools and programs in New Jersey. Specifically, data in the form of percentages identified for the categories of availability and enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and collaboration were utilized for comparison.
Statistical Techniques

This study, in paralleling the National Center for Education Statistic’s study on Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At-Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, utilizes the same analytical approach and mirrors the qualitative descriptive statistical techniques. These techniques include collecting, compiling, analyzing, and comparing information based on primary data obtained via completed surveys from New Jersey alternative education school and program administrators, and secondary data obtained via the National Center for Education Statistics. These descriptive statistics assist in determining the attributes of a set of characteristics in order to gain understanding of them. The collection and comparison of number, percents and percent distribution, and rank are utilized. Tables and figures, to convey more than one feature of a data set, are also utilized.

Summary

This chapter described the methods and procedures utilized in the collection and analysis of the data. A comprehensive description of the study design, data sources, survey instrument, procedures and statistical techniques are also included in this chapter. The following chapter will present the results and findings as they pertain to the research questions posed in support of the purpose for this study.
CHAPTER IV
Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine and establish a framework of characteristics of alternative education schools and programs for students at risk of education failure in the state of New Jersey. A specific focus is upon program characteristics of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. This study also provides a comparison of these characteristics to the national norms established by the National Center for Education Statistics for public alternative education schools and programs for at-risk youth.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education has established the first and only study to date of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure. This study, Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, presents data and related information on public alternative schools and programs for grades pre-kindergarten through twelve, establishing a National profile (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002). This National profile is also categorized by regions across the United States, and analyzed data for the Northeast region is presented. Since the Northeast region includes the State of New Jersey, comparisons between the Northeast region and the New Jersey can be conducted here as well. The national data represents findings from the 2000-01 school year and is currently eight years old. Whether there has been any shift in trends, and if so in what characteristics or direction, during the last eight years is unknown.
Given the aforementioned, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are the program characteristics of New Jersey's public alternative education schools and programs for: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration?

2. How do New Jersey's public alternative education schools and programs compare to the national statistics studied, identified, and published by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education?

Accordingly, this chapter presents the findings of this study. New Jersey alternative schools and programs data findings are presented and discussed alongside comparisons to the National and Northeast region. Related tables and figures of the analyzed data are also presented.

The procedure for conducting this study and specifically addressing the research questions was as follows: Eighty surveys were mailed to public school districts believed to have one or more alternative schools or programs for at-risk youth. A database of such schools or programs is not available at the New Jersey Department of Education. Some of the County Superintendent Offices throughout New Jersey had such listings available though they were not always updated. As such, each county office was contacted by telephone and every county's education specialist, or other identified administrator, was asked to provide current contact information for the alternative education schools or programs for at-risk students within the respective county. Eighty alternative education schools and programs for at-risk students were identified resulting in eighty surveys mailed along with a letter of solicitation. Forty-one surveys were returned yielding a
response rate of fifty-one percent. Of the forty-one returned surveys, six were not considered for this research; five were returned reporting an alternative school or program did not exist, and one contacted this researcher by telephone to say the school district has such a school but they declined participation. The remaining thirty-five responses provided data for analysis (N=35).

As noted in Chapter 3, the data collected from respondents among New Jersey alternative schools and programs was coded, entered and analyzed for descriptive statistics using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). Excel was also used for the creation of figures. Presented here are the findings regarding New Jersey alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure for: overall availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing, curriculum and collaboration in public alternative schools and programs. Additionally, the New Jersey findings were compared to the National profile as made available by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002). Tables presenting percentages, in order of highest to lowest, of the analyzed data for the New Jersey profile along with the National and Northeast region are presented in this chapter. Figures used to highlight comparisons are also included in this chapter. Tables of standard errors are included in Appendix C. Appendix B presents the survey questionnaire.
Availability and Enrollment

Establishing information about the availability of alternative schools and programs and the enrollment of students in such programs is sought to gain knowledge of the presence of such programs and the population being served. Through the District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs, administrators were asked questions related to availability and enrollment. Specifically, survey questions 1, 2, 3(a-d), 4, 5, 6, 7(a-b), 8(a-g) were directed at addressing availability and enrollment of students at-risk of education failure at alternative education schools and programs. The results of the New Jersey alternative education schools and programs respondents were compiled, reported, and compared to the Northeast region and National profiles.

Table 1 presents the results for: number of public alternative schools and programs available; number of students enrolled; number of special education students with an Individual Education Plan enrolled; and location of public alternative schools and programs (housed in a separate facility, juvenile detention center, community based, or charter school).

Each district administrator receiving a questionnaire was first asked to respond to whether their district operated an alternative school or program for students at risk of education failure during the 2007-2008 school year. If so, the respondent was asked to continue with the survey and indicate how many alternative schools and programs are currently administered in the district. Table 1 shows at least 54 public alternative schools and programs are currently administered in public school districts throughout New Jersey. It is noteworthy that this number reflects those respondents electing to voluntarily participate in this research and is not an exhaustive representation of alternative schools.
and programs for students at risk of educational failure within New Jersey public school districts.

The 35 respondents representing 54 New Jersey alternative schools and programs provided educational services for 3,209 New Jersey students at risk of failure as of October 1, 2007. The fewest number of students enrolled in an alternative education school or program is eight. While the maximum number of students enrolled in a single alternative education program is 663 (M=91.69; SD=120.34).

Of the 3,209 students enrolled in a New Jersey alternative education school or program, 716 were special education students with an Individual Education Program (IEP). The fewest number of special education students with an IEP enrolled in an alternative education school or program was reported as two. Although, 18% (n=34) of the districts reported having no special education students in their alternative schools or programs. The maximum number of special education students with an IEP enrolled in a single alternative education school or program was reported as 125.

A comparison of total number of students enrolled to special education students enrolled indicates 22% of the students enrolled in New Jersey alternative education schools and programs represented in this study are special education students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This differs from the National sample where 11% (70,300 special education students with an IEP out of 612,900 students) of students enrolled in public alternative schools and programs are special education students with an IEP. As is indicated in Table 1, the overall majority of students at-risk for academic failure enrolled in alternative education schools or programs in New Jersey and across the Nation are regular education students. The National sample was reported for October 1,
2000. It is unknown what shifts in trends, if any, have occurred at the national level in nearly eight years.

Respondents were asked how many of their alternative schools and programs were: (a) housed within a separate facility, (b) charter schools, (c) in juvenile detention centers, and (d) in community based programs. While this list of possible sites was not exhaustive, it reflects that which was designed by the National Center for Education Statistics as reflecting the specific interests of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002). Thirty-three out of fifty-four (sixty-one percent) public alternative schools and programs in New Jersey are housed in a separate facility. Two of the fifty-four (four percent) alternative schools and programs are community based (see Table 1). The remaining nineteen of the fifty-four (thirty-five percent) alternative schools and programs are housed within the main school setting. As such, alternative schools and programs housed off of the main campus appear to be the primary choice for administering these programs in New Jersey. The National profile indicates a combined total of 7,350 out of 10,900 (sixty-seven percent) schools and programs are based outside of the main school campus. There is a similarity between the New Jersey and the National profile for location of alternative education schools and programs as predominately housed off the main school campus. Also, similar among the results for the New Jersey and National profile was the indication that districts administered few alternative schools and programs that were in juvenile detention centers, community centers or charter schools.
Table 1

Total number of survey participants representing New Jersey public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, number of students enrolled, and number of specific types: Academic year 2007-08 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000-2001 for National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public alternative school and program types and enrollments</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>National$^6$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs:</td>
<td>54$^1$</td>
<td>10,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled in public alternative schools and programs:</td>
<td>3,209$^2$</td>
<td>612,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education students with IEPs enrolled in public alternative schools and programs:</td>
<td>716$^3$</td>
<td>70,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs housed in a separate facility:</td>
<td>33$^4$</td>
<td>6,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs in juvenile detention centers:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs that are community-based:</td>
<td>2$^5$</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs that are charter schools for at-risk students:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$Number of alternative schools and programs for at-risk students in New Jersey represents survey respondents and is not exhaustive.

$^2$Students enrolled in New Jersey public alternative schools and programs number reflects enrollment as of October 1, 2007, according to survey results.

$^3$Special education students with IEPs enrolled in New Jersey public alternative schools and programs represents about 22% of the total number of at-risk students enrolled in New Jersey public alternative schools and programs, according to survey results.

$^4$The number of New Jersey public alternative schools and programs housed in a separate facility represents about 61% of the total number of New Jersey public alternative schools and programs, according to survey results.

$^5$The number of New Jersey public alternative schools and programs that are community-based represents about 4% of the total number of New Jersey public alternative schools and programs, according to survey results.

The distribution of districts that had one, two, or three or more alternative schools or programs for at-risk students is presented in Table 2. Overall, 51\% (n=18) of the New Jersey districts in the study were likely to have one alternative school or program, 43\% (n=15) were likely to have two or more, and 6\% (n=2) were likely to have three or more alternative schools or programs. Similarly, the Northeast and National profiles reflect a likelihood of public school districts having just one alternative school or program. When considering the likelihood of districts that have two or three or more alternative schools/programs, the National profile indicates a slightly higher likelihood of having two such schools or programs. However, the reverse was found in the Northeast where there is a greater likelihood for having three or more such schools or programs over having two alternative schools or programs, 16\% and 13\% respectively.

Comparison of the three profiles indicates some similarities in the State, National, and Northeast. Each was likely to have public school districts with one alternative school or program. The New Jersey profile mirrors, in general, that for the National data. The State data differs from the Northeast in that the Northeast is likely to have three or more alternative schools or programs over two such programs.
Table 2

Percentage distribution of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, grouped by number of schools and/or programs per district: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 1999-2000 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Schools or Programs</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One alternative school or program</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two alternative schools and/or programs</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more alternative schools and/or programs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Since alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure are available in New Jersey and both regular education and special education students are enrolled, it is of interest to learn what grade levels are served by these schools/programs. Findings suggest that these programs predominantly serve students in grades at the secondary level: 10th and 12th grades, each 80%; 11th grade, 77%; 9th grade, 74%. These grades were followed by: 8th grade, 46%; 7th grade, 37%; and 6th grade, 14%. Lastly was kindergarten at 3%. Grades 1 through 5 and pre-kindergarten were identified as not having any students enrolled among the New Jersey respondents.

Reflected in Figure 1 are the percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that offered such schools or programs for pre-kindergarten through grade 12 during the 2007-2008 school year in New Jersey alongside the National profile as reported for the 2000-2001 school year. The profile for the State is consistent.
with the National data, where 88% to 92% of such programs were offered at the secondary level, grades 9 to 12. The middle school level (grades 6 to 8) followed with 14% to 46% of New Jersey’s alternative education schools and programs offering educational services to students at risk of academic failure. Only 3% of the alternative education schools or programs in New Jersey offered services at the elementary school level (grades 1 through 5) and only 9% reported services to students within an ungraded level. Overall, the New Jersey profile mirrors that of the Nation whereby alternative education schools and programs for students at risk of academic failure are primarily offered at the secondary level followed by the middle school level.
Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that offered alternative schools and programs for pre-kindergarten through grade 12: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey (n=35); 2000-2001 for National\(^1\). No data for the Northeast region, specific to this category, was available.

The alternative education administrators participating in this research were asked whether a need for enrollment exceeded capacity during any month of the 2007-2008 school year. Twenty-six percent (n=41) of the districts indicated they were unable to enroll new students in any of their alternative schools and programs because of staffing or space limitations. Conversely, 74% (n=41) did not experience the same difficulty with enrollment. The National profile indicates about one-third of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students (33%) were unable to enroll new students in at least one alternative school or program during the 1999-2000 school year (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 13). The New Jersey profile is similar to the National profile in that the majority of districts were not experiencing enrollment difficulties as a function of staffing or space limitations.

However, among New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs that were unable to enroll new students, the months of March, April, and June of the 2007-2008 school year were most often indicated as the times of year when programs were unable to enroll students due to staffing or space limitations. Similar to the National data, New Jersey districts were less likely to identify months at the beginning of the school year as months during which demand exceeded capacity. However, a difference was found between New Jersey and the Nation for identifying end of the school year months as months during which demand exceeded capacity. Specifically, New Jersey’s districts experience a peak in new enrollment needs during the months of March (17%, n=35), April (17%, n=35), and June (17%, n=35). The National data reported for the 1999-2000 academic year identifies the months from November through April with a peak in January as
months when new enrollment needs exceeded available capacity (Figure 2). Whereas the
National profile represents a peak in need for enrollment exceeding capacity during the
month of January (58%), the New Jersey profile indicates it is much less likely (9%) to
encounter a need for enrollment that would exceed capacity during this same month.
Furthermore, the National profile indicates a decline in need for enrollment that exceeds
capacity between May (53%) and June (23%). In contrast, the New Jersey data indicates
a greater likelihood that a need for enrollment will exceed capacity in June (17%) over
May (14%).
Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students where new enrollment needs exceeded available capacity between the months of August and June by month: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey (n=35); 1999-2000 for National.¹

Fifty-four percent of the responding New Jersey school districts reported not having enrollment needs exceeding available capacity over the course of three years, 2005 to 2008. Conversely, during this time period, 46% of the districts experienced a demand for enrollment in alternative schools and programs which exceeded available capacity. With nearly half of the alternative schools or programs for New Jersey identifying a demand for enrollment, which exceeded available capacity, their procedures for addressing this demand is worthy of attention. Among those New Jersey alternative schools/programs whose need for enrollment exceeded capacity, the procedures and related response for addressing such a need varied. The responses, noted in Table 3, reflect six characteristic procedures over the course of a three year time period: academic years 2005-2008 for New Jersey and academic years 1998-2001 for Northeast and National.

The most frequently reported response for the New Jersey alternative education schools and programs was that of placing students on a waiting list (82%, n=17) when enrollment needs exceeded available space. Similarly, the Northeast and National profiles also indicates the most frequent response when demand for enrollment exceeds capacity is that of placing students on a waiting list, 75% and 83% respectively. New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs indicate providing homebound instruction (69%, n=13) as the second most likely service to students when enrollment exceeded capacity in the alternative education schools or programs. Conversely, the second most likely option across the Nation and within the Northeast
region was that of adding staff or space, 41% and 42% respectively. Among New Jersey district’s, 47% (n=15) would add staff or space, 25% (n=12) would refer students to a private facility, 15% (n=13) would open a new site, and 8% (n=12) would refer students to another district.

The primary response among districts in the state, the region, and nationally in the face of shortage of program space is the creation of a waiting list. However, clear differences are evident in secondary solutions. Whereas in New Jersey home instruction was the second procedure after wait listing of students, other districts, both in the region and nationally, were likely to add staff or space. The less likely responses identified among the three profiles were similarly identified as referral of students to a private facility, opening a new site, and referring students to another district (see Table 3).
Table 3

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that employed various procedures when demand for enrollment exceeded available capacity within the last three years: Academic years 2005-2008 for New Jersey; 1998-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast (^1)</th>
<th>National (^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting list</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide homebound instruction</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add staff or space</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer students to private facility</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open new site</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer students to another district</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: 2% specified as: having no procedure; students remain in the regular school; and increase capacity without adding staff or space.

Entrance and Exit Criteria

Survey questions 9(a-k), 10(a-h), 11(a-c), 12(a-h) were directed at addressing entry and exit procedures for students enrolled in alternative education schools and programs. The results of the New Jersey alternative education schools and programs respondents were compiled, reported, and compared to the Northeast region and National profiles.

Entrance Criteria

There are a variety of reasons for student enrollment in public alternative education schools and programs. Some students are enrolled due to continual academic failure or reasons that put them at increased risk for academic failure, such as chronic truancy, teen pregnancy/parenthood, or mental health needs. While others are enrolled for disruptive behavior such as physical fights, disruptive verbal behavior, possession of weapons, criminal activity, or the possession, use or distribution of alcohol or drugs (Paglin and Fager, 1997 in Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 17). Additionally, there are various means influencing the placement of special education students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) in alternative schools and programs. Whether students are permitted by policy to return to the regular school setting and the reasons deemed as very important in making such a determination are also considered.

The districts' respondents were asked to indicate whether students at-risk of academic failure could be transferred to an alternative school or program solely on the basis of the following reasons: possession or use of a firearm; possession or use of weapon other than firearm; possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs (excluding
tobacco); arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system; physical attacks or fights; disruptive verbal behavior; chronic truancy; continual academic failure; pregnancy/teen parenthood; mental health needs. Respondents were also given the option of providing a response of “other” and to specify their response. The results, presented in Table 4 in ranked order, for New Jersey alternative schools and programs indicate the following: continual academic failure, 76%, n=33; chronic truancy, 65%, n=34; physical attacks or fights, 53%, n=34; possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs, 52%, n=33; disruptive verbal behavior, 49%, n=33; possession or use of a weapon (other than a firearm), 47%, n=34; possession or use of a firearm, 46%, n=33; arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system, 41%, n=32; mental health needs, 36%, n=31; teen pregnancy/parenthood, 31%, n=33. Additionally, 12% of the New Jersey respondents elected “other” and specified sole reasons for student transfer to an alternative school or program as: age, bomb scare/terrorist threat, voluntary student/parent agreement, and unsuccessful in traditional school setting.

Findings from the state profile indicate the primary reason for student transfer to an alternative school or program is continual academic failure. This mirrors the primary reason found in the Northeast region. However, the New Jersey profile differs from the National, where the most likely reasons for student placement are physical attacks or fights and possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs are equally identified. As continual academic failure was the primary reason for student transfer in New Jersey, this same reason is identified in the National profile as the third most likely reason for transfer and shared this rank with possession or use of a weapon (other than firearm).
Table 4

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported that students could be transferred to an alternative school or program solely on the basis of various reasons: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000-01 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Transfer</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast¹</th>
<th>National¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continual academic failure</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic truancy</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical attacks or fights</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive verbal behavior</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession or use of a weapon (other than a firearm)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession or use of a firearm</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health needs</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen pregnancy/parenthood</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: 12% specified as: age, bomb scare/terrorist threat, voluntary student/parent agreement, unsuccessful in traditional school setting

While the New Jersey profile mirrors the Northeast region for primary reason of transferring students differences in secondary findings were evidenced. Chronic truancy and physical attacks or fights are the second and third, respectively, most likely reasons for student transfer in New Jersey. This differs from the Northeast region where possession or use of a weapon (other than a firearm) and possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs were identified as second and third reasons for student transfer.

It is unclear whether the differences evidenced between New Jersey, the Northeast region, and the National profiles are due to variations of national trends over a near eight year period. Also, any effect of a co-existence of various reasons, such as physical attacks or fights involving a weapon, or continual academic failure due to use of alcohol or drugs is unknown. Furthermore, some factors influencing placement may be mitigated by state and/or local district policies requiring expulsion, such as in a case of weapon possession, thus eliminating transfer to an alternative school or program as an option for districts.

Analyses via cross-tabulations for chi-square tests were conducted to examine whether any relationships of significance exist among characteristics for enrollment, entrance, and exit criteria. One significant relationship was found. The chi-square test indicated that the relationship between continual academic failure and chronic truancy was significant, $\chi^2 (1, n=33) = 11.93, p < .001, V = .601$. Therefore, it is most likely that students who are chronically truant will experience continual academic failure. Such students are among those most commonly enrolled in New Jersey alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure.
Among the ten options offered as sole reasons influencing transfer of a student to an alternative school or program three were consistently noted as less likely across the New Jersey, Northeast, and National profiles. These are: arrest or involvement with juvenile justice, mental health needs, and teen pregnancy/parenthood. Here too different options for school programming and placement may influence these responses. For instance, students who have been arrested or involved with juvenile justice system may be receiving educational services as directed by the courts at a non-public program or within a juvenile detention center. Similarly, placement of students with mental health needs may extend into private and/or residential facilities with educational services.

Overall, it is less likely for students to be transferred solely on the basis of arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system, mental health needs, or teen pregnancy/parenthood. Among all three profiles findings indicate a greater likelihood for transferring students on the basis of continual academic failure, chronic truancy, or physical attacks or fights.

More than half (61%) of New Jersey alternative schools and programs indicated special education students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) were placed in alternative schools and programs. The means of placement of special education students with IEPs at alternative education schools and programs was considered. Specifically, districts acknowledging having special education students with IEPs at their alternative schools or programs were asked to provide information concerning the various means influencing placement and the extent to which each factor influences such placement. The various means of placement identified for responses included: support of Director of Special Education; IEP team decision; regular school staff recommendation; student
request; parent request; as a result of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA); and referral by the juvenile justice system. Respondents were also given the option of specifying an “other” response. Table 5 details the findings of the means of placement by factors influencing extent as “not at all,” “small extent,” “moderate extent,” and “large extent”.

An IEP team decision appears as the most likely factor by “large extent” (56%, n=27) to have an influence upon special education students with an IEP at New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs. This influence is similarly reflected in the National profile whereby 66% of the districts responding that an IEP team decision was the most likely factor influencing placement of special education students with an IEP at alternative schools and programs. An IEP team is comprised of special education faculty, child study team members, regular school staff, parent(s) and student(s). Since the factor of IEP team decision is inclusive of factors identified separately, it may account for why the IEP team decision emerges as the primary reason for placing special education students.

Following an IEP team decision, New Jersey districts were more likely to rely upon the regular school staff recommendation to a “large extent” (42%, n=26) or “moderate extent” (31%, n=26). The support of the Director of Special Education was equally recognized as a factor influencing means of placement at both a “moderate extent” (42%, n=26) and “large extent” (39%, n=26) at New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs. Similar to New Jersey, the National profile indicates districts were more likely to rely on the support of a Director of Special Education, and the regular school
staff recommendation to a “large extent,” as compared to other means of placing special education students with IEPs at alternative schools and programs.

The New Jersey and National profiles also shared similar responses for factors least likely to influence placement of special education students with IEPs at alternative schools and programs. Among the New Jersey districts, factors least likely to influence placement were: referral by juvenile justice system (42%, n=26) and as a result of FBA (39%, n=26). Similarly, the National profile reports the factors of as a result of FBA (36%) and referral by juvenile justice system (33%) as the two factors least likely to influence such placements.
Table 5

Percentage distribution of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported the extent to which various means influence the placement of special education students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in alternative schools and programs: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 2000–2001 for National.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of placement</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Small extent</th>
<th>Moderate extent</th>
<th>Large extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IEP team decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular school staff recommendation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of director of special education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student request</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral by juvenile justice system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent request</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: NCES did not report data by region for means influencing the placement of special education student with IEPs in alternative schools and programs. Therefore, data for the Northeast region was not available and comparisons between the New Jersey and Northeast profile were not possible.
Exit Criteria

After responding to entrance criteria, attention was turned to exit criteria. The survey respondents were asked to identify whether it was the district’s policy to allow students enrolled in alternative schools and programs to return to a regular school in the same district. Response options of “yes, for all students”, “yes, for some students”, and “no, never for any students” were provided. Table 6 shows New Jersey alternative schools and programs responses in ranking order as follows: “yes, for all students”, 57%; “yes, for some students”, 31%; and “no, never for any students”, 11%.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy for Return to Regular School</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast¹</th>
<th>National¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, for all students</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, for some students</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, never for any students</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Comparison of data for the three profiles indicates primary, secondary and tertiary approaches of having district policies for returning students to the regular school were similar. While 57% of New Jersey districts responded “yes, for all students”, the
Northeast and National responses were 75% and 74%, respectively. New Jersey districts responded “yes, for some students” 31% of the time as compared to both the Northeast and National responses of 25%. New Jersey, with an 11% response rate for “no, never for any students”, was more likely than the Northeast region or Nation (0 to 1% respectively) to not have a policy allowing students enrolled in an alternative school or program to return to a regular school. Such a response among New Jersey’s alternative education schools and programs is concerning as it is contradictory to the New Jersey Department of Education’s policy requirements. The New Jersey Department of Education’s application for alternative education schools and programs specifically requires districts to provide information concerning the procedures districts will adopt for options available to students so they may return to the regular school setting.

Also, worthy of consideration is that while policy is in place for all or some students ranging from 25% to 75% of the time, whether in New Jersey or across the Nation, such policy does not necessarily equate to practice. Though policy is in effect it is unknown how often such a policy is implemented and practiced. Lastly, given the near eight year difference between the state and national profiles in academic year reporting, it is unknown whether there has been a shift in national trends and if a difference over years would produce different results.

As noted by Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (2002, p. 21), “Although most alternative education students attending alternative schools and programs for at-risk students are allowed to return to regular schools, some schools are reluctant to bring students back into the regular classroom (Harrington-Lueker, 1995)”. Moreover, even if provided the opportunity, some students elect to remain in alternative schools and programs, and some
are never adequately prepared to return to a regular school (Quinn and Rutherford, 1998). Whether a student returns to a regular public school depends on a variety of factors including district policies regarding criteria for return. District respondents were asked to rate the importance of a variety of reasons in determining whether a student is able to return to a regular school, including those involving student behavior, performance, and attitude, as well as the approval of regular school and/or alternative school or program staff.

Table 7 provides the percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that cited various reasons as “very important” in determining whether an enrolled student can return to a regular school within New Jersey and compared to the Northeast region and National profiles. The primary reasons for returning students in the state are: improved attitude or behavior, 90%, n=29; approval of alternative school/program staff, 83%, n=30; improved grades, 70%, n=30; student motivation to return, 55%, n=29; approval of the regular school administrator or counselor, 53%, n=30; student readiness by standardized assessment 7%, n=27; availability of space in regular school, 4%, n=28.
Table 7

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that cited various reasons as "very important" in determining whether an enrolled student can return to a regular school: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Return to Regular School</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast(^1)</th>
<th>National(^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved attitude or behavior</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of alternative school/program staff</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved grades</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student motivation to return</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of the regular school administrator or counselor</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student readiness by standardized assessment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of space in regular school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: 11% of New Jersey respondents specified various reasons as "very important" in determining whether an enrolled student can return to a regular school as: lack of space at the alternative school; student voluntary choice; drug test results; superintendent makes the final decision.

Among New Jersey's alternative schools and programs, the primary reason determining whether a student is able to return to a regular school was improved attitude or behavior. This reason was shared as primary among the state, region and national profiles. Among the New Jersey districts the secondary reason was found to be that of approval of alternative school/program staff. This differs from the Northeast and National profiles where the reason of student motivation to return is secondary. Differences across the profiles are also noted in subsequent reasons for determining whether a student can return to the regular school. These differing responses, deemed less likely to have an influence in the New Jersey profile, are: improved grades, student motivation to return, and approval of the regular school administrator/counselor.

The New Jersey profile mirrors that of the Northeast region and Nation for reasons least likely to determine a student's return to a regular school. These reasons are: student readiness by standardized assessment and availability of space in a regular school. Overall, it is more likely that a student's improved attitude or behavior would influence whether he or she can return to a regular school. However, the national data are older than New Jersey's and whether the same findings would hold currently is unknown.

Relationships between enrollment, entrance criteria, and exit criteria were analyzed with cross-tabulations. Upon such analyses, it initially appeared that chi-squared tests for relationships between characteristics of enrollment, entrance criteria, and exit criteria were significant. However, all results indicated 75% or more cells had an expected count less than five. The chi-square test requires that the expected frequency be five or higher for all cells as noted by SPSS. Therefore, the sample size requirement
for the chi-square test was not met. As such, any relationships initially thought to have been found significant for presentation cannot be validated due to limited sample size.

**Staffing, Curriculum and Services, and Collaboration**

While there are various reasons cited for the exit of at-risk students enrolled in alternative schools and programs, "whether they are able to transfer back to regular schools or successfully graduate from alternative schools and programs for students at-risk of education failure may depend in part on the quality of the education and services they receive at their alternative schools and programs" (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002, p. 25). Also, "Various factors have been identified as beneficial to at-risk students in alternative education environments, including dedicated and well-trained staff, effective curriculum, and a variety of support services provided in collaboration with an array of agencies" (Quinn & Rutherford, 1998 in Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 25). As such, the survey asked respondents to provide information pertaining to staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration with outside agencies. Survey questions 10(a-h), 11(a-c), 12(a-h), 13(a-c), 14(a-q), and 15(a-m) were directed at addressing staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. The results of the New Jersey alternative education schools and programs respondents were compiled, reported, and compared to the Northeast region and National profiles.

**Staffing**

Since teachers play a primary role in a student's education, it is of interest in determining how a teacher comes to work within an alternative education school or program. Research indicates that teachers who are well trained, caring, demanding, highly motivated and responsive to the needs of at-risk students achieve better student
outcomes (Barr & Parret, 2001; Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002). Furthermore, it has been found that teachers who voluntarily elect to work in alternative schools and programs are more likely to serve students well while teachers who are involuntarily assigned are less likely to serve students well (Barr & Parret, 2001). The NCES research (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002) has drawn the only national data on how teachers come to teach at public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure. Practices for hiring alternative school and program teachers were assessed through the survey questionnaire to establish such data. Survey respondents were asked to select which practices were utilized in their district when hiring teachers for alternative schools or programs. The options of “hired specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs,” “transferred by choice from a regular school,” and “involuntarily assigned” were offered. Respondents were asked to respond either “yes” or “no” for each as these practices are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Table 8 provides the results for percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that used various practices for hiring alternative school and program teachers. Among New Jersey respondents, teachers hired specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs was the primary practice (68%, n=34). This was closely followed by the practice of teachers transferred by choice from a regular school (64%, n=33). The least common practice among New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs respondents was that of involuntarily assigning teachers (22%, n=32).
Table 8

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that used various practices for hiring alternative school and program teachers: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 2000-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice for Hiring Teachers</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast¹</th>
<th>National¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hired specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred by choice from a regular school</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntarily assigned</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The most common practice (hiring teachers specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs) to the least common practice (involuntary assignment of teachers) for staffing among New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs parallels the Northeast and National profiles for rank order only. While the tendency among New Jersey districts having alternative schools and programs is to engage in staffing practices where the teacher participates in the choice to teach in such a program (i.e., hired specifically to teach in such a school or transferred by choice) there is a greater likelihood of involuntary assignment of staff among New Jersey districts when compared to the National and Northeast profiles. It is recognized that New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs have a much greater likelihood for practice of involuntarily assigning teachers (22%) to alternative schools and programs than the Northeast region (3%) and
As mentioned earlier, research has found that teachers who are involuntarily assigned are less likely to serve students as well as those who come to teach at alternative schools or programs by choice (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002).

Curriculum and Services

In schools various curriculum and educational services may be practiced or required. Based upon data from the National Center for Education Statistics (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002) alternative schools and programs likely offer a wide variety of services and practices for at-risk students enrolled in alternative schools and programs. The survey questionnaire asked respondents to provide information according to district policy for the types of services or practices made routinely available to the students. Sixteen services or practices were identified on the questionnaire along with an option for respondents to specify an “other”.

Table 9 presents the percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported various required services or practices made routinely available to enrolled students. The New Jersey profile, presented in rank order, indicates the most common services or practices routinely available to enrolled students are academic based. Primary among these were: curricula for regular high school diploma and smaller class size (both 97%, n=35), followed by career counseling (94%, n=35), academic counseling (91%, n=35), and opportunity for self-paced instruction (83%, n=35). Less commonly utilized practices, though still among the top half out of those identified, were: crisis or behavioral intervention and remedial instruction (both at 77%, n=35), social work services (71%, n=35), and psychological counseling (69%, n=35).
Following security personnel on site (60%, n=35) were services and practices identified at less than fifty percent. These were: peer mediation (49%, n=35), vocational or skills training (47%, n=34), and opportunity to take classes elsewhere (40%, n=35). Least common among the services or practices offered among New Jersey’s alternative schools or programs for enrolled students were: extended school day/year (27%, n=34), preparation for the GED exam (21%, n=33), and evening or weekend classes (15%, n=34).

The New Jersey profile bears similarities to the Northeast and National profiles for most commonly required services or practices made routinely available to enrolled students at alternative schools and programs. In particular, the New Jersey, Northeast and National profiles each share ranking of curricula for regular high school diploma as primary. Other services or practices found to be within the top one-fourth, among the sixteen services or practices identified and shared with the New Jersey profile, were smaller class size (93% Northeast, 85% National) and academic counseling (91% Northeast, 87% National).

Dissimilar between New Jersey and the Northeast and National profiles, among the top one-fourth ranking, was that the Northeast region had a greater likelihood for crisis or behavioral intervention (84%) while the National profile indicates a greater likelihood for remedial instruction (84%) as compared to 77% for both of these services or practices in New Jersey alternative schools and programs. The practices and services identified as least commonly available to enrolled students for New Jersey, Northeast and National profiles were similar. One difference evidenced between New Jersey and the Northeast and National profiles was that of security personnel on site. Within the
Northeast and National profiles security personnel on site was reported at 29% and 26%, respectively. This is in sharp contrast to New Jersey's alternative schools and programs report of having security personnel on site at 60%. Such a difference may be attributable to factors related to shifts in trends, such as the addition of school resource officers among public school districts in New Jersey.

On average, New Jersey's districts offering alternative schools and programs required 10 of the 16 services asked about in the survey. Alternative schools and programs across the Nation require, on average, 9.5 of the 16 services cited in this study (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002, p. 29) (not shown in tables). Here too, the New Jersey alternative schools and programs share a similarity to the alternative schools and programs across the Nation.
Table 9

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported various required services or practices be made routinely available to enrolled students: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000–2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service or Practice Routinely Available</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast(^1)</th>
<th>National(^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curricula for regular high school diploma</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller class size</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career counseling</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic counseling</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for self-paced instruction</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis or behavioral intervention</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial instruction</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work services</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological counseling</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security personnel on site</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mediation</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational or skills training</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to take classes elsewhere</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended school day/year</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for the GED exam</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening or weekend classes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: 11% of New Jersey respondents specified various required services made available to enrolled students as: school based business; radio station with student stipend; to adhere to NJ CCCS; e-school.

Collaboration with Other Agencies

Collaboration with other agencies outside of the public school system, especially among alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure, is often practiced (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002). Collaboration with various outside agencies may provide students enrolled in alternative schools and programs with opportunities to receive support services that may not otherwise be available or accessed. Survey respondents were asked by way of the questionnaire to provide information regarding collaboration with various agencies that provide student services. Twelve outside agencies and related services were identified along with an “other” option for respondents to specify any agencies or related services not pre-identified. Table 10 provides the results for percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that collaborated with various agencies in order to provide services for enrolled students.

Among New Jersey alternative schools and programs, the most common agency service provided for enrolled students was that of child protective services (79%, n=33). Other agency services found to be common, following child protective services, were juvenile justice system (77%, n=34), and drug and/or alcohol clinic (71%, n=34). Less common, though still in the upper half of the twelve identified agencies and services, were: community mental health agency (68%, n=34), family organization or associations (62%, n=34), crisis intervention center (59%, n=34), health and human services agency or hospital (59%, n=34), police or sheriff’s department (50%, n=34), and family planning/child care/child placement agency (46%, n=33). Least common among the various agencies and services made routinely available to alternative school or program
enrolled students were those of: community organization (44%, n=34), job placement center (41%, n=34), and parks and recreation department (30%, n=34).

Common among alternative schools and programs for the New Jersey, Northeast, and National profiles was the agency least frequently collaborated with (parks and recreation department) to provide services for enrolled students. Differences were identified among the most common agencies collaborated with, primary of which was: child protective services for New Jersey (79%), community mental health for Northeast (68%), and juvenile justice system for National (84%). Since the National profile was last established for the 2000-01 school year, it is unknown whether more current data would reflect the same outcomes.
Table 10

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that collaborated with various agencies in order to provide services for enrolled students:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration with Agencies</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child protective services</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile justice system</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and/or alcohol clinic</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community mental health agency</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family organizations or associations</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis intervention center</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and human services agency or hospital</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police or sheriff's department</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family planning/child care/child placement agency</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organization</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job placement center</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and recreation department</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other: 11% of New Jersey respondents specified collaboration with various agencies as: YMCA; Boys and Girls Club; Department of Public Works (DPW); Housing Authority.

Relationships between characteristics of required services or practices, collaboration with other agencies, enrollment, entrance criteria, and exit criteria were analyzed with cross-tabulations. Upon such analyses, it initially appeared that chi-squared tests for relationships between some characteristics were significant. However, here too the results indicated 75% or more cells had an expected count less than five. The chi-square test requires that the expected frequency be five or higher for all cells, as noted by SPSS. Therefore, the sample size requirement for the chi-square test was not met. As such, any relationships initially thought to have been found significant for presentation can not be validated due to limited sample size.

Furthermore, it is counterintuitive to not find any significant relationships in areas such as continual academic failure and curriculum services for either small class size, remedial instruction, or academic counseling. Perhaps a larger sample size would better produce results representing any relationships between curriculum services and continual academic failure, the primary reason found for student placement in alternative schools and programs among New Jersey public school districts. Likewise, the reporting of school security on-site among New Jersey alternative schools and programs was cited as common, yet no relationship to entrance criteria for characteristics associated with violent or aggressive behaviors (possession of weapon, possession of firearm, physical attacks or fights, or disruptive verbal behavior) were found nor was there a significant relationship to collaboration with the juvenile justice system, crisis or counseling services. It is likely that the sample size affected such outcomes.
Lastly, the District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs asked participants to respond to a background question about the schools in the district. Question 16 specifically addressed the percent of students in each district that are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Among New Jersey participants, 94% responded. The reported percent of students in each district who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch ranged from 1% to 100% with a mode of 60%. The district responses were distributed and categorized into the following: 1% to 25%, 26% to 50%, 51% to 75%, and 76% to 100%. Figure 3 presents the percentage distribution of New Jersey districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, grouped by percent of students in the district who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Among New Jersey participants, the most common response (31%) are school districts having 1% to 25% of its students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. This was followed by school districts having 51% to 75% of its students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch at 27%. Equal at 21% among the respondents were school districts having either 26% to 50% or 76% to 100% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Overall, this data indicates that the sample population comprising the New Jersey profile encompasses a broad range of districts with varying socio-economic status and is not skewed.

Since student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch is connected to family income, school districts having less students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch are more likely to have residents with higher income. More of New Jersey’s public school districts were likely to have alternative schools and programs in districts with as little as 1% to 25% of its residents having eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. As such, it appears that school districts having students with higher family income are likely to have
alternative schools or programs. Though the data in this study does not provide for any such formal analysis or correlation it would be of interest to determine any relationship between the establishment of alternative schools and programs among districts, given per-pupil expenditures and district factor grouping, with greater socio-economic status.
Figure 3

Percentage distribution of New Jersey districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, grouped by percent of students in the district who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. (n=33)
Summary

The District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs for New Jersey public school respondents provided data that was analyzed to establish a profile of such schools and programs across New Jersey. The New Jersey profile was compared to the National profile, including the Northeast region, as set forth by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the United States Department of Education. The research questions that were posed as a basis for this study were answered using descriptive statistics. The results do provide for a baseline profile representing New Jersey public school districts having alternative schools or programs for students at risk of education failure. Furthermore, this profile is compared to the National norms. Comparisons for percentages and ranking order of alternative schools and programs characteristics do provide for information on similarities and differences between New Jersey, the Northeast region, and Nation for: enrollment and availability; entrance and exit criteria; curriculum, staffing and collaboration.

The following chapter will highlight the key findings. In addition, recommendations will be presented for New Jersey alternative schools and programs so that public school services to students at risk of education failure may be enhanced. It is hopeful that these recommendations may assist educational leaders in the formation of policy governing educational services to students at risk of education failure within the state of New Jersey. Also, recommendations for possible future study, research initiatives, and ideas to improve this study will be presented.
CHAPTER V

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This purpose of this study was to determine and establish a framework of characteristics of alternative education schools and programs for at-risk students in the state of New Jersey. A specific focus was upon program characteristics of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration. This study also provided a comparison of these characteristics to National norms for public alternative education schools and programs for at-risk youth, established by the National Center for Education Statistics, U. S. Department of Education (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002).

The significance of this research is in providing educational leaders and policy makers with an understanding of characteristics, trends, policies, and services of public alternative schools and programs. Alternative education has an extensive history outside public education and has a more than forty year history within public education. Our Nation has experienced a more than forty-seven percent increase in alternative education programs whereby 10,900 public alternative schools and programs serve 612,000 students (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002, iii), and it continues to grow. Yet, alternative education has been and continues to be criticized in the development and implementation of programs. It is important for educational leaders to turn attention identifying characteristics, services, and trends of these schools and programs toward establishing policy and identifying best practices. Such information would be useful both within New
Jersey and throughout the United States as our Nation pursues initiatives to advance educational services to students at-risk of failure.

The NCES study is the only National study conducted to date. The state of New Jersey does not collect and analyze data specific to its public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure. As noted in Chapter 2, states such as Vermont, Kentucky and Indiana, have mechanisms within their respective departments of education for collecting, analyzing, and assessing data for such schools and programs toward the overall goal of identifying trends, establishing policy, and determining practices among public alternative schools and programs.

This study was guided by two research questions. These questions were developed to establish insight into the current status of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure in the state of New Jersey. They were also designed with the intention to elicit comparisons between New Jersey’s alternative education schools and programs for students at risk of education failure and the National profile, including the Northeast region, for like schools and programs. The research questions are as follows:

Research Question One: What are the program characteristics of New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs for: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration?

Research Question Two: How do New Jersey’s public alternative education schools and programs compare to the national statistics studied, identified, and published by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education?
The data used in this study was obtained from two sources. The primary data source for New Jersey alternative schools and programs was obtained from voluntary participation among administrators of alternative schools and programs across the state. The District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs was sent to 80 alternative schools or programs in New Jersey, and obtained a response rate of 51%. These responses represent 54 alternative schools and programs in New Jersey, and 3,209 students at risk of education failure enrolled in such programs during the 2007-2008 academic year. Secondary data was obtained from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). To date this NCES data provides the only National profile for students at risk of education failure enrolled in public alternative schools or programs. This data was collected for the 2000-2001 academic year. The National profile (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002) also provided data by region, allowing for representation of data specific to the Northeast region of the United States. As such, the primary data collected and analyzed not only established a profile of public alternative schools and programs in New Jersey but also provided for comparison to the National profile including the Northeast region.

Through data analysis, the establishment of data for alternative education schools and programs in New Jersey that parallels data set forth by the NCES, and the comparison to the National profile, including the Northeast, was achieved. A framework of characteristics among New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure for: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing, curriculum and collaboration has been established through this study. This study furthers understanding of the determined characteristics among New Jersey’s alternative
education schools and programs through comparisons to the Nation’s alternative education schools and programs.

The collection, analysis, and comparison of data serves to provide information to educational leaders seeking to establish alternative education schools or programs, or to improve upon practices for already established alternative education schools or programs. This study provides the New Jersey Department of Education with information regarding practices being implemented within the State’s alternative schools and programs and how the State of New Jersey compares to the Nation and Northeast region for such schools and programs.

Chapter I presented the problem to be studied and its educational context. Chapter II contained a review of the literature focusing on the history of alternative education, theoretical frameworks supporting such schools and programs, models, standards, and national and state research. Chapter III described the methodology used in this study to collect and analyze the data as it pertains to the research questions. The analytic strategy employed in this study was a descriptive approach aimed at discovering a profile of alternative education schools and programs in New Jersey alongside comparisons to the National profile. Varied methods and descriptive statistical analyses were employed for summarizing, analyzing, and reporting the data as set forth in Chapter IV. Tables and figures presenting the data and presenting comparisons among data were used during the analysis stage. Lastly, Chapter V presents a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.
Summary of Research Findings and Discussion

National recognition of public alternative schools and programs became apparent in September, 2002 with the release of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, study Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01. This statistical analysis report provided the first, and only to date, study and findings of public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve, for a determination of trends specific to availability and enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration. This study suggested that “future research will need to employ similar measures to determine whether public alternative education is becoming more or less established in the nation’s public school system and whether it is progressing in its service to the nation’s at-risk students” (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002, p. 35).

New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs, having no such specific data collection or research conducted which parallels the NCES study, were examined as a means of establishing a profile and comparing it to the National profile. Guided by the aforementioned research questions, this study’s results are summarized here.

Availability

As of October 1, 2007 there were at least 54 public alternative schools and programs available in New Jersey. The majority of these schools and programs (33) are housed in a separate facility. Among these schools and programs, New Jersey school districts were most likely (51%) to have only one such program. Having two alternative
schools or programs closely followed at 43%. Having three or more alternative schools or programs in one district was least likely (6%) in New Jersey. Also, these New Jersey schools and programs are more frequently offered at the secondary level followed by the middle school level. Overall, the availability of New Jersey alternative schools and programs is similar in rank to National profile.

*Enrollment*

The enrollment data indicates that as of October 1, 2007 New Jersey had at least 3,209 students, identified as at-risk, receiving educational services in an alternative school or program. Among this population, 716 students were special education students with an IEP. Needs for enrollment typically do not exceed capacity among New Jersey alternative schools and programs as is the case among the national profile. Yet, when such a need exists, differences between New Jersey and the National profile were evidenced. In New Jersey the months of March, April, and June were most often indicated as times of the year when programs were unable to enroll students due to staffing or space limitations. The National profile differs in that the months from November through April with a peak in January represent times when needs exceeded available capacity.

When the need for enrollment exceeded available space, the procedures for providing students with educational services in New Jersey varied. The primary procedure in New Jersey was that of placing students on a waiting list. This was followed by providing homebound instruction then adding staff or space, referring students to a private facility, opening a new site, and lastly, referring students to another district. The New Jersey and National profile, including the Northeast region, for the
rank of placing students on a waiting list as first among procedures was shared. Differences in rank order were evidenced whereby the second most likely procedure noted in the National and Northeast region profile was to add staff or space, which seemingly placed a greater emphasis nationally on keeping a student in an educational setting over that of homebound instruction. The remaining procedures of referring students to a private facility, opening a new site, and referring students to another district were shared in rank across the profiles.

*Entrance Criteria*

The District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs identified ten reasons for a transfer of a student into an alternative school or program. This study of New Jersey alternative schools and programs found the reasons for students entering into such a school or program are ranked as follows: continual academic failure; chronic truancy; physical attacks or fights; possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs; disruptive verbal behavior; possession or use of a weapon (other than a firearm); possession or use of a firearm; arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system; mental health needs; and teen pregnancy/parenthood. While the Northeast region shared the primary reason of continual academic failure for a student entering an alternative school or program with New Jersey, this differed with the National profile. The National profile indicates the primary reason for entry is shared between two factors: physical attacks or fights and possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs. Chronic truancy and continual academic failure followed as reasons ranked second and third within the National profile.

Additional analyses of relationships of these factors from the New Jersey profile revealed a significant relationship between continual academic failure and chronic
truancy. It is likely that students considered to be chronically truant also experience continual academic failure and are more likely to become enrolled in an alternative school or program in New Jersey.

For special education students an IEP team decision is the most likely factor by a large extent to have an influence upon being enrolled in a New Jersey alternative school or program. The influence of the IEP team as the primary is shared for both the New Jersey and National profiles. An IEP team is comprised of child study team members, regular school staff, special education faculty, the parent(s), and the student. Given that some of the IEP team members were also identified as separate factors for means of placement, there may be an effect of influence. Nonetheless, an IEP team decision is favored equally, as represented by the New Jersey and National profiles, over other individual factors that might be deemed as unilateral.

Exit Criteria

The New Jersey and National profiles, including the Northeast region, each indicate that most districts have a policy allowing all students to return to a regular school, with some districts allowing only some students to return to a regular school. Though each of the three profiles ranks districts’ policies for never allowing any students to return to a regular school as least likely, New Jersey alternative schools and programs did so at a higher rate (11%) than the Northeast (0%) and National (1%) profile. The New Jersey Department of Education’s program requirements for alternative schools (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1) establishes that alternative education programs designed for either middle or high school students are required to offer transitional services designed to reintegrate students back into traditional classes and the traditional academic
environment. Though there is not explicit direction for districts to have a policy for returning students to the regular school, New Jersey alternative schools and programs should have practices in the form of transition services addressing reintegration. Such a distinction may be a factor influencing the indication of New Jersey’s profile having a higher rate of responses over that of the Northeast region and National profile for not having a policy for returning students to the regular school. Since the survey structure and related acquired data do not allow for more in depth consideration within this category, this is an area for possible future examination.

Seven reasons were identified among reasons for returning a student to a regular program. The reason most likely to be deemed as “very important” for returning a student to a regular program was improved attitude or behavior. This was consistent across the three profiles. Differences were evidenced in the rank order for second, third and fourth reasons across the profiles. The New Jersey profile indicated the second through fifth reasons likely to return a student to a regular school as: approval of alternative school/program staff, improved grades, student motivation to return, and approval of the regular school administrator or counselor. The National profile, including the Northeast region, differ in that the second, third, and fourth reasons cited as likely for returning a student to a regular school were student motivation to return, the approval of alternative school/program staff, and improved grades. All three profiles shared rank for fifth (approval of the regular education administrator), sixth (student readiness by standardized assessment), and seventh (availability of space in regular school) reasons cited as likely to return a student to a regular school. While there is agreement across the profiles for the reason most likely and reasons less likely, the differences in between are
noteworthy. Where the National profile deems greater the influence of student motivation, the New Jersey profile demonstrates a greater influence of the approval of alternative school/program staff and improved grades for returning a student to the regular school.

**Staffing**

The New Jersey and National profiles, including the Northeast, region shared their ranking of practices for staffing public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure. These practices for hiring teachers presented in the following order: hired specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs, transferred by choice from a regular school, and involuntarily assigned. Though this rank order was shared, the rate at which New Jersey identified the involuntary assignment of teachers (22%) was much higher than that of the Northeast (3%) and National (10%) profile. As research indicates that teachers who are involuntarily assigned to teach in alternative schools and programs are less likely to serve students well than those who come to teach this population by choice (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002), it would likely benefit New Jersey alternative schools and programs to reduce the practice of involuntary assignment and to place greater emphasis on hiring teachers specifically to teach in alternative schools/programs or transferring teachers by choice from a regular school.

**Curriculum and Services**

Findings within the New Jersey profile indicate that the alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure are providing a range of services, and curriculum initiatives and approaches to promote student success. Offering curricula for
a regular high school diploma and a smaller class size shared primary rank among New
Jersey alternative schools and programs. Among program requirements for alternative
schools, as set forth by the NJ DOE (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-8.1), are: student teacher ratio of
10:1 for middle school programs and student teacher ratio of 12:1 for high school
programs only and curricula that addresses all areas of the Core Curriculum Content
Standards (per N.J.A.C. 6A:8-3) including curricula for a regular high school diploma.
Therefore, the New Jersey profile indicating small class size and curricula for a regular
high school diploma as primary among services is consistent with NJ DOE requirements.

Following these primary services in order of more common to least common
were: career counseling; academic counseling; opportunity for self-paced instruction;
crisis or behavioral intervention; remedial instruction; social work services;
psychological counseling; security personnel on site; peer mediation; vocational or skills
training; opportunity to take classes elsewhere; extended school day/year; preparation for
the GED exam; evening or weekend classes.

Many similarities were evidenced across the New Jersey and National, including
the Northeast region, profiles. In particular, each profile ranks offering a curricula for
regular high school diploma as primary. Though ranking was not identical for
subsequent services, it is noteworthy that those in the top quarter (i.e., smaller class size,
and academic counseling) were also shared as common among the services. Where the
Northeast region places a greater emphasis on the service of crisis or behavioral
intervention, the National profile indicates a greater likelihood of offering services for
remedial instruction. A most noteworthy difference across the profiles centers on the
service of having security personnel on site. The Northeast and National profiles indicate
that security personnel on-site is offered at 29% and 26%, respectively, of alternative schools and programs. This is in sharp contrast to the New Jersey profile’s indication of offering security personnel on-site at 60%. This difference is worthy of future investigation to determine what attributes account for such.

Lastly, as noted in Chapter 4, cross-tabulations of factors in the New Jersey profile were conducted and no significant relationships between factors of entrance criteria, exit criteria, and curriculum and services were found. This is mentioned here again as it appears counter-intuitive to not find relationships between some factors, especially in the area of entrance criteria for student behaviors regarded as violent or aggressive having any association with services of security personnel on-site or crisis/behavior intervention. It is posed that any such correlations may be hindered by the small sample size comprising the New Jersey profile and/or that services do not necessarily bear any direct correlation to reasons for student entrance into alternative schools and programs in New Jersey. For the future, additional considerations of outside factors such as funding grants for school resource officers in New Jersey having any influence upon services provided may be worthy of examination.

Collaboration with other Agencies

Collaboration with agencies outside the school district, especially for students identified as at-risk, is often practiced (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002). The profile of New Jersey alternative schools and programs demonstrates that the state’s public alternative schools and programs do collaborate with outside agencies for its students. The primary agency that New Jersey alternative schools and programs collaborate with is child protective services (79%). Other agencies found to be commonly collaborated with,
(50% or more respondents acknowledging such) were, in rank order: juvenile justice system, drug and/or alcohol clinic, community mental health agency, family organization or associations, crisis intervention center, and health and human services or hospital.

The only commonality found across the New Jersey and National, including Northeast region, profiles was that for the agency least commonly collaborated with: parks and recreation department. Aside from this similarity, differences across the profiles were evidenced among all other agencies collaborated with for students enrolled in alternative schools and programs. Most notable among these differences was that of the primary agency collaborated with. Whereas the New Jersey profile indicates child protective services as primary (79%), the Northeast region indicates collaboration with community mental health agency as primary (68%), and the National profile indicates the juvenile justice system as the primary (84%) agency collaborated with for students enrolled in alternative education schools and programs.

Here, too, cross-tabulations did not reveal any significant relationships between factors of enrollment and entrance criteria, services, and collaboration among New Jersey alternative schools and programs. Nonetheless, collaboration with outside agencies may be beneficial in providing opportunities and/or supportive services that might not otherwise be accessed. The extent to which these services assist at-risk students enrolled in alternative schools and programs with improving their academic growth is worthy of future investigation.
Implications for Policy, Practice and Future Research

This study was challenged by voluntary participation of New Jersey’s administrators for public alternative schools and programs, producing a small sample size for data collection. It would be helpful if the New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE) required and collected data for public alternative schools and programs, serving students at risk of education failure for grades pre-kindergarten through twelve. As identified in the review of literature, other states (such as Vermont, Kentucky, and Indiana) do such and are able to identify policies, practices, and trends in alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure. The NCES recognized that no such data was being collected to produce an understanding of these schools/programs and the practices associated with them (Kleiner, Porch and Farris, 2002). Born from this recognition was the study and statistical analysis report, Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, which was used as the basis for this study of New Jersey’s public alternative schools and programs. Since the release of the NCES study report seven years ago, the New Jersey Department of Education has not moved in a direction which parallels the identification of availability and enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and services, and collaboration, among its public alternative schools and programs serving at-risk students.

This relatively small sample size hindered cross-tabulations for analyses through chi-square tests. Such an identification of relationships among the characteristics examined may have produced a better understanding of policies and/or practices among New Jersey’s alternative schools and programs. If all public school districts in New
Jersey were required to report their data, there would be sufficient data to run more correlations. Likewise, all states would benefit from having data for the effective assessment of public alternative schools and programs. Educational leaders outside of New Jersey may look to this study as a framework for conducting analyses toward gaining insights for the direction of alternative education.

Also, the only National data available for comparison was produced in 2002 (Kleiner, Porch and Farris) representing the 2000-2001 academic year. The comparisons made between the National profile, including the Northeast region, and the New Jersey profile as set forth through this study have a seven year difference. It is unknown what shifts in National trends, if any, have occurred. Any shifts in the National trends may have produced different results in the comparisons for rank order. It would be interesting to see if the results were similar over this seven year period.

The lists and categories posed in the District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs were designed and set forth by the NCES. Having an established reliability this survey instrument was duplicated for use in the establishment of a profile of New Jersey’s alternative education schools and programs that would parallel the National profile. The NJ DOE, other researchers, and educational leaders may have additional considerations for inclusion in future surveys for study. Such considerations may include survey questions aimed at eliciting responses geared toward the following: examining patterns of alternative school or program characteristics by district size, setting, or district factor grouping; assessing student performance on achievement via local and standardized measures for pre-enrollment and post-enrollment in alternative schools and
programs; and the effects upon retention, dropout and graduation rates as well as post-secondary transitioning.

The NCES is in the process of conducting its second study on public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure. An updated survey was released to public school districts through the Fast Response Survey System around August and September of 2008, and data collection has begun. Upon its release, this second national study should be closely examined by researchers and educational leaders, especially those providing services to students at risk of education failure within an alternative school or program setting. Where differences between the New Jersey and National profiles were found and the influence of time may have raised question of shifts in national trends, the New Jersey data presented in this study can be applied forward once the new National profile is made available.

This study was beneficial for the establishment of baseline data for New Jersey alternative schools and programs that parallels the National profile as established by the NCES. It is recommended that the NJ DOE establish a data base of alternative schools and programs throughout the state and collect data to determine the characteristics and functioning of these educational services. Specifically, such data can be beneficial for accessing information on trends of enrollment, entrance and exit criteria, staffing, curriculum and collaboration. Furthermore, district policy and compliance with NJ DOE regulations, such as in the area of student eligibility to return to the regular school setting, could then be more closely examined. Additionally, it seems likely that absent the NJ DOE establishing a requirement for local district or county reporting of such information efforts to collect future data will be solely voluntary and likely continue to produce, and
be hindered by, a smaller sample size. With NJ DOE requirements for data collection, the effect of a larger sample size can: (a) reduce questions related to descriptive analyses, correlations, and comparisons, (b) validate representations of characteristics among New Jersey alternative schools and programs, and (c) provide data for assessment of policies and practices that can be replicated and/or improved upon for the enhancement of provision of educational services to students who are identified as being at risk of educational failure.

The policy and practice implications of this study extend beyond that for New Jersey public alternative education schools and programs. Education leaders seeking to establish or assess existing alternative schools/programs should turn attention to considerations of: (a) program availability and enrollment based upon the needs of the student population alongside program characteristics of staffing and space, (b) whether curriculum and instructional services correspond to the established entrance criteria and needs of the students enrolled, (c) whether policy for exit procedures are established and practiced, (d) considerations for determining and establishing criteria for a student’s return to the regular school, and engaging in collaborative practices for such, (e) whether collaboration with outside agencies reflect the needs of entering students, and (f) the establishment of best practices for hiring or assigning faculty. Overall, education leaders, practitioners and policy makers among other stakeholders can better understand how state requirements and recommendations are reflected in the establishment and practice of public alternative education schools and programs. Absent established state requirements, education leaders, researchers, and policy makers may wish to use this research in consideration of the various characteristics of program features toward
supporting and advancing the development of alternative schools and programs throughout the Nation.

Lastly, educational leaders may look to research on alternative schools and programs to determine what characteristics may be beneficial for all students not just students identified as at risk of educational failure. Overall, the effect of alternative school and program practices pertaining to staffing, curriculum and services and collaboration upon students remaining in school, student achievement, and student outcomes should be more closely examined. Information about practices benefiting this student population may provide impetus for replication of services, to the extent possible, within the regular education setting. As educational leaders should continue to strive for advancement of all learners, identifying and learning about practices deemed as beneficial within alternative schools and programs may provide opportunities to integrate varied educational services in a regular setting and continue to advance education for the benefit of all students.

Conclusion

The right to a free appropriate public education is a core principle governing education and its related services to youth across America. The educational system has a long history of students who are considered to be at risk of educational failure. Though alternative schools and programs have been in existence prior to public education, they have a more than forty year existence within public education. As the movement for alternative education schools and programs not only exists but continues to grow, education leaders should be seeking to determine the characteristics, policies, and practices of such programs. Such an investigation may provide greater insight to whether
alternative education is becoming more established in public schools districts and whether alternative school services to students identified as at-risk are progressing.

The aim of this study was to provide education leaders, policy makers, New Jersey Department of Education, and stakeholders with a profile of New Jersey’s public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure, and to examine this profile alongside the National profile previously established by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

The establishment of the New Jersey profile, its examination, and comparison to the National profile, including the Northeast region, was achieved. The establishment of a New Jersey profile serves as baseline data of this state’s public alternative schools and programs that parallel the National profile and that future research can look to build upon. Furthermore, the establishment of a New Jersey profile provided for comparisons to National trends. The comparison of profiles revealed both similarities and differences between New Jersey and National public alternative education schools and programs in the areas of: availability and enrollment; entrance and exit criteria; staffing; curriculum and services; and collaboration. Any differences noted can be approached through shifts in policy, practices, and future research if systematically and cooperatively approached by education leaders, policymakers, and the New Jersey Department of Education. In conclusion, efforts should continue to be devoted to the understanding of public alternative schools and programs within the state of New Jersey, and how they compare to National trends for such schools and programs and should be used in the determination of whether educational services are progressing for students at risk of education failure.


June 15, 2008

Dear Program Administrator,

I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University's Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy and am seeking your assistance.

I am currently conducting research on Public Alternative Education Schools and Programs for my dissertation toward completion of an Ed.D. Your assistance with my efforts is greatly needed and will surely be appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to survey administrators regarding program characteristics of public alternative education schools and programs within the state of New Jersey and conduct a comparison to the national profile. This research will serve to establish a descriptive framework of New Jersey's public alternative education schools. This data will also provide for a comparison to national norms on public alternative education schools/programs across the United States.

I am surveying all public alternative education schools and programs based upon contact information made available by all of New Jersey’s County Offices of Education and the New Jersey Department of Education. The "District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs", developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education and pilot tested, contains 16 questions and will take approximately thirty minutes to complete. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Though your participation is strictly voluntary it will provide valuable information toward developing an understanding of alternative education schools and programs throughout New Jersey, and how we compare to alternative education schools across our nation. All responses will be anonymous, securely maintained by this researcher, and kept in the strictest of confidence.

I would be most grateful for your participation in this survey. Thank you for your time and collegial support.

Сlrecil y

Sue A. DeNobile
Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board
MAY 28 2008

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 28 2009

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy
Tel: 973.761.9397
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
DEFINITIONS FOR THIS SURVEY

Alternative schools and programs are designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools. The students who attend alternative schools and programs are typically at risk of education failure (as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from school).

Alternative schools are usually housed in a separate facility where students are removed from regular schools. Alternative programs are usually housed within regular schools.

For the purposes of this survey, include:
- only alternative schools or programs for at-risk students,
- only alternative schools or programs where the majority of students attend for at least half of their instructional time,
- community-based schools or programs (administered by your district, but located within community organizations (e.g., boys and girls clubs, community or recreational centers)),
- alternative schools or programs that operate during weekday evenings or weekends.

For the purposes of this survey, exclude:
- alternative schools or programs that are not for at-risk students (e.g., gifted and talented programs, magnet schools),
- alternative schools or programs not administered by your district,
- alternative schools or programs where the majority of students attend for less than half of their instructional time,
- schools or programs that exclusively serve special education students,
- vocational education programs (unless specifically designated for at-risk students),
- child care/day care centers,
- privately run sites contracted by your district,
- short-term in-school suspension programs (lasting 2 weeks or less), detention, or in-home programs for ill or injured students.
This questionnaire is intended for the person or persons most knowledgeable about the alternative schools and programs in your school district. Please feel free to collaborate with others who are able to help provide the required information.

I. Basic Information About Alternative Schools and Programs in Your District

1. During the current school year (2007-2008), are there any alternative schools or programs in your district?
   Yes .......... 1 (Continue with question 2.)  No........... 2 (Stop. Complete respondent section on front and return questionnaire.)

2. How many alternative schools and programs do you currently have in your district? _________

3. Of those schools and programs in question 2, how many are...
   a. Housed within a separate facility, i.e., not within a regular school?.............  
   b. Charter schools?..........................  
   c. Schools in juvenile detention centers?.....................................................  
   d. Community-based programs?.................................................................

4. During the current school year (2007-2008), what grades are taught in your district's alternative schools and programs? (Circle all that apply.)

   PK  K  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  Ungraded

II. Enrollment

5. As of October 1, 2007, about how many students in your district were enrolled in alternative schools and programs? _________ students

6. Of those students, about how many were special education students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP)? _________ students

7a. In any month during the 2007-2008 school year, were any of your district's alternative schools and programs unable to enroll new students because of staffing or space limitations?
   Yes ............. 1 (Continue with question 7b.)  No............... 2 (Skip to question 8)

7b. During which months of the 2007-2008 school year were any of your district's alternative schools and programs unable to enroll new students because of staffing or space limitations? (Check all that apply)

   a. August  
   b. September  
   c. October  
   d. November  
   e. December  
   f. January  
   g. February  
   h. March  
   i. April  
   j. May  
   k. June

8. In the past 3 years, what was your district's procedure when demand for enrollment in alternative schools and programs exceeded available capacity? If not applicable, check here □ and skip to question 9.

   (Circle one on each line.)

   a. Put students on waiting list............................................................. Yes  No  1  2
   b. Increase capacity by adding staff/space............................................  1  2
   c. Provide home-bound instruction.....................................................  1  2
   d. Open new site.....................................................................................  1  2
   e. Refer students to another district....................................................  1  2
   f. Refer students to private facility.......................................................  1  2
   g. Other (specify)...................................................................................  1  2

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III. Entry and Exit Procedures

9. Can students in your district be transferred to alternative schools and programs solely on the basis of any of the following reasons? (Circle one on each line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Possession or use of a firearm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Possession or use of weapon other than a firearm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs (excluding tobacco)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Physical attacks or fights</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Disruptive verbal behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Chronic truancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Continual academic failure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Pregnancy/teen parenthood</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Mental health needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Other (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. To what extent are special education students with IEPs placed in alternative schools or programs through each of the following means? If you have no special education students, check here □ and skip to question 11. (Circle one on each line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of placement</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Small extent</th>
<th>Moderate extent</th>
<th>Large extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Support of Director of Special Education (district level) ................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. IEP team decision .......................................................... ..................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Regular school staff recommendation (e.g., teacher, administrator, or counselor) .........................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Student request ...............................................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Parent request ....................................................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. As a result of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) ................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Referral by the juvenile justice system ....................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Other (specify) .....................................................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Is it your district’s policy to allow students enrolled in alternative schools and programs to return to a regular school in your district? (Circle one.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Yes, for all students .......................................................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Yes, for some students .....................................................................................................</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. No, never for any students ................................................................................................</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. According to your district’s policy, how important are each of the following in determining whether a student is able to return to a regular school? (Circle one on each line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Improved grades ...............................................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Improved attitude/behavior ..............................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Student motivation to return ............................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Student readiness as measured by a standardized assessment ............................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Availability of space in regular school ............................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Approval of the regular school administrator or counselor .............................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Approval of alternative school/program staff (e.g., teacher, administrator, or counselor)</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Other (specify) ................................................................................................................</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Staffing

13. Were any of the teachers in your district's alternative schools and programs... (Circle one on each line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Hired specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Transferred by choice from a regular school to an alternative school or program?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Involuntarily assigned to teach in an alternative school or program?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. Curriculum and Services Offered

14. According to district policy, are any of the following services or practices required to be made routinely available in alternative schools and programs? (Circle one on each line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Smaller class size than regular schools.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Remedial instruction for students performing below grade level</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Academic counseling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Career counseling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Psychological counseling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Crisis/behavioral intervention</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Social work services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Peer mediation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Extended school day or school year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Evening or weekend classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Curricula leading toward a regular high school diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Preparation for the GED exam</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Vocational or skills training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Opportunity to take classes at other schools, colleges, or local institutions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. Security personnel on site</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. Opportunity for self-paced instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Other (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Does your district collaborate with any of the following agencies to provide services to students in alternative schools and programs? (Circle one on each line.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Child protective services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Community mental health agency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Community organization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Job placement center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Crisis intervention center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Drug and/or alcohol clinic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Family organizations or associations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Family planning/child care/child placement agency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Health and human services agency or hospital</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Juvenile justice system</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Parks and recreation department</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Police or sheriff's department</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Other (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI. Background Question About Schools in Your District

16. What percent of the students in your district are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch? _____ percent

THANK YOU!
APPENDIX C
### Table B-1, Standard Errors for Table 1

*Total number of survey participants representing New Jersey public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, number of students enrolled, and number of specific types: Academic years 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 2000-2001 for National.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public alternative school and program types and enrollments</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>National$^1$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs:</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled in public alternative schools and programs:</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education students with IEPs enrolled in public alternative schools and programs:</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs housed in a separate facility:</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs in juvenile detention centers:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs that are community-based:</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public alternative schools and programs that are charter schools for at-risk students:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-2, Standard Errors for Table 2

Percentage distribution of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, grouped by number of schools and/or programs per districts: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 1999–2000 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One alternative school or program</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two alternative schools and/or programs</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more alternative schools and/or programs</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-3, Standard Errors for Table 3

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that employed various procedures when demand for enrollment exceeded available capacity within the last 3 years: Academic years 2005-2008 for New Jersey; 1998-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting list</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide homebound instruction</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add staff or space</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer students to private facility</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open new site</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer students to another district</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-4, Standard Errors for Table 4

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported that students could be transferred to an alternative school or program solely on the basis of various reasons: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Transfer</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast¹</th>
<th>National¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continual academic failure</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic truancy</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical attacks or fights</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive verbal behavior</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession or use of a weapon (other than a firearm)</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession or use of a firearm</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health needs</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen pregnancy/parenthood</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-5, Standard Errors for Table 5

Percentage distribution of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported the extent to which various means influence the placement of special education students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in alternative schools and programs: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 2000–2001 for National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means of placement</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Small extent</th>
<th>Moderate extent</th>
<th>Large extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IEP team decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular school staff recommendation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of director of special education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student request</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral by juvenile justice system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent request</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-6, Standard Errors for Table 6

Percentage distribution of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported a policy that allows all, some, or no students enrolled to return to a regular school: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 2000-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, for all students</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, for some students</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, never for any students</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>†</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Estimate of standard error is not derived because it is based on a statistic estimated at 0 percent.

Table B-7, Standard Errors for Table 7

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that cited various reasons as “very important” in determining whether an enrolled student can return to a regular school, by district characteristics: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000–2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Return to Regular School</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast(^1)</th>
<th>National(^1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved attitude or behavior</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of alternative school/program staff</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved grades</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student motivation to return</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of the regular school administrator or counselor</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student readiness by standardized assessment</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of space in regular school</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-8, Standard Errors for Table 8

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that used various practices for hiring alternative school and program teachers: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; 2000-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice for Hiring Teachers</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hired specifically to teach in alternative schools and programs</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred by choice from a regular school</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntarily assigned</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-9, Standard Errors for Table 9

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that reported various required services or practices be made routinely available to enrolled students: Academic year 2007-2008 for New Jersey; Academic year 2000-2001 for Northeast and National.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services or Practices Routinely Available</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast¹</th>
<th>National¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curricula for regular high school diploma</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller class size</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career counseling</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic counseling</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for self-paced instruction</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work services</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis or behavioral intervention</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial instruction</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological counseling</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security personnel on site</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mediation</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational or skills training</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to take classes elsewhere</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended school day/year</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for the GED exam</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening or weekend classes</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B-10, Standard Errors for Table 10

Percent of districts with alternative schools and programs for at-risk students that collaborated with various agencies in order to provide services for enrolled students:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration with Agencies for Student Services</th>
<th>New Jersey</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child protective services</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile justice system</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and/or alcohol clinic</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community mental health agency</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family organizations or associations</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis intervention center</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and human services agency or hospital</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police or sheriff's department</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family planning/child care/child placement agency</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organization</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job placement center</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and recreation department</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>