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The Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program

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Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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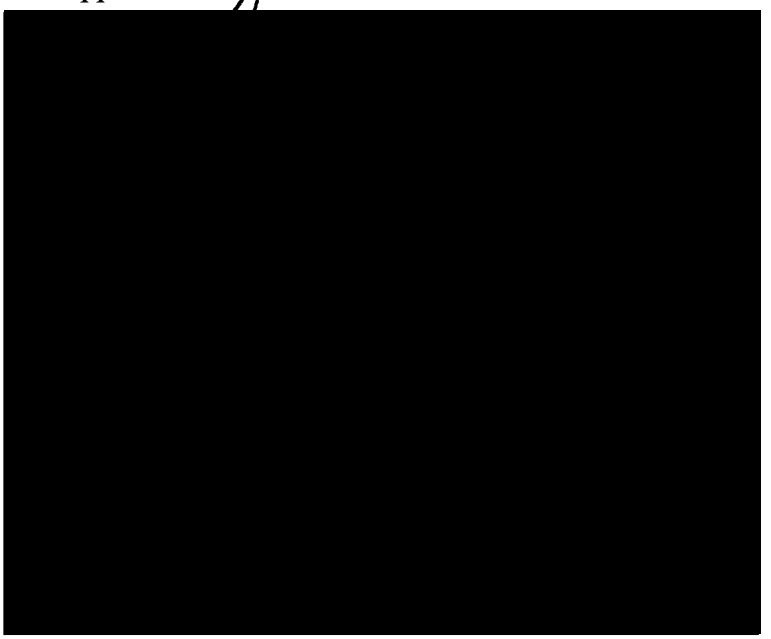

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PHOENIX ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

by Jason Dethor Laffitte

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Many school districts throughout the United States utilize alternative schools for students who have not been successful in a traditional school setting. The Phoenix Program is a second chance alternative school in Mobile, Alabama that provides educational opportunities to students who are at risk of dropping out or school or under a long-term suspension from a regular school program.

This study was conducted to determine the perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program on students who have been suspended from their assigned school for a long term. Participants in this study included 36 principals and assistant principals, 30 students, 18 parents, and 17 staff members. The participants indicated their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program by responding to questions on a survey which utilized a Likert Scale. Statistical data was also collected on students who attended the Phoenix Program during the years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

Using data obtained from the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services of the Mobile County Public School System, an analysis was conducted to determine the number of students who showed a decrease in discipline referrals, avoided further suspensions, and graduated from high school with a diploma. A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to determine if there was a significant difference among students' who attended the Phoenix Program, the parents of students who attended the Phoenix

Program, Phoenix Program staff members', and principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program.

This study indicated that the majority of the students who attended the Phoenix Program graduated from high school with a diploma. The study also indicated that most students showed a decrease in discipline referrals but more than half of the students were suspended from school again. After conducting the one-way ANOVA it was concluded that there was a significant difference among current students, the parents of current students, staff members, and principals and assistant principals.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Today's school administrators are faced with the difficult task of providing an educational environment that enables all students to achieve success. One problem that administrators must face is dealing with at-risk students and students who cause serious behavior problems.

School administrators have several methods at their disposal for dealing with student discipline. They can use parent conferences, detention, counseling, and in-school suspension. For serious infractions that may occur at school, administrators can use out-of-school suspension. Students may be suspended for a short term or a long term, or they can be expelled from school. Short-term suspensions range from one to ten days, long-term suspensions range from eleven days to the end of a semester, and expulsions can last up to one year. Long-term suspensions and expulsions have increased throughout the country due to recent concerns with school violence and the safety of students, faculty, and staff.

Students are generally suspended from school for a long term when they commit illegal behaviors that disrupt the educational process. Such behaviors include possessing, selling, or using alcoholic beverages, drugs, drug paraphernalia, or weapons on school property (Mobile County Public Schools, 2008). The increase in long-term suspensions has raised concerns about denying suspended students an education. These concerns have caused a growing request for school systems to provide alternative programs for students who have been suspended from school for a long term.

The Mobile County Public School System offers an alternative program to students who have been suspended from school for a long term, which is 11 days or until the end of a semester. This program is called the Second Chance Alternative Program. The purpose of the Second Chance Alternative Program is to serve students who are unsuccessful in maintaining appropriate behavior in their assigned school. According to the Mobile County Public School System, "The goals for students enrolled in the program are: 1) to increase self-control, self-disciplining, responsibility, and awareness; 2) to improve conflict resolution skills; 3) to improve academic performance; and 4) to improve self-esteem" (Mobile County Public Schools, 2002, p. 1).

There are two Second Chance Alternative Programs in Mobile County. The middle and high school alternative programs are both located at the former Blount High School in Prichard, Alabama. These alternative programs are designed to provide educational opportunities to students who are at risk of dropping out of school or under a long-term suspension from a regular school program. Classes are conducted in the courses required by the Mobile County Public School System, which include a curriculum of basic academics and electives designed to meet the needs of each student. The Phoenix Program is staffed by certified teachers and administrators. It offers a program of study that reflects local and state requirements, GED preparation, high school graduation exam tutoring, guidance counseling, conflict resolution, anger management, and drug and alcohol intervention to all students enrolled in the program. Once students have returned to their regular school, the guidance counselor performs extensive follow-up services to monitor their academic performance.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program, one of Mobile County's Second Chance Alternative Schools, on students who have been suspended from their assigned school for a long term. The effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program was measured using the perceptions of principals and assistant principals who referred students to the Phoenix Program, students who attended the Phoenix Program, the parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, and staff members (teachers, counselors, directors) of the Phoenix Program.

This study also measured the performance of former Phoenix Program students in their regular school after leaving the program. The performance of these students were determined by monitoring whether students showed a decrease in the number of discipline referrals, avoided further suspensions, and graduated with a high school diploma.

The significance of this study was to determine if alternative programs helped at-risk students. The Phoenix Program was designed to give troubled students a second chance to stay in school and graduate. Principals need to see if this program changes students enough to continue sending them to the program.

Supporting documentation for this study came from several sources. 1) Statistical data on student discipline, suspensions, and graduation were collected on students who attended the Phoenix Program during the years 2005 – 2006 and 2006 – 2007. This data was obtained from the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services of the Mobile County Public School System. 2) Surveys were distributed to principals, assistant principal, students who attended the Phoenix Program, parents of students who attended

the Phoenix Program, and staff members (teachers, counselors, and directors) of the Phoenix Program.

Theoretical Framework

The environment in which a student learns has become a very important factor in providing an adequate education for students. Not only are educators and educational leaders responsible for providing students with a meaningful academic curriculum, but they must also create an inviting atmosphere that is conducive to learning. While at school, students look for an environment where they feel safe, are treated fairly, and taught by faculty members who care about them. These characteristics often reflect a school's climate. The climate of a school consists of the organization of a school, school safety, rules and procedures, students' attitude towards their school, faculty morale, teacher and student relationships, and parental involvement. A school's climate can be described by words such as caring, sharing, trusting, and cooperating (Sashkin & Walberg, 1993).

A positive or negative school climate can affect the academic performance of a student. School climate and culture is a school-level factor that effects student achievement (Marzano, 2003). School climates vary from school to school. Some schools create educational environments that are conducive to learning and other schools are unsafe for students and don't make the students feel comfortable. Research indicates that there is a difference between the climate of a traditional school and of an alternative school. Students like alternative schools because the schools are smaller and the communication is better with the teacher (De La Ossa, 2005). Students who attended alternative schools liked them because there were fewer students at the school, the class

sizes were smaller, and the teacher gave more individual attention (De La Ossa, 2005). Students felt comfortable at the alternative school because the teachers treated them like they cared for them (De La Ossa, 2005). Some people feel that students perform better in alternative schools because it creates a kinder and friendlier climate than traditional schools. Effective alternative school programs should involve small class sizes, a positive environment that provides high expectations and an instructional program that meets local and state requirements (Friedman, 2001).

The theoretical framework for this study revolved around whether changing the climate of students from traditional schools to alternative schools improved their academic and nonacademic performance. The theory that best describes this concept is Institutional Pathology (Sagor & Cox, 2004). Institutional Pathology is a dominant theory of at-riskness that suggests students may become at-risk due to institutional insufficiencies (Sagor & Cox, 2004). When individuals or groups consistently receive differential treatment by social institutions one should expect to see them behave differently (Sagor & Cox, 2004). This theory suggests that a large number of children receive improper or inappropriate treatment by the institutions where they spend much of their time. School is one of the most significant institutions that have the most impact on youth (Sagor & Cox, 2004). Institutional interventions that are suggested are referred to as pacification programs. Pacification programs are programs such as alternative schools that don't cure the problem but changes the institution as well as the institutional practices that may be placing the student at-risk (Sagor & Cox, 2004).

Research Question

This study examined the following research questions:

1) What are the numbers of suspensions for students once they return to their traditional school after attending the Phoenix Program?
2) Does the attendance of students who attend the Phoenix Program improve after returning to their regular school?
3) What are the numbers of students who graduate from high school with a diploma from their traditional school after attending the Phoenix Alternative Program?
4) What are the numbers of student discipline referrals for students in their traditional school after attending the Phoenix Alternative Program?
5) Is there a significant difference among students' who attended the Phoenix Program, parents' of students who attended the Phoenix Program, Phoenix Program staff members', and principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program?

Definition of Terms

At-risk student – Any child who is unlikely to graduate, on schedule, with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships (Sagor & Cox, 2004).

Alternative schools – A school or program that provides educational opportunities to at-risk students, students in danger of dropping out of school, or students who have been suspended from their traditional school.

Dropout – An individual who was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year and was not enrolled on October 1 of the current school year and did not graduate from high school without a diploma.

Short-term suspension – Action taken to deprive a student the privilege of attending school from one (1) to (10) days.

Long-term suspension – Action taken to deprive a student the privilege of attending school from eleven (11) days to the end of a semester (Mobile County Public Schools, 2008).

Expulsion – The permanent removal of the right and obligation of a student to attend a public school (Mobile County Public Schools, 2008).

Zero-tolerance policies – Rules that address school safety and discipline by requiring the expulsion of students who are in possession of weapons, drugs, or commit serious acts of violence while at school.

Multiple intelligences - A theory of human intelligence that suggests there are at least seven ways that people have of perceiving and understanding the world (Funderstanding, 2001).

School climate – The overall environment of the school where students feel safe, comfortable and cared for by the faculty and staff.

Free schools – An early form of an alternative school that was set up in mostly inner-city areas by parents and community members who were fed up with the current status of the educational system.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Safety and Zero-Tolerance Policies

Schools throughout the country are faced with the challenge of dealing with the increase in violence and discipline problems in school. In recent years, there has been a growing concern about safety in schools, causing school districts to devise stricter discipline policies which have resulted in more suspensions from school. Many administrators maintain that their strict adherence to school guidelines is simply a response to parental and societal concerns about the rising rates of violence and drug use among young people (Portner, 1996).

In 1994, Congress passed the Gun-Free Schools Act, which required states to legislate zero-tolerance laws or risk losing federal funds (Martin, 2000). This legislation came after demands from the public for safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools. Zero-tolerance policies are administrative rules intended to address specific problems associated with school safety and discipline (McAndrews, 2001). The purpose of zero-tolerance policies is to make schools safer by reducing the number of weapons, drugs, and violence. Zero-tolerance policies require school districts to expel students who bring weapons, commit assault, or bring illegal drugs to school (Portner, 1996).

The U.S. Department of Education's Report of State Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act gives the state's results of zero-tolerance policies for weapons violations in 1996-1997. According to the report, 6,093 students throughout the nation were expelled in 1996-97 for bringing weapons to school (Bushweller, 1998).

As a result of the Columbine shooting in 1999, as well as other instances of school violence, zero tolerance policies began to resurface. There was a new push for safer schools and stricter discipline policies in schools. "Those killings produced widespread support for zero tolerance and other "get-tough" programs designed to keep another such tragedy from occurring" (McCollum, 2004). In an effort to continue to create safe schools, zero tolerance polices were expanded from weapon possession to include offenses such as drug possession, sexual harassment or assault, profanity towards adults, and violent and threatening behavior.

In the United States, more than 80% of schools implement zero tolerance policies (Black, 2004). However, these policies have sparked several controversial concerns. Advocates for zero tolerance polices credit them for lowering the amount of violence in schools and creating safer learning environments for students. People who oppose this type of discipline complain of the high suspension rates in schools and attribute high suspension rates to academic failure and high dropout rate. Several people have voiced concerns about the increased number of suspensions and expulsions that occur in schools as a result of zero tolerance policies. More than 3 million K-12 students are suspended and nearly 100,000 students are expelled each year due to zero tolerance policies (Fuentes, 2003). In most school districts, expulsion and suspension is the main form of punishment under zero tolerance policies. Short-term suspensions range from one to ten days, long-term suspensions range from eleven days to the end of a semester, and expulsions can last up to one year (Mobile County Public Schools, 2008). Students are generally suspended from school for a long term or expelled when they commit behaviors that violate the zero tolerance policy such as possession of alcoholic beverages, drugs,

drug paraphernalia, or weapons while on school property. The increase in long-term suspensions has raised concerns about denying suspended students an education. Students who are suspended are three times more likely to drop out of school by their sophomore year than other students (Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Many students who are suspended or expelled under zero tolerance polices are not able to continue their education and often drop out of school.

Zero tolerance polices have created other negative consequences. Proponents fear that the one size fits all approach to discipline creates inconsistency to school discipline procedures. Proponents also fear one race is disciplined more than others due to zero tolerance policies. In 2000, Russell Skiba, associate professor of education and director of the Safe and Responsive Schools Project at Indiana University, used data to examine zero tolerance polices in thirty-seven states. In almost every state, he found that suspension, and expulsion rates were higher for African-American students than for the general student population (Fuentes, 2003). African-American students are 17 percent of the entire public school population but account for 34 percent of all out-of-school suspensions and 30 percent of the student population but account for 48 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 49 percent of expulsions (Fuentes, 2003).

The increase in long-term suspensions has caused a growing request for school systems to provide alternative programs for students who have been suspended from school for a long term. Several initiatives have been established to decrease the number of out of school suspensions in schools by replacing them with other discipline methods. Some of these alternatives include mentoring, and tutoring programs, in-school suspensions, character development, and discipline contracts (Casella, 2003). Another

alternative is to provide alternate education programs for students who are suspended and expelled as well as students who are a threat to teachers and other students. In the Knox County school system in Tennessee, more than half of all offenders were either returned to school or placed in an alternative school after committing a zero-tolerance offense (Black, 2004).

Alternative Schools for At-Risk Students

In every school system, teachers and administrators must deal with students who may not be the ideal student. They have to deal with students who may struggle in school academically, are constant behavior problems, have poor attendance and have not had successful experiences in school. These students can be identified as at-risk students. An at-risk student is usually academically challenged and is in danger of failing or dropping out of school (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). An at-risk student may have limited success in school because of a lack of educational exposure. Many times a student who is labeled at-risk exhibits behavior that may prevent themselves and others from being successful in school.

Over the years rigorous training has helped teachers and administrators quickly and effectively recognize signs of an at-risk student. Students who may be at-risk can be identified by low achievement, grade retention, behavior problems, poor attendance, low socio-economic status, and attendance at schools with large numbers of poor students (Schargel & Smink, 2004). Often times students struggle in schools because of backgrounds and characteristics that are not school related. Researchers list several factors that may cause students to become at-risk. At-risk students are typically from low-SES homes, eligible for free lunches, and from poverty stricken homes (Schargel &

Smink, 2004). At-risk students also include children in African- American or Hispanic families, students whose first language is not English, children who are handicapped and have special needs, capable students who are not succeeding in the classroom, students who disrupt the learning process, and students who challenge, demoralize, frustrate, and exasperate their teachers (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The at-risk characteristics that are mostly mentioned throughout the literature are ethnicity, single-parent homes, socio-economic status and student behaviors. Children who have to live through these risk factors often become poor school performers (Kronick, 1997).

Students of certain ethnic backgrounds often become at-risk students. Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian and Pacific Islanders, and poor whites all have possibilities of being at risk (Morris, 1994). However, dropout rates for black and Hispanic youths are two times greater than that of white students (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993).

Students who come from a single-parent home are likely to do poorly in school. Students who live in single-parent households tend to have lower achievement rates and higher school dropout rates than do students from more traditional, two-parent households (Thomkins & Deloney, 1994).

The most mentioned characteristic of an at-risk student is the student's socio-economic status. The poverty level of a student may dictate the academic success of a student. Children in poverty drop out more often than their peers who are not so poor (Gibson, 1997). Poverty is a very powerful community-related factor that has an impact on dropping out like no other (Gibson, 1997). These are behaviors that should be addressed to improve the educational status of students in at-risk situations.

Most literature on at-risk students suggests that the proper implementation of programs and strategies into schools and homes can prevent or decrease the number of at-risk students in today's school. Some literature suggests that programs and strategies that maybe conducted with students before entering school may increase their performance and prevent them from dropping out of school. Many dysfunctional behaviors are already evident in kindergarten and become more evident each year, which could lead to more serious behaviors during high school (Kronick, 1997). It is extremely important for educators to identify such behavior and immediately begin interventions to prevent further development of these behaviors. Other much needed interventions include social skill development, activities which encourage student communication positive interaction and self-esteem, as well as programs that address alcohol and drug use, and teenage pregnancy (Kronick, 1997). As a result of identifying at-risk children early and providing each of them with appropriate interventions, the later behavioral crises of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and dropping out will be greatly reduced (Kronick, 1997).

In order to reduce the student behavioral problems that administrators face, a comprehensive and consistent K-12 program that facilitates the development of social and academic skills for all students is required (Kronick, 1997). The program must examine the school climate, classroom instructional practices, school policies, and organizational structure to which the students respond (Kronick, 1997). The school's response to what these students bring to school determines their success in school (Kronick, 1997).

Students become at-risk because they have not had a reasonable number of school successes (Kronick, 1997). At-risk students need an introduction to reading and

arithmetic, one-to-one tutoring, and home assistance beginning in kindergarten and first grade. (Kronick, 1997). At-risk students need the school to help them develop the positive self-concept and esteem that result from positive academic experiences (Kronick, 1997). Early intervention can prevent school failure for nearly every child (Kronick, 1997).

Another strategy that may decrease at-risk behavior at school is a successful relationship between students and their parents. The extent to which children bond with their parents and feel that they are important members of their family reduces later at-risk behaviors (Kronick, 1997). The amount of influence that a parent has on a child may have an effect on how successful a child will be in school. It is also important for parents to establish a relationship with their child's school. Schools should implement techniques into their school that promote a partnership between the school and family (Kronick, 1997). Teachers should make phone calls, set up parent teacher conferences, collaborate with parents in the decision making process as well as planning activities, send notes and letters to teachers as well as sending parents instructions on how to help their students with homework (Kronick, 1997). Research suggest that the involvement of parents in their child's school, improves the attitude toward school as well as their academic achievement (Kronick,1997).

In a research study done by Karen L. Mapp and Anne Henderson, they analyzed research on the relationship between parent and community connections with schools and student academic achievement (Schargel & Smink, 2004). This study showed how the involvement of a family can affect the achievement of a student who is considered at risk. Henderson and Mapp concluded from their study that there is a positive relationship

between family involvement and improved academic achievement (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The study revealed that when families are engaged in children's learning, students are more likely to earn higher grade point averages and test scores, pass more classes, have better attendance, have more positive attitudes about school and graduate from high school (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The study also showed that family involvement is important at all stages of a child's life (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The research from the evidence synthesis indicates that when students feel support from both home and school, they tend to do better in school (Schargel & Smink, 2004).

The literature on at- risk students suggested that early intervention programs, parental involvement, and family engagement are all important factors in decreasing the at-risk status of students. Parents should begin at an early age becoming involved in their child's education. It is also suggested that the parents become visible at their child's school and developing a relationship with the teachers and school administrators. These strategies have been proven by research and data that they can increase a child's success in school and ensure that a student does not drop out of school. Another successful strategy that is suggested for at–risk students is alternative schooling.

Dropout Prevention

A student is considered a dropout when he or she was enrolled in school during the previous school year but was not enrolled on October 1 of the previous school year. (Schargel & Smink, 2001). A student is also considered a dropout if the student did not graduate from high school or complete a state or district approved educational program and did not transfer to another public or private school (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Many states have different ways of configuring dropout rates. The state of Alabama is one of

the many states that use the same definition developed by the National Center for Education Statistics.

School districts figure dropout rates by either overestimating or underestimating dropouts (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). When school districts overestimate dropouts they include all individuals who did not graduate from high school and who are currently not enrolled in school. Even if a student completes a GED, or transfers to another school, the person is still considered a dropout (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). This type of overestimation of dropout rates often allows school districts to have an inflated dropout rate. The second way that districts figure dropout rates is underestimation of dropouts. Some districts underestimate their dropout rate by creating categories of students and not including students in their dropout rate who no longer attend school. Students who are suspended, expelled or transfer to another district are usually not counted in the dropout total. During this method many students are on roll that may not be attending the school (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Underestimating is usually done to meet local or federal requirements to lower dropout rates (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

The U.S. Department of Education calculates dropout rates in four ways: event dropout rates, status dropout rates, cohort dropout rates, and high school completion rates.(Schargel & Smink, 2001). An event dropout rate is the number of students who leave school each year without completing a high school program (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Event dropout rates provide information about how effective educators are in keeping student enrolled in school (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Status dropout rates provide cumulative data on dropouts among young adults from ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and who have not earned a high school diploma (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

The difference between status and event dropout rates is that status rates include all dropouts regardless of when they last attended school. As a result status dropout rates tend to be higher than event rates (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Cohort rates measure what happens to a group of student from a single age group or specific grade over a period of time. In a high school, a cohort rate usually tracks a group of ninth grade students until they reach the twelfth grade to determine how many students in that group dropped out of school before they reached the twelfth grade. A cohort rate gives an estimate of how many students eventually fail to complete high school (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Finally, the U.S. Department of Education also uses high school completion rates to figure dropout rates. The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18-24 year-olds who have completed a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, including a GED (General Educational Development Degree) (Schargel & Smink, 2001). In some states data on dropouts is collected by the high school completion percentage. In the state of Alabama, each school is required to have a 90% graduation rate.

Who Drops Out?

School districts throughout the country are making great efforts to decrease the number of students dropping out of school. However, before the dropout rate can improve, school systems and educators must be able to identify who is most likely to drop out of school and why they tend to leave before they graduate. Students who are most likely to drop out of school often suffer from poverty or low economic status, are from a certain ethnic group, speak limited English, and become pregnant before graduating high school.

In the United States the significant change in family structures may be responsible for the increase of economic strain in some homes. Throughout the United States there are a growing number of single family homes that are headed mostly by single mothers. The fastest growing family group is the single-parent household. One-third of all family groups are headed by one parent. Single mothers represent 86 percent of all single parents (Schargel & Smink, 2004). According to the Census Bureau, the number of single-parent homes grew from 3.8 million in 1970 to 11.4 million in 1994 (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The divorce rate has also seen an increase for the last several years. Divorce has become more common, and it affects the economic well-being of new single mothers and their children. Half of the black single mothers and one-third of the white single mothers who were not poor while they were married were likely to be living in poverty within a year after divorce (Schargel & Smink, 2004). These factors have had a tremendous impact on the financial situation of most families in the United States. In fact these factors have even increased the chance that children raised in one of these types of households may be brought up in poverty. As a result, the increased number of students living in poverty is a factor that schools and school districts are forced to overcome in order to educate all children. Approximately 7.6 million school-age children, more than 17 percent of the total student population, live in poverty (Schargel & Smink, 2004). Over the years, research and data indicate that students who suffer from poverty are less likely to graduate from high school than other students. In 2000, young adults living in families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent of all family incomes were six times as likely as their peers from families in the top percent of the income distribution to drop out of high school (Reed, 2007). Students from low-economic

families are three times as likely to drop out of school as those from more affluent homes (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

Ethnicity is another characteristic of students who may drop out of school. Most research indicates that black and Hispanic students are more likely to drop out of school than white students. Asian students are less likely than all races to drop out of school. In 2000, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 64.1 percent of all Hispanic 18-through 24-year olds, 91.8 percent of white 18-through 24-year olds, and 83.7 percent of black 18-through 24- year olds had completed secondary schooling. Asian youth had the highest completion rate with 94.6 percent (Reed, 2007). In 1998 and 1999, not only did Hispanics and blacks have higher dropout rates but that they also had higher grade retention rates, higher numbers of suspension and expulsions and they took a less amount of advanced level mathematics and science courses (Schargel & Smink, 2004). These statistics appear to be an indicator of why blacks and Hispanics tend to have a higher dropout rate than white students.

Students who attend schools in the United States but speak limited English stand a greater chance of not completing school. Young people from non-English-language backgrounds are one and one-half times more likely to leave school than those from English-language backgrounds (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The dropout rate for Hispanics who do not speak English is three to four times as high as the rate for those who do (Schargel & Smink, 2004).

The last characteristic of a school dropout is teenage pregnancy. Female students who become pregnant before graduating high school tend to drop out of school. Between

30 and 40 percent of female teenagers who drop out of school are mothers. (Schargel & Smink, 2004).

Reasons for Leaving School Early

Students drop out of school for many reasons. Some reasons are caused by factors such as social, family, and economic situations. However, school-related factors often cause students to become frustrated with school and eventually drop out. School-related factors are characteristics of a school that may cause a student to have a bad experience or develop a negative opinion about school. These factors are not associated with social or cultural factors that students bring from home. School-related factors may include the structure of the school, the staff, the curriculum, or teaching styles. Five reasons mentioned by students for leaving school early were being bored with school, missing too many days, spending time with people who were not interested in school, having too much freedom and not enough rules in their lives, and failing in school (Azzam, 2007).

There are several school-related risk factors. One of the most important factors about dropping out is a student's feelings about their school (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Most students who eventually drop out dislike school because they feel that school is boring, meaningless, and their teachers and administrators did not care about them (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Literature suggested that a student's prior experiences may not be a factor for dropping out but instead it may be the students' experiences once they enter the school that causes them to dislike school and eventually quit. These indicators have raised concerns about the structure and organizational set up of schools. These indicators cause people to question if schools rather than social factors

cause students to drop out of school. Some research suggested that some of the strategies and practices that are done in schools are not suitable for all students and do not address the needs of all students causing some to fail. Some of the most common institutional practices of schooling retard the development of children and act to handicap minorities and the poor further (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Ability grouping and retention is a school practice that does not improve student achievement and may cause students to drop out of school (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Ability grouping and retention are both interventions that are used for students who are learning at a slower pace and who may not be on grade level. Both of these practices have been viewed by some to be ineffective and devastating to students. Ability grouping (often referred to as tracking) is a practice where students at the same ability level are grouped together. This often leads to having a group of slower learning students together moving at a slower pace than the rest of the class. Students in the slower groups receive fewer minutes of instruction, are instructed more by aides or paraprofessionals than by regular teachers, cover less material, are given fewer complex cognitive tasks, and experience a more technical-managerial teaching style from teachers than do other students (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). Retention is the practice of placing a student in the same grade the next year if the student does not master grade-level objectives the previous year. Different studies on retention effects have shown that retention is an ineffective means for increasing student achievement (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991). When data is analyzed across school systems, it is usually discovered that students who were retained experienced a greater risk for dropping out that cannot be explained by their poor

achievement. In most cases, a large proportion of high school dropouts have repeated a grade (Shepherd & Smith, 1989; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

Some people are beginning to point to schools as the reason why all students do not graduate from school. Many people feel that the structure and the organization of schools do not address the needs of all learners. The grading system, standardized testing and the school curriculum seem to receive the most criticism in schools. These are things that have been apart of schools for many years. However, many believe that all students do not benefit from these factors. Curriculum is defined as the way a school is organized and instruction is delivered (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). Curricular organization determines the way students are evaluated and the ratio of success to failure than results (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). The problem with this type of structure is that usually there is only one curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of all students. However, all students are not on the same ability level and do not learn at the same pace. The curriculum should be fitted to children, and children should not be fitted to a curriculum (Kronick and Hargis, 1998). A student develops into a dropout when he or she is forced to fit into a certain curriculum that does not work for him or her. Creating a learning environment that supports the child's ability, background, and method of learning are interventions that are gradually decreasing the number of dropouts in schools.

Many schools and school districts across the country attempt to educate children with a one size fit all approach. This is done with the assumption that all students are the same. Based on years of data and research, we all know that this is not true. Not only are students not the same, but their ability levels are not the same and most importantly all students do not learn the same way. This is a problem that many students face in schools today. Students often receive instruction in a manner that does not necessarily meet their

learning style. This may cause students to become uncomfortable in that learning environment and become frustrated with school.

The delivery of instruction is a school related factor that is many times overlooked. The degree to which information or skills are organized and presented so that students can easily learn them and the time that students are given to learn the materials being taught are crucial variables in the delivery of effective instruction (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). The method in which a teacher chooses to relay information to students is very crucial to the success or failure of a child. Although, there are numerous ways of delivering instruction, some ways are more effective than others. There are some delivery methods that use more rigorous and thought provoking strategies which engage students in learning while retaining more information. Other methods such as lecture, do not engage students in the learning process, makes the class less interactive, and may cause the students to become bored with the class. Unfortunately, most teachers attempt to use the methods that are less effective with students. This may be a contribution to the development of a dropout. Since the early 1980's educators have learned a great deal about the attributes of instruction that result in efficient and motivated learning. Despite the research evidence that supports varied instructional techniques, effective teaching practices are not routinely used in classrooms, which leads to academic failure and ultimately disengaged and disinterested students who drop out of school (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). Teachers tend to utilize the majority of class time by lecturing to students. This type of instruction does not engage students in the learning process. During a lecture there is no way for a teacher to evaluate if a student comprehends or retains the information that is covered in a lecture. By designing a lesson that allows a

student to participate and apply what is learned, a student has an opportunity to demonstrate to the teacher that he/she has mastered an objective. More classroom time should consist of activities where the student is engaged in learning and the teacher is attending to the students (Kronick & Hargis 1998). When the student is engaged, the teacher can monitor his/her performance to see if the instructional match has been made (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). Many students have been lost because teachers use the simplest form of instruction, which does not allow students to reach their academic potential. Lecture and demonstration is considered the lowest level of instruction because it does not allow them to apply what they have learned. Students can very quickly become disinterested in the class and respond by acting out. This is what starts discipline problems in the classroom. Although lecture continues to be the most widely used method in the classroom, countless studies indicate that students retain the most by teaching others, practicing by doing, and discussing in groups (Madrazo & Motz, 2005). A teacher can increase the level of instruction by utilizing activities that are student centered and allows students to learn using strategies such as higher order-thinking skills, peer tutoring and cooperative learning (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). No longer can students learn by one approach and one approach only. Teachers must make a conscious effort to teach students in a manner that is appropriate to their learning style and ability level. If teachers continue to use ineffective teaching methods, a large number of students who cannot succeed using those methods will continue to drop out.

In recent years, educators and researchers have searched for ways to improve instruction and decrease the use of the outdated teaching practices of old. The use of research-validated practices as a foundation for effective teaching is essential to the

success of the education system in the 21st century (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). Advances in educational research over the past few decades have clearly highlighted more about effective instructional practices than ever before (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). As a result, teachers have the opportunity to implement research-validated practices rather than relying on their own intuitive judgments about what works and what does not work (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). In the article, "Effective Instruction: An Inconspicuous Strategy for Dropout Prevention," Bost & Riccomini (2006) give an overview of 10 effective teaching principles that teachers can use to make instruction more effective and keep students engaged in school. Some of the 10 principles include active engagement, grouping for instruction, and scaffolded instruction. Active engagement refers to the amount of time students and teachers attend to work that is instructionally appropriate (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). Students learn more when they are actively engaged during an instructional task. Grouping for instruction is another principle that suggests students achieve best in classes where they spend most of their time engaged in learning activities supervised by their teacher. Scaffolded instruction is one of the 10 principles that promote independent learning. Scaffolded instruction is a system of instructional support that is deliberately designed by a teacher to assist students in becoming independent and self-regulated learners, by enabling them to become more successful in school and successful adults. This principle facilitates a teacher's ability to keep students engaged in the classroom (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). These are research-validated practices that, are capable of helping students experience school success and make academic gains in the general education curriculum (Bost & Riccomini, 2006).

Other research has been done on the ways that students learn and the best way to teach them. The most notable research came in 1983 by a psychologist named Howard Gardner. Gardner proposed a theory that describes different kinds of "intelligences" exhibited by human beings. This proposed a new view of intelligence that was rapidly incorporated in school curricula across the country (Brualdi, 1996). Gardner defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued within one or more cultural settings (Gardner, 1999). Gardner would later refine his definition and refer to intelligences as a biopsychological potential process of information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture (Gardner, 1999). Gardner argues, "the intelligences are used together and typically complement each other as individuals develop skills or solve problems " (Brualdi, 1996).

In 1983, Gardner's theory originally included seven intelligences. They were:

- Logical-Mathematical Intelligence – Consists of the ability to detect patterns, deductive reasoning and thinking logically.
- Linguistic Intelligence – Involves having a mastery of language.
- Spatial Intelligence – The ability to create mental images in order to solve problems.
- Musical Intelligence – The capability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms.
- Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence – The ability to use one's mental abilities to coordinate one's own bodily movements.
- Personal Intelligence – The interpersonal feelings and intentions of others.

- Intrapersonal Intelligence – The ability to understand one's own feelings and motivations.

Gardner selected the seven intelligences because they met eight criteria. The eight criteria that Gardner established were 1) the potential of isolation by brain damage 2) an evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility 3) an identifiable core operation or set of operations, 4) susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system 5) a distinct developmental history, along with a definable set of expert performances 6) the existence of idiot savants, prodigies, and other exceptional people 7) support from experimental psychological tasks and 8) support from psychometric findings (Gardner, 1999). Gardner used the eight criteria as a method to determine if a candidate faculty had enough evidence according to the criteria to become a human intelligence (Gardner, 1999). Candidate faculties that met all criteria were called human intelligences.

Since the development of the multiple intelligences theory in 1983, Gardner has considered expanding the list of intelligences. There have been numerous debates on if there are other intelligences and if so how many actually exist. There have been several candidates that have been considered as an additional intelligence but so far there is only one candidate that has met all of the eight criteria. This intelligence is called the naturalist intelligence.

Naturalist combines a description of the core ability with a characterization of a role that many cultures value (Gardner, 1999). A naturalist demonstrates expertise in the recognition and classification of the numerous species of his or her environment (Gardner, 1999). Naturalists are often biologists, ornithologists, hunters, farmers, and cooks (Kincheloe, 2004). A naturalist is only intelligent only if he or she is engaged in

nature (Kincheloe, 2004). Gardner added the naturalist intelligence to the original seven intelligences because it clearly met all of the eight criteria that were established for the human intelligence. Gardner's acknowledgement of the naturalist as the eighth intelligence increases the possibility of more intelligences being added in the future.

Despite the number of intelligences that may exist, teachers and schools across the country have adopted the multiple intelligence theory and have made efforts to implement it into their classrooms. Researchers have brought to educators' attention that all students have various intelligences and talents that they bring to the classroom. The way that students use their talents as learning styles (Brualdi, 1996). All students learn differently. A teacher cannot teach all students the same way because there are many students in one classroom that have different learning styles. Due to the fact that there are many students in one classroom that all have different learning styles, a teacher cannot teach all students the same way. Teachers are learning that it is their responsibility to address the learning styles of students by diversifying their instruction. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences implies that educators should recognize and teach to a broader range of talents and skills. Teachers should structure their presentation of material in a style which engages most or all of the intelligences (Brualdi, 1996). Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences recognizes the different abilities and talents of students (Brualdi, 1996). This theory acknowledges that while all students may not be verbally or mathematically gifted, children may have an expertise in other areas, such as music, spatial relations, or interpersonal knowledge. Approaching and assessing learning in this manner allows a wider range of students to successfully participate in classroom learning (Brualdi, 1996).

Gardner's theory provides a foundation for other research that would eventually be conducted on how students learn. Gardner's theory makes reference to parts of the brain and how it is used for learning. "Primary elements of different types of learning are found in particular areas of the brain where corresponding transformations have occurred" (Brualdi, 1996). Other research has been done on how the brain works and how it affects learning styles. This type of research is referred to as brain-based research. Brain- based research focuses on how the brain works to gain an understanding of how students learn and develop in a classroom (Madrazo & Motz, 2005). In recent years, research on how the brain works has been shared with teachers all over the country to show the relationship between the human brain and teaching and learning. Educators are being encouraged to use this research to understand the various ways that students learn and diversify their instructional techniques to reach the needs of all students. In Marcia Tate's book called *Worksheets Don't Grow Dendrites: Instructional Strategies that Engage the Brain*, she introduces 20 instructional strategies that according to brain research, take advantage of the way the brain learns best (2003). In her book she uses research rationales on the brain and learning styles to give teachers strategies for improving student performance. After reading this book, teachers should be able to motivate and engage students by using techniques correlate with brain research and multiple learning styles.

A teacher's instructional strategies have a tremendous impact on the academic success of a student (Marzano, 2003). "A teacher-level factor that affects student achievement is "instructional strategies" (Marzano, 2003). It is perhaps self-evident that more effective teachers use more effective instructional strategies. It is probably also true

that effective teachers have more instructional strategies at their disposal" (Marzano, 2003).

Research on instructional strategies show that there are other ways of educating students rather than using the traditional ineffective methods of instruction. The same applies to the structure and organization of schools. If it is indeed true that there are issues inside schools that enable students to have negative experiences, then the appropriate measures should be taken to change them. Factors that a student brings into a school may not be controllable but a child's experience while in school should.

School systems across the United States are faced with a great challenge of reducing the dropout rate for students. Educators are working against a great number of factors that cause students to have poor academic achievement and to drop out of school. It is already known what social factors and school-related factors cause students to fail and eventually dropout of school. However, educators and school officials need to know what can be done to prevent or solve the dropout problem. School systems must begin implementing dropout prevention plans in their schools in order to save students from leaving school before receiving a diploma.

Over the years research has been conducted to determine strategies that may decrease the dropout rate in schools. Groups and organizations have also developed plans to increase student achievement and reduce the dropout rate. The Southern Regional Education Board developed a comprehensive plan for reducing dropouts and encouraged many states to implement this plan to reduce dropouts. The plan requires states to develop a system to collect and report dropout data for different groups of students; develop programs to identify and help students who are most likely to drop out of school;

establish policies to reduce excessive absenteeism; provide special assistance for particular groups of students, such as teen parents, and children whose native language is not English; and establish a method of attracting high school dropouts into alternative programs that lead to a high school diploma (Southern Regional Educational Board, 2000).

In an article called *The Dropout Crisis*, Angela Pascopella, summarizes a 12-step plan to reduce dropouts by the National Education Association. This plan was created in response to the continued increase in high school dropouts. The NEA 12-step plan includes:

- Make high school graduation a requirement for everyone below age 21.
- Establish high school graduation centers for older students, ages 19-1, to provide specialized instruction and counseling, separate from younger students.
- Ensure students receive individual attention through safe schools, smaller learning communities in larger buildings, smaller classes, and during the summer, and in after-school tutoring programs.
- Expand students' graduation options by creating partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools.
- Increase career education and workforce readiness programs so students can see connections between school and careers.
- Use high-quality, preschool programs to ensure early grade-level interventions.

- Involve families in students' learning at school and home in new and creative ways so they will stay involved in their education.
- Monitor students' academic progress during the school year.
- Gathering accurate data for key student groups like ethnic and racial groups, establishing benchmarks in each state, and adopting standardized reporting developed by the National Governors Association.
- Involve the entire community through family-friendly policies that provide release time for employees to attend parent-teacher conferences; work schedules that allow high school students to attend classes.
- Ensure educators have the necessary training and resources, including professional development focused on needs of diverse and at-risk students.
- Make high school a federal priority by calling on Congress to invest $10 billion over the next decade to support dropout prevention programs and support states that make high school graduation compulsory (Pascopella, 2007).

In the book *Strategies to Help Solve Our School Dropout Problem*, Franklin P. Schargel and Jay Smink discuss fifteen effective strategies for dropout prevention. These are researched based strategies that have had the most impact on the dropout rate. They have been successful in rural, suburban, and urban schools and at all school levels from kindergarten to twelfth grade (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Schargel and Smink's fifteen strategies to dropout prevention include: family involvement, early childhood education, reading and writing programs, mentoring/tutoring, service learning, alternative schooling,

out-of-school enhancement, professional development, openness to diverse learning styles & multiple intelligences, instructional technologies, individualized learning, systemic renewal, community collaboration, career education, and conflict resolution & violence prevention. When thoughtfully implemented in a comprehensive school improvement plan, these fifteen strategies have been proven to help solve the school dropout problem (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

Dropout Prevention and Alternative Schools

There have been numerous plans and strategies that have been created to reduce the number of dropouts in school districts. Most of the strategies have had some success when implemented correctly. However, the one strategy that is usually mentioned in all comprehensive plans as well as dropout prevention strategies is the use of alternative schools. Alternative schooling has been mentioned by most researchers as one of the most effective ways of reducing dropouts. Alternative schooling provides potential dropouts a variety of options that can lead to graduation, with programs paying special attention to the students' individual social needs and the academic requirements for a high school diploma (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Researchers promote alternative schools because it provides students who have dropped out or are at-risk of dropping out of school, with another opportunity to receive a high school diploma. The most common form of alternative school serves youth in at-risk situations and is designed as part of a school district's comprehensive dropout prevention program (Schargel & Smink, 2001). The typical student is underachieving and lacks the credits required to graduate or to stay in class with others of the same age (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Alternative schools are recommended to school systems because they create a different environment for students

who were not successful at their traditional school. Students who attend alternative schools usually benefit from smaller class sizes, closer interaction with teachers, flexible scheduling, a specialized curriculum, a more structured environment, and instructional strategies that reflect students' learning styles. Alternative schools are able to provide students with experiences that they may not have received at their traditional school. Alternative schools have been shown to be successful with potential dropouts by reducing truancy, helping them accumulate high school credits, helping them to improve attitudes toward school, and reducing behavior problems (Schargel & Smink, 2004).

In recent years alternative schools have become more popular throughout the United States. Alternative schools are educating more students as well as receiving more local, state, and federal funding. However, there is limited research on how to measure the success of alternative schools. In recent years, school systems and organizations have begun collecting data on alternative schools. The National Dropout Prevention Center has established a working relationship with alternative schools throughout the United States which allows them to keep day-to-day results and determine what educational practices work best (Schargel & Smink, 2004). From a review of more than 75 alternative schools, the Center identified numerous exemplary program ideas and administrative practices that were successful (Schargel & Smink, 2004). In a review by the Intercultural Development Research Association of 1,044 school districts n Texas in 1995-96, 841 districts reported that students were regularly referred to a disciplinary alternative education program; the statewide program has grown to involve more than 70,000 students (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The Hostos Lincoln Academy of Science is one of 75 small alternative high schools run by the New York City Board of Education,

serving students who did not succeed in their previous schools. Hostos's rate for students passing state exams was more than 20 percent higher than the city average. Also, the school dropout rate was just 0.3 percent, compared to the citywide average of 5 percent (Schargel & Smink, 2004). However, not all data has yielded positive results about alternative schools. From 1991 to 1996, the U.S. Department of Education's School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program operated the nation's largest dropout prevention program in 85 different schools and communities. In a survey of twenty selected programs, with data collected from more than 10,000 students, the results showed that no program was able to improve all key outcomes examined, such as dropping out, attendance, test scores, and grades (Schargel & Smink, 2004). An evaluation of Kentucky's alternative school programs revealed a difference of approximately 30 percent between the academic performance of regular schools and that of alternative education programs (Schargel & Smink, 2004). In other nonacademic data, the approximate difference between alternative schools and regular schools was 20% for attendance, 23% for dropout rates, 9% for retention rates, and 4% for rate of transition to adult life (Schargel & Smink, 2004). These findings reveal that the academic programs in Kentucky are significantly poorer than regular schools (Schargel & Smink, 2004).

Other research is documented on the success of alternative schools. In 1983, there was a study conducted which compared alternative schools to conventional schools (Schargel & Smink, 2004). In this study 14 alternative schools and 11 conventional schools in ten states were assessed on how well they were meeting the needs of their students (Schargel & Smink, 2004). The alternative schools proved to do a better job of meeting student's needs in the areas of social competence, self-esteem, and self-

actualization (Schargel & Smink, 2004). It was also concluded that smaller school size was a factor that contributed to the superior climate of alternative schools (Schargel & Smink, 2004). A study by Lucas, Steiger, & Gamble, in 2002, of Indiana's alternative schools showed that over 80 percent of the enrolled students make satisfactory progress each year (Schargel & Smink, 2004). In that same study the teachers state that most of their students would have dropped out, if they had not participated in some type of alternative program. They also said that they expect 94 % of the students to complete high school because they were given an alternative (Schargel & Smink, 2004). There are many examples such as these that demonstrate how alternative schools have prevented students from dropping out of school. Alternative schooling is one of the dropout prevention strategies that give students an option other than settling for failure in a traditional school setting.

The problem of high school dropouts has plagued public schools for many years. Reasons students drop out of school include unhappiness with their current school, failing grades in school, disciplinary problems, suspensions from school, frustration with high-stakes testing and drug or alcohol problems. Schools must bear some of the responsibility for student dropouts. Factors such as a school's size, academic curriculum, and social organization are related to a student's decision to stay or drop out. These issues can be addressed in alternative programs. Students who have had difficulty in traditional schools have an opportunity to find success in alternative programs (Black, 2002).

Alternative Schools for Students with Discipline Problems

A main purpose of alternative education programs is dropout prevention. However, alternative schools also serve students who are discipline problems. Many of the students who are enrolled in alternative schools have either been expelled from public school or are on the verge of dropping out because of their inability to succeed in a traditional classroom environment. Alternative schools offer students a way to continue their education in an environment that meets their physical, intellectual, and emotional needs (Friedman, 2001).

Since zero-tolerance policies have been implemented, there has been an increase in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Although many people were initially excited about taking action against school violence, some have become concerned about the number of students being denied an education. "When students are not in school, they are on the streets, and more often than not, getting in more serious trouble than they could at school" (Perlstein, 2000). If school systems do not provide programs to help continue educational opportunities for suspended and expelled students, these students will have no choice other than dropping out of school. For example, an eighth grade student in Holly, Michigan, was expelled from his school for bringing a plastic toy gun to school and storing a kitchen knife in his locker. The school district did not have an alternative school, so the student spent five months at home (Portner, 1996). The news media regularly report incidents such as this one in school districts across the nation. The literature reviewed for this study revealed several outstanding and exemplary alternative schools.

In 1982, a public school district outside Baltimore, Maryland, established an alternative school to educate troubled teenagers. Special programs included a "positive discipline" program that awarded students points every period during the school day for behavior, attitude, and academic performance. The school has been successful in establishing a disciplined learning environment for students who were likely to drop out or fail to complete high school (Gale Research, 1998).

The Second Chance School in Topeka, Kansas, provides an alternative education program for students who have been expelled from their regular school for possession of weapons or assaulting a staff member. Students placed in the program study math, social studies, and language skills. Depending on the seriousness of the offense, students attend the program for one semester or one year. Ninety percent of the school's student population during the 1995-96 school year successfully completed program requirements and returned to their regular school (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

The Borough Academies in New York City help students who are expelled from their regular school to develop positive behavior skills as they prepare for entrance into college or the job market. This program provides students with a combination of academic and behavior management skills. Students earn credit toward a New York City High School diploma through academic work, guidance, and vocational performance. The Academies have an 86% graduation rate. The Borough Academies are part of an educational network which contains 70 schools and 400 site locations and serves more than 45,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Since 1990, the number of alternative schools in North Carolina has more than quadrupled, and the state has invested millions of dollars in such programs. In 1996-97,

the governor and the State Board of Education asked the legislature to appropriate millions more toward alternative schools (North Carolina Education and Law Project, 1996).

Alternative programs were initially set up to serve students who were expelled or suspended. Now there are several types of alternative programs. Alternative programs may serve students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, those who have been appointed through a court, and those who are struggling academically in a traditional school setting.

The History of Alternative Schools

The history of alternative schools in the United States can be traced back as early as the 19th century. The development of alternative schools occurred due to differences in opinions regarding the purpose and structure of the educational system dating back to the 1800's. When public education first began it was very basic with the purpose, of overcoming cultural diversity and personal differences by preparing people for the anticipated industry workforce (Miller, 1996). At that point the purpose of an education was to mold and discipline young students for the political and social arena, as well as preparing them for success in the corporate economy (Miller, 1996).

As time passed, various groups of people grew disenchanted with this style, of education. Critics felt that it was too rigid, targeted one class of people, and limited the talents and creativity of students.

Concerns with educational structure partially influenced the emergence of the progressive education movement. John Dewey was one of many philosophers who led the progressive education movement in the late nineteenth century. Before the start of

the progressive movement, education was viewed as subject-centered with learning defined as rote memorization of facts and training in language and math skills (Neumann, 2006). Dewey felt that schools should be more individualized and reflect the characteristics of a democratic society (Neumann, 2006). Dewey's philosophy focused more on a child-centered concept. He felt that school curriculum's should focus on student's interest and experiences in earlier years and eventually shift to the learning of subject matter as a child matures. Dewey did not totally oppose the teaching of academic subjects but felt that the curriculum should be better designed to coordinate subject matter with student experiences (Neumann, 2003).

As a result of John Dewey's teaching and philosophies of the progressive education movement, several schools were established which provided alternatives to the conventional schools and curriculums that were under much scrutiny. Dewey assisted with the creation of the Laboratory School, and influenced the development of the Dalton School, the City and Country School, and the Bank Street School. These schools all practiced Dewey's philosophy of utilizing student experiences and individual talents. Dewey's teachings eventually made its way into public schools. Several school district superintendents established plans that included strategies that represented Dewey's ideas of the progressive movement (Neumann, 2003). In the early 1900's the Gary Plan was implemented in Gary, Indiana, the Winnetka Plan, was introduced in Winnetka, Illinois, and in Denver, Colorado, the Denver Research Monograph series was established (Neumann, 2003). All three of these projects used Dewey's philosophy as a foundation to establish curriculums which gave students more options. The development of these

schools and projects were the first of many other schools that would be created to counter the limited structure and curriculums of conventional schools.

The argument over the purpose and structure of schools emerged again in the 1950's. The second time around the argument over school structure focused more on the high school curriculum (Neumann, 2003). Critics of the current curriculum felt that it was too limited and that it did not address every aspect that a child may encounter after high school such as vocational opportunities. Many critics wanted an expansion of the curriculum which would meet the needs of all students and give them a better educational opportunity (Neumann, 2003).

The debate from the 1950's carried over into the 1960's, where the alternative movement would eventually flourish. Before alternative schools became popular, free schools gained a lot of notoriety in the early 1960's. Free schools were set up in mostly inner-city areas by parents and community members who were fed up with the current status of the educational system. Developers of the free schools shared the views of public school opponents who displayed unhappiness with the poor curriculum, ineffective teaching techniques, and the rigid structure that did not properly prepare and educate children. Free schools would allow for student freedom to choose subject matter and learning projects, a strong sense of community in which students and teachers learned from each other, and an absence of distinctive age grading, frequent tests, and letter-grade assessment (Neumann, 2003). Parents and students were attracted to free schools because of the caring disposition of teachers and the staff's concern with creating humane learning environments (Neumann, 2003).

In a time period when the civil rights movement was becoming very aggressive in the United States, free schools were viewed as an opportunity to educate young people in hopes of eventually becoming liberated. Free schools were influenced by freedom schools which were established in 1964 (Neumann, 2003). Freedom schools were established by African American groups in the South who were trying to organize for the civil rights movement by teaching basic literacy skills (Neumann, 2003). As a result, free schools eventually developed into an alternative to public education (Neumann, 2003).

The concepts of the free school movement sparked the emergence of alternative schools in the 1960's and 1970's. Educators, parents, students and community members were fully aware that public education had other alternatives to traditional schools. For several years the establishment of alternative schools continued to increase all over the United States.

As alternative schools became popular, the dynamics began to change. Instead of alternative schools being options for students, school systems began utilizing them as places for troubled students who have failed to fit in at traditional school. In the 1970's, the federal government began supporting alternative schools (Neumann, 2003). The following programs were initiated by the federal government in support of alternative schools. The White House Conference on Children provided funding for the development of alternative optional forms of public education, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which gave Title III funds to establish public alternative schools such as the St. Paul Open School and Rochester's World of Inquiry School, and the Office of Education which provided the Experimental Schools Program, and the National alternative Schools Program in 1971 (Neumann, 2003).

However, in recent years, the federal government has continued to provide support to alternative schools by requiring some school districts to provide alternative programs to students. In 1986, Florida passed the Dropout Prevention Act which encouraged district school boards to establish dropout prevention programs to meet the needs of students who were not being served effectively by traditional public school programs (Schargel & Smink, 2001). In 1995 this Act was amended to create Second Chance Schools for violent and disruptive students who have committed serious infractions. (Schargel & Smink, 2001). In 1993, the state of Mississippi passed a bill that required the school districts to establish and maintain an alternative school program to complement the traditional public school programs of each school district (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Other states such as Texas, South Carolina, and Georgia recent legislations have required that school districts establish alternative schools for suspended and expelled students as well as for students who were not successful in traditional schools (Schargel & Smink, 2001). According to a survey by the Education Commission of the States, only seven states (Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, and Texas) have passed laws requiring that alternative schools be created to handle expelled young people (Portner, 1996). Most, states however, encourage districts to establish alternative schools. Many small and medium-sized districts have started to do so, and many big districts already have alternative schools in place.

As alternative schools became popular, the dynamics began to change. The evolution of the alternative school movement has made it possible for alternative schools to have more than one purpose. Today, there are various forms of alternative schools being used in school districts all over the United States that serve kids in its own unique

way. There are several types of alternative school programs. They are a school-within-a-school, schools without walls, residential schools, separate alternative learning centers, college-based alternative schools, summer schools, magnet schools, second-chance schools, and charter schools. (Schargel & Smink, 2001). The number of alternative schools has continued to increase in the United States. The most popular alternative program that is used by most school districts is the second chance school. Second chance schools are designed for troubled or disruptive students who have been placed in the school by the school district as a last chance before being expelled. (Schargel & Smink, 2004). Students who attend this type of school have committed serious infractions that normally result in a long-term suspension or expulsion from school (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Not only do alternative schools provide a second chance to disruptive students but they also focus on dropout prevention. Many alternative programs provide opportunities to receive a high school diploma or at least attain a GED.

One important reason that supporters are impressed with alternative schools is the services that the school provides to its students. Students who attend alternative schools usually benefit from services that are not always provided at traditional school. Some alternative schools provide extensive counseling, drug awareness programs, and even career development opportunities. Effective alternative school programs should involve small class sizes and certified teacher and administrators who are dedicated to education alternative students. They should offer a positive environment that provides high expectations and an instructional program that meets local and state requirements. The primary goal for students should be to return to their regular school (Friedman, 2001).

In research done by Schargel and Smink (2004), they listed several characteristics that were found in successful alternative schools. They are:

- Total commitment to have each student be a success,
- Maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10,
- Small student base not exceeding 250 students,
- Clearly stated mission and discipline code,
- Caring faculty with continual staff development pertaining to students at-risk,
- School staff that has high expectations for student achievement,
- Learning program that is specific to the student's expectations and learning style,
- Flexible school schedule and,
- Community involvement.

Other characteristics of successful alternative education programs included a strong mission and sense of purpose, a belief that all students can succeed, a low teacher/student ratio allowing individual attention, high academic standards technology that is integrated into instructional practices, and a caring and committed staff who are experienced in working with difficult students (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

All alternative schools are not the same. However, the purpose of all alternative schools is to provide a structured environment to students that will allow them to achieve success that could not be attained at their traditional school. The difference between alternative schools and traditional schools is the structure and the environment that are provided to the students.

Mobile's Alternative: The Phoenix Program

The Phoenix Program is an alternative school in Mobile, Alabama that was established in 1998 by the 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile, Inc. The school was created to give educational opportunities to students who are under a long-term suspension from the Mobile County Public School System and who are in danger of dropping out of school. After attending the Phoenix Program, students return to their traditional school setting and graduate with their class, earn a high school diploma or transfer to the Phoenix Programs GED program (100 Black Men of Greater Mobile, 2008).

Students are assigned to the Phoenix Program when they are suspended from their traditional school for a long term for reasons such as possession of drugs, alcohol, weapons, disorderly conduct, and multiple discipline referrals. After students have been suspended, they are referred to the Phoenix Program by the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services. Before students start the Phoenix Program the students and their parents must attend a program orientation with the Phoenix Program Director. During this orientation the students and their parents meet with the counselor to establish his or her class schedule and sign a student participation agreement with the director. Once orientation is successfully completed, the student may begin class the next day. The students will remain at the Phoenix Program until the end of a semester. Students may return to their regular school upon the completion of program requirements. Once students return to their regular school they may not be referred back to the Phoenix Program.

The goals of the Phoenix Program are to increase self-control, improve conflict-resolution skills, improve academic performance, and to improve self-esteem. Since its inception in 1998, the Phoenix Program has assisted more than 900 students who were at risk of dropping out of public high school. Of that number, more than 20% of the students who returned to their high school graduated with their class. Twelve percent of the students who did not return to high school enrolled in the GED preparation classes through Bishop State Community College. Several students graduated and attended a community or a four-year college.

Alternative schools and programs come in a variety of organizational structures (Schargel & Smink, 2001). These structures include: a school within-a school, schools without walls, residential schools, separate alternative learning centers, college-based alternative schools, summer schools, magnet schools, second-chance schools, and charter schools. The Phoenix Program is considered a second-chance school because it is designed to give students another alternative after being suspended or expelled from their traditional school. The Phoenix Program is independent from the Mobile County Public School System and is privately run by the 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile, Inc. along with assistance from community partners and community resource agencies. Community partners include the Mobile County Public School System, Alabama State Department of Education, The Community Foundation of South Alabama, The Bedsole Foundation, The American Center for Law and Justice of Alabama, Volkert & Associates Inc., and Thompson Engineering Testing Inc. The Phoenix Program is funded by various state and local agencies. Funding sources include: Mobile Housing Board Grant, Alabama State

Department of Education, Mobile County Public School System, Wal-Mart (Money Smart), State Farm (Small Edge), Johnson Control, and Thompson Engineering.

There are two Second Chance Alternative Programs in Mobile County. The middle and high school alternative programs are both located at the former Blount High School in Prichard, Alabama. It is staffed by certified teachers who are usually retired from the Mobile County Public School System. It maintains a 1-12 faculty/student ratio for instructional classes. The Phoenix Program classes are conducted in the courses required by the Mobile County Public School System which include a curriculum of basic academics and electives designed to meet the needs of each student. The Phoenix Program provides instruction in all core subjects (math, science, social studies, language arts) in Grades 9 – 12. Elective courses are taught in reading, keyboarding, word processing, computer applications, and graduation exam preparation. Counseling services are also provided to all students enrolled in the program. The Phoenix Program follows the same school calendar as the Mobile County Public Schools. The school day begins at 8:30a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. Transportation is provided by the Mobile County Public Schools upon request.

During the ten years that The Phoenix Program has been in existence its focus has been to help students at risk of dropping out of school and to give a second chance to students who would normally be out of school due to suspension or expulsion. Before the Phoenix Program, the Mobile County Public School System did not have an alternative school. Students who were suspended or expelled from school did not have an opportunity to go to school or continue their education. In most cases students were out of school all day with limited supervision. The only opportunity that students had to

receive credit while under a long-term suspension was to attend night classes provided by the Mobile County Public School System. However, students could only take one class and could only receive one credit. The creation of the Phoenix Program gave another option to students who were under a long-term suspension. Students now have an opportunity to attend a school that follows a regular school calendar and follows a normal school schedule. Instead of taking one class and receiving one credit, students may now take four classes and receive four credits just as if they were at their regular school. This is one way that the Phoenix Program provides a second chance to students who are under a long-term suspension.

Research on effective alternative schools indicates that successful alternative schools offer a climate and structure that is different than a regular school. The different structure of an alternative school usually gives students a better opportunity to succeed. One of the reasons that the Phoenix Program has been successful with at-risk students is because it provides a nurturing environment to students that may not be available in a regular school setting.

The structure of the Phoenix Program is one of the main characteristics that make it different from traditional schools. The Phoenix Program maintains an enrollment that does not exceed more than 60 students and maintains a 1-12 faculty/student ratio in each instructional class. Maintaining a small student enrollment and small class sizes allows the teachers and administrators to provide more services to the students that cannot be provided in a larger environment. Teachers are able to spend more time with students in a smaller classroom setting than at a traditional school with more students. Students are

also able to focus better and not be distracted as easily. These are two characteristics that have been found to be effective in successful alternative schools.

The Phoenix Program also provides extensive counseling to students. The guidance counselor spends a lot of time with students by scheduling individual conferences with students as well as group counseling sessions with the whole class. The counselor covers subjects such as conflict resolution, career choices, and study habits. After each student returns to his or her regular school, the guidance counselor goes to each school once a semester and does a follow up on each student. The counselor checks on the students' grades, attendance, and discipline record. The counselor also has a conference with the student to check on his or her progress in school. Along with counseling services, all Phoenix Program students are given a drug test twice a semester. The parent is sent a letter the first time a student tests positive for drugs. The second time a student tests positive, the student is denied from receiving school credit until they attend and successfully complete a drug prevention program that is provided by the Mobile County Public School System.

The Phoenix Program provides speakers and mentors from the 100 Black Men Organization and the Drug Education Council to speak to the students on various subjects. The mentors foster a positive relationship between the staff, mentors and students enrolled in the program (100 Black Men of Greater Mobile, 2008). Students who attend the Phoenix Program and have not passed the Alabama High School Graduation Exam are tutored and given remediation while at the Phoenix Program. Students are tutored while at school and are also given an opportunity to attend remediation programs during the summer.

Finally, at the end of each year the Phoenix Program staff members, the 100 Black Men of Greater Mobile, and the community partners hold an end of the year gala for the students, parents, and staff members. During this gala three students are awarded scholarships. One student is given a $10,000 scholarship to a four year university and two students are given a $5,000 scholarship to a junior college.

The Phoenix Program is an alternative program that strives to give a second chance to students who have made mistakes in the regular school setting. Along with a second chance, the Phoenix Program tries to provide the students with the tools they will need to be successful once they return to their regular school. Students who attend this program are surrounded by individuals who genuinely care about their success. This is an alternative program that has made a difference in children's lives.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were high school students in the Mobile County Public School System who were suspended for a long term and attended the Phoenix Program during 2005–2006 and 2006–2007. The participants were between 14 and 19 years of age when they were suspended for reasons such as possession of drugs, alcohol, or weapons, disorderly conduct, or multiple discipline referrals. Other participants in this study included high school principals and assistant principals in the Mobile County Public School System, who referred students to the Phoenix Alternative Program, students who attended the Phoenix Program, parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, and staff members (teachers, counselors, and directors) of the Phoenix Program.

Design

A quantitative study was conducted to collect data on the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Surveys were distributed to high school administrators, students, parents, and Phoenix Program staff members to collect data on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Quantitative data were used to determine the participants' perceptions of the Phoenix Alternative Program and to analyze statistical data on former Phoenix Program students after returning to their regular school. Archival data provided by the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, analyzed former Phoenix Program students' performance by determining whether they continued

to receive discipline referrals, avoided further suspensions, and graduated with a high school diploma.

Archival Data

Statistical data on student discipline, suspensions, attendance, and graduation were collected on students who attended the Phoenix Program during the years 2005 – 2006 and 2006 – 2007. This data was obtained from the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services of the Mobile County Public School System. The Student Services Division of the Mobile County Public School System provided a profile sheet on each student who attended the Phoenix Program. Data from the profile sheets were analyzed to determine the percentage of students who continued to receive discipline referrals to the office, avoided further suspensions, and graduated with a high school diploma. The students' profile sheets were retrieved by a designee of the Assistant Superintendent. The names of each student were removed from the profile sheet to protect the students' confidentiality.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for this study were surveys designed to measure the participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program (see Appendixes D - G). The surveys pertained specifically to the participants experience with the Phoenix Program. Four different surveys were designed and distributed to four different groups. The four groups consisted of principals and assistant principals who referred students to the Phoenix Program, students who attended the Phoenix Program, the parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, and staff members of the Phoenix Program.

The surveys used in this study utilized a Likert scale. The participants were asked to answer questions by responding with "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree", or "not sure".

Principal and Assistant Principal Survey

The principals' and assistant principals' surveys were designed to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program. The survey consisted of 10 questions (see Appendix G) that measured the participant's perceptions of the Phoenix Program. The first part of the survey asked the principals and assistant principals to respond "yes" or "no" to whether they had ever referred a student to the Phoenix Program.

The second part of the survey required the participants to use a Likert scale to respond to the remaining nine questions. All of the questions on this survey pertained to the administrators' observations and experiences with former Phoenix Program students after returning to their regular schools. This survey did not include any questions that were asked on the other three surveys. Questions for this instrument were developed after reviewing the literature on effective alternative schools.

Student Survey

The student surveys were designed to determine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. The student survey consisted of 15 questions (see Appendix D) referring to the students' experiences while at the Phoenix Program. The first five survey questions asked for demographic information about the students. The remaining 10 questions asked the students to respond using a Likert scale. Many of the questions listed on the student survey were also on the parent and staff survey. Ten

questions from the student survey are included on the parent survey. The student and parent surveys correlated as follows: student survey question five is the same as parent survey question one, student survey question six is the same as parent survey question two, student survey question seven is the same as parent survey question three, student survey question eight is the same as parent survey question four, student survey question ten is the same as parent survey question five, student survey question eleven is the same as parent survey question six, student survey question twelve is the same as parent survey question seven, student survey question thirteen is the same as parent survey question eight, student survey question fourteen is the same as parent survey question nine, and student survey question fifteen is the same as parent survey question eleven.

The student survey contains six questions that are listed on the staff survey. The student and staff surveys correlated as follows: student survey question six is the same as staff survey question four, student survey question eight is the same as staff survey question five, student survey question nine is the same as staff survey question six, student survey question eleven is the same as student survey question nine, student survey question thirteen is the same as staff survey question eight, and student survey question fourteen is the same as staff survey question ten. Questions for this instrument were developed after reviewing the literature on effective alternative schools.

Parent Survey

The parent survey was designed to determine the parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. The survey consisted of 12 questions (see Appendix E) asking the parents about their experiences with the Phoenix Program. The first survey question requested demographic information about the parents.

The remaining 11 questions asked the parent to respond using a Likert scale. Ten questions from the parent survey were also on the student survey. There were five questions on the parent survey that were on the staff survey. The questions from each survey correlated as follows: parent survey question two is the same as staff survey question four, parent survey question four is the same as staff survey question five, parent survey question six is the same as staff survey question nine, parent survey question eight is the same as staff survey question eight, and parent survey question nine is the same as staff survey question ten. Questions for this instrument were developed after reviewing the literature on effective alternative schools.

Staff Survey

The staff survey was designed to determine the staff members' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. The survey consisted of 11 questions (see Appendix F) asking the staff members about their experiences with students who have attended the Phoenix Program. The first three survey questions asked the staff members about their previous work experience before working at the Phoenix Program.

The remaining seven questions asked the staff members to respond using a Likert scale. The staff survey included six questions that were on the student survey and five questions that were on the parent survey. Questions for this instrument were developed after reviewing the literature of effective alternative schools.

Instrument Validity

A panel of experts was used to check the validity of the survey questions. The panel consisted of a former Assistant Superintendent of the Student Services Department of the Mobile County Public School System and a research consultant for the Mobile

County Public School System. The two panel members were given copies of the four instruments and asked to give feedback on the validity of the instrument. The panel members gave input and suggestions on changes that should be made to the instruments. Suggested changes included appropriate wording of survey questions, elimination of unclear survey questions, and creation of clear and understandable questions for the reader.

A pilot test was conducted to check the validity of the four instruments that were designed for this study. The pilot surveys were given to 10 former Phoenix Program students, five assistant principals, five former parents of the Phoenix Program, and four staff members of the Phoenix Program. Participants selected for the pilot test were not included in the research study. After confirming validity, the instruments were ready for distribution.

Procedures for Data Collection

Permission to conduct this study was obtained by the University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee (see Appendix H). After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) data was collected by distributing surveys to four different groups of participants. All surveys were accompanied with a cover letter (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the survey as well as directions on completing and returning the survey. The four groups of participants who received surveys were principals and assistant principals, students who attended the Phoenix Program, parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, and staff members of the Phoenix Program.

Principal and Assistant Principal Surveys

The principal and assistant principal surveys were mailed to each person's school. The survey, the cover letter, and an additional envelope for return were placed in an envelope and labeled with the principals' or assistant principals' name. The surveys were distributed to each school through the Mobile County Public School System mail. The directions on the cover letter informed the participants of the time frame for completion (see Appendix A). The participants were given two weeks to complete the survey and return it to the designated address. After two weeks, a follow up phone call was made to the principal of each school.

Student Survey

Students who attended the Phoenix Program received surveys on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program (see Appendix D). The students who received surveys were between 14 -19 years of age. All students who completed surveys were asked to complete student assent forms (see Appendix C). Students under 18 years of age were required to receive parent consent before participating in this study. The consent form explained to the parents the purpose of the study and asked permission for their child to complete a survey on their perceptions of the Phoenix Program. The Phoenix Program guidance counselor visited each student at their regular school and distributed the parent consent forms (see Appendix B), and student assent forms. She instructed the students to deliver the forms to their parent and bring them to school next week if they wanted to participate in the survey. The guidance counselor returned to each school and distributed the surveys to students who returned a parent consent form and student assent form.

Parent Survey

The parents of students who were attending the Phoenix Program were given a survey on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program (see Appendix E). The guidance counselor visited the Phoenix Program students at their regular school and distributed parent surveys to each student. She instructed them to deliver the surveys to their parents and bring them to school the following week. One week later the guidance counselor returned to each school and collected the parent surveys from each student. The time of completion was two weeks.

Staff Survey

Staff members of the Phoenix Program were given a survey on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Surveys along with cover letters (see Appendix A & F) were given to the guidance counselor of the Phoenix Program to distribute to the staff members. The staff members were given one week to complete the surveys and return them to the guidance counselor. One follow up phone call was made as a reminder to the guidance counselor of the Phoenix Program. The surveys were collected one week later. The time of completion was two weeks.

The completion time for instrument design, instrument validity confirmation, and instrument distribution was two months. Upon distributing the surveys to the principals, assistant principals, and staff members a two week deadline was established for completion.

Analysis of Data

Data was analyzed using descriptive techniques and a one-way ANOVA. Descriptive techniques were used to analyze participant demographics and student

performance after leaving the Phoenix Program. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference among students', parents', Phoenix Program staff members' and principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

To assess the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program on students who were suspended from school for a long term, data was analyzed from surveys that were distributed to high school administrators, students who attended the Phoenix Program, the parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, and Phoenix Program staff members about their perceptions of the Phoenix Alternative Program. Statistical data provided by the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services of the Mobile County Public School System was also analyzed to measure the performance of students after leaving the Phoenix Program.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1

Performance of Phoenix Program Students after Completing the Program

	2005-2006		2006-2007	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Suspended Again				
No	23	41.1	44	45.4
Yes	33	58.9	53	54.6
Discipline Referrals				
Decrease	34	60.7	63	64.9
Increase	22	39.3	34	35.1
Graduation				
No	7	12.5	2	2.1
Yes	17	30.4	9	9.3

The statistical data in Table 1 focuses on the performance of students in their regular school after leaving the Phoenix Program. Of the 56 students who attended the Phoenix Program in 2005-2006, 23 students (41.1%) avoided being suspended again and 34 students (60.7%) showed a decrease in discipline referrals. Of the 32 students who were eligible for graduation after attending the Phoenix Program in 2005-2006, 17 students (30.4%) obtained their high school diploma.

Of the 98 students who attended the Phoenix Program in 2006-2007, 53 students (54.6%) avoided being suspended again and 63 students (64.9%) showed a decrease in discipline when they returned to their regular school. Of the 11 students who were eligible for graduation after attending the Phoenix Program in 2006-2007, 9 students (9.3%) obtained their high school diploma.

An analysis of the data indicates that students who attended the Phoenix Program in 2006-2007 showed more improvement in their regular school than students who attended the program in 2005-2006.

Statistical Measures of Effectiveness

Table 2 reflects the demographics of students who completed surveys. Of the 30 students who completed perceptions of effectiveness surveys, 26 students (87%) were black and four students (13%) were white. The gender of the students was equal. Fifteen students (50%) were male and 15 students (50%) were female. The age of the students who attended the Phoenix Program ranged from 15-19. Eight students (26%) were 15 years of age, 12 students (40%) were 16 years of age, four students (13%) were 17 years of age, five students (17%) were 18 years of age and one student (3%) was 19 years of age. Students who completed the survey were in grades 9-12. Eight students (26%) were

in the ninth grade, ten students (33%) were in the tenth grade, three students (10%) were in the eleventh grade and nine students (30%) were in the twelfth grade. Eight students (27%) were assigned to the Phoenix Program for drugs, one student (3%) for possession of a weapon, seven students (23%) for disruptive behavior, five students (17%) were expelled from regular school, and nine students (30%) were assigned to the Phoenix Program for other reasons.

Table 2

Phoenix Program Student Demographics

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Ethnicity		
White	4	13.3
Black	26	86.7
Gender		
Male	15	50.0
Female	15	50.0
Age		
15	8	26.7
16	12	40.0
17	4	13.3
18	5	16.7
19	1	3.3
Grade		
9	8	26.7
10	10	33.3

11	3	10.0
12	9	30.0
Reasons for Assignment		
Drugs	8	26.7
Weapons	1	3.3
Behavior	7	23.3
Expulsion	5	16.7
Other	9	30.0

Note: SA = 5 S = 4 NS = 3 D = 2 SD = 1

Table 3 shows the students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program.

Table 3

Student Perceptions of Effectiveness

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Q6: Grade Improvement		
SA	17	56.7
A	12	40.0
NOT SURE	1	3.3
Q7: Initial Attitude towards the Phoenix Program		
SA	10	33.3
A	11	36.7
D	7	23.3
SD	2	6.7
Q8: Attitude after attending the Phoenix Program		

SA	17	56.7
A	11	36.7
D	7	3.3
SD	2	6.7
NOT SURE	1	3.3

Q9: Time and Attention from the Staff Members of the Phoenix Program

SA	16	53.3
A	9	30.0
D	3	10.0
NOT SURE	2	6.7

Q10: Comparison of Phoenix Program and Regular School

SA	9	30.0
A	9	30.0
D	3	10.0
SD	6	20.0
NOT SURE	3	10.0

Q11: School and Class Size

SA	14	46.7
A	12	40.0
D	2	6.7
SD	1	3.3

Q12: Fairness of the Phoenix Program Staff

SA	7	23.3

A	12	40.0
D	6	20.0
SD	2	6.7
NOT SURE	3	10.0
Q13: Teacher/ Parent Communication		
SA	8	26.7
A	14	46.7
D	6	20.0
SD	1	3.3
NOT SURE	1	3.3
Q14: Phoenix Program Programs and Services		
SA	5	16.7
A	9	30.0
D	8	26.7
SD	2	6.7
NOT SURE	6	20.0
Q15: Attending the Phoenix Program Again		
SA	6	20.0
A	10	33.3
D	3	10.0
SD	7	23.3
NOT SURE	4	13.3

Note: SA = 5 S = 4 NS = 3 D = 2 SD = 1

Q6: Almost all of the students (97%) felt their grades improved while at the Phoenix Program. Only one student indicated that he or she was not sure if their grades improved while at the Phoenix Program.

Q7: When the students were asked if they started the Phoenix Program with a negative attitude towards the program, 11 students (37%) agreed and 10 students (33%) strongly agreed. However, there were a few students who did not have a negative attitude towards the program. Seven students (23%) disagreed and two students strongly disagreed.

Q8: After attending the Phoenix Program for a while, a majority of the students (94%) indicated their attitude changed positively towards the Phoenix Program.

Q9: Most of the students either agreed (30%) or strongly agreed (53%) that the teachers and administrators at the Phoenix Program provided more attention and spent more time with them than at their regular school. Ten percent disagreed, and seven percent were not sure.

Q10: The students had mixed responses when they were asked if they liked the Phoenix Program better than their regular school. Sixty percent of the students preferred the Phoenix Program, and 30% preferred their regular school. Ten percent of the students were not sure.

Q11: A majority of the students either agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (47%) that the school and class size helped them more at the Phoenix Program than at their regular school. Seven percent disagreed and only three percent strongly disagreed.

Q12: The students gave mixed responses about whether the Phoenix Program faculty and staff treated them more fairly than the faculty and staff at their regular school.

Sixty-three percent of the students felt that they were treated better at the Phoenix Program. Twenty- seven percent of the students felt that they were treated better at their regular school, and 10% of the students were not sure which faculty and staff treated them better.

Q13: Most of the students either agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (28%) that the teachers and administrators communicated with their parents more at the Phoenix Program than at their regular school.

Q14: There were more students who either disagreed (34%) or did not know (20%) if the Phoenix Program offered helpful programs that were not offered at the regular school.

Q15: Although there were quite a few students who indicated they would not like to attend the Phoenix Program again (33%), more students indicated they would like to attend the Phoenix Program again if given the opportunity (53%)

Table 4

Phoenix Program Parent Demographics

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Reasons for Child's Assignment		
Drugs	5	27.8
Behavior	8	44.4
Expulsion	2	11.1
Other	3	16.7

Table 4 reflects the demographic information of parents who completed perceptions of effectiveness surveys. The parent survey consisted of 12 questions. The

first question asked the parents why their child was assigned to the Phoenix Program. Most of the parents who completed the survey indicated that their child was assigned to the Phoenix Program for either disruptive behavior (44%) or possession of drugs while at school (29%).

Table 5

Parent Perceptions of Effectiveness

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Q2: Grade Improvement		
SA	11	61.1
A	7	38.9
Q3: Initial Attitude towards the Phoenix Program		
SA	4	22.2
A	4	22.2
D	3	16.7
SD	4	22.2
NOT SURE	3	16.7
Q4: Attitude after attending the Phoenix Program		
SA	11	61.1
A	6	33.3
NOT SURE	1	5.6
Q5: Comparison of the Phoenix Program and Regular School		
SA	8	44.4
A	9	50.0
NOT SURE	1	5.6

Q6: School and Class Size		
SA	12	66.7
A	6	33.3
Q7: Fairness of the Phoenix Program Staff		
SA	8	44.4
A	10	55.6
Q8: Teacher/Parent Communication		
SA	9	50.0
A	7	38.9
D	1	5.6
NOT SURE	1	5.6
Q9: Phoenix Program Programs and Services		
SA	6	33.3
A	8	44.4
D	3	16.7
NOT SURE	1	5.6
Q10: Improvement of Grades and Behavior after attending the Phoenix Program		
SA	11	61.1
A	7	38.9
Q11: Allowing student to attend the Phoenix Program Again		
SA	5	27.8
A	12	66.7
NOT SURE	1	5.6

Q12: Recommendation of the Phoenix Program to other Parents

SA	12	66.7
A	6	33.3

Note: SA = 5 S = 4 NS = 3 D = 2 SD = 1

Table 5 shows the parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. A survey was completed by 18 parents whose child attended the Phoenix Program.

Q2: All of the parents felt their child's grades improved while attending the Phoenix Program. Eleven parents (61%) strongly agreed, and seven parents (39%) agreed they saw improvements in their child's grades.

Q3: When the parents were asked about their attitude before their child attended the Phoenix Program, 44% agreed that they had a negative attitude and 39% disagreed and felt they did not have a negative attitude.

Q4: However, all of the parents except one agreed their attitude had a positive change while their child was attending the Phoenix Program. One parent was not sure about their attitude towards the Phoenix Program.

Q5: All of the parents except one agreed or strongly agreed they liked their child attending the Phoenix Program better than their regular school. One parent was not sure of which school they liked better.

Q6: All of the parents either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt the size of the school and the classes helped their child while at the Phoenix Program.

Q7: All of the parents felt the faculty and staff of the Phoenix Program treated their child more fairly than at their regular school. The parents either agreed or strongly agreed.

Q8: A majority of the parents felt the teachers and administrators at the Phoenix Program communicated with them more than at their child's regular school. One parent (6%) disagreed and one parent (6%) was not sure if the communication between the parent and staff was better at the Phoenix Program.

Q9: When asked if the Phoenix Program offered helpful programs and services that were not offered at their regular school 77% of the parents either agreed or disagreed. Seventeen percent of the parents disagreed and six percent of the parents were unsure if the Phoenix Program offered more helpful programs than the regular school.

Q10: All of the parents either agreed or strongly agreed that their child's grades and behavior will improve in at their regular school after attending the Phoenix Program.

Q11: Nearly all of the parents indicated that they would send their child back to the Phoenix Program if given the opportunity. One parent (6%) responded they were not sure if they would send their child back to the Phoenix Program.

Q12: All of the parents responded that they would recommend the Phoenix Program to other parents of students who have been suspended, expelled, or have had problems with school.

Table 6 reflects the demographics of Phoenix Program staff members who completed perceptions of effectiveness surveys. Of the 17 Phoenix Program staff members who completed the perception of effectiveness surveys, 15 staff members (88%) had previous experience in a regular school before working at the Phoenix

Program, four staff members (24%) had experience in a middle school, ten staff members (59%) in a high school, one teacher (6%) taught in an elementary and all of the teachers (100%) had 25 or more years of teaching experience

Table 6

Phoenix Program Staff Demographics

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Regular School Teaching Experience		
YES	15	88.2
NO	2	11.8
Previous Teaching Experience		
Elementary	1	5.9
Middle	4	23.5
High	10	58.8
Other	2	11.8
Years of Teaching Experience		
25 or more	17	100.0

Table 7

Phoenix Program Staff Perceptions of Effectiveness

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Q4: Grade Improvement		
SA	8	47.1
A	8	47.1
NOT SURE	1	5.9

Q5: Attitude towards the Phoenix Program after Leaving		
SA	6	35.3
A	11	64.7
Q6: Individual Time Spent with Students		
SA	6	35.3
A	8	47.1
Q7: Structure and Environment of the Phoenix Program		
SA	11	64.7
A	6	35.3
Q8: Teacher/Parent Communication		
SA	4	23.5
A	9	52.9
D	2	11.8
NOT SURE	2	11.8
Q9: Small classes and student enrollment		
SA	13	76.5
A	3	17.6
NOT SURE	1	5.9
Q10: Programs and Services of the Phoenix Program		
SA	4	23.5
A	6	35.3
D	1	5.9
NOT SURE	6	35.3

Q11: Recommendation of the Phoenix Program to other Students

SA	16	94.1
A	1	5.9

Note: SA = 5 S = 4 NS = 3 D = 2 SD = 1

Table 7 shows the Phoenix Program staff members' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program.

Q4: Of the 17 staff members that completed surveys, all but one felt their students improved their grades while attending the Phoenix Program. One student (6%) was not sure if their students' grades improved while at the Phoenix Program.

Q5: All of the staff members agreed (65%) or strongly agreed (35%) that the majority of their students showed a positive change in attitude towards the Phoenix Program before they left the school.

Q6: All of the staff members either agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (35%) that they were able to spend more individual time with students at the Phoenix Program than when they were at a regular school.

Q7: All of the staff members either agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (65%) that the structure and environment of the Phoenix Program was helpful to struggling students.

Q8: When the staff members were asked if they communicated with their parents more at the Phoenix Program than at a regular school, most of the staff members either agreed (53%), or strongly agreed (24%). Only12% felt they communicated with parents more at the regular school than at the Phoenix Program.

Q9: All of the staff members either agreed (18%) or strongly agreed (77%) that students who attend the Phoenix Program benefit from the small classes and the smaller student enrollment.

Q10: When the staff members were asked if the Phoenix Program offered helpful programs that were not offered at the regular school, a majority of the staff members either agreed (35%) or strongly agreed (24%). Six percent of the staff members disagreed and 35% were not sure if the Phoenix Program offered helpful programs that were not offered at the regular school.

Q11: All of the staff members indicated they would recommend the Phoenix Program to other students who have been suspended or expelled.

Table 8

Phoenix Program Principal and Assistant Principal Demographics

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Referred Students to the Phoenix Program		
YES	34	94.4
NO	2	5.6

Table 8 shows the demographics of principals and assistant principals who completed perceptions of effectiveness surveys. Of the 36 principals and assistant principals who completed the perceptions of effectiveness survey, 34 of them (94%) indicated they had referred students to the Phoenix Program.

Table 9

Principal and Assistant Principal Perceptions of Effectiveness

Survey Item	Count	Percent
Q2: Further Suspensions after the Phoenix Program		
SA	6	16.7
A	20	55.6
D	7	19.4
SD	2	5.6
NOT SURE	1	2.8
Q3: Attitude after the Phoenix Program		
SA	3	8.3
A	26	72.2
D	7	19.4
Q4: Improvement in Attendance after the Phoenix Program		
SA	3	8.3
A	19	52.8
D	7	19.4
NOT SURE	7	19.4
Q5: Improvement in Behavior after the Phoenix Program		
SA	4	11.1
A	26	72.2
D	4	11.1
SD	1	2.8

NOT SURE	1	2.8
Q6: Grade improvement after the Phoenix Program		
SA	1	2.8
A	15	41.7
D	10	27.8
SD	1	2.8
NOT SURE	9	25.0
Q7: Phoenix Program's Helpfulness to Administrators		
SA	24	66.7
A	12	33.3
Q8: Recommendation of the Phoenix Program to other Administrators		
SA	23	63.9
A	10	27.8
Q9: The Need for other Alternative Programs		
SA	28	77.8
A	8	22.2
Q10: Phoenix Program and Dropout Prevention		
SA	8	22.2
A	22	61.1
NOT SURE	6	16.7

Note: SA = 5 S = 4 NS = 3 D = 2 SD = 1

Table 9 shows the principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program.

Q2: When the principals and assistant principals were asked if former Phoenix Program students were suspended after returning to their regular school, 73% indicated that their students were suspended again. Twenty-five percent responded that their students were not suspended from school again and 3% were not sure.

Q3: Most of the principals and assistant principals either agreed (72%) or strongly agreed (8%) that the students who attended the Phoenix Program returned to their regular school with a better attitude. Nineteen percent of the principals and assistant principals indicated otherwise.

Q4: A majority of the principals and assistant principals felt that student attendance would improve when the student returned from the Phoenix Program, 19% disagreed with that statement and another 19% were unsure.

Q5: Most of the principals and assistant principals either agreed or strongly agreed that the students who they referred to the Phoenix Program improved their behavior when they returned to their regular school.

Q6: The principals' and assistant principals' responses varied when asked if the students who they referred to the Phoenix Program improved their grades once they returned to regular school. Forty-five percent of the principals indicated that their students' grades improved, 31% responded that their students' grades did not improve and 25% did not know whether their students' grades improved after leaving the Phoenix Program.

Q7: All of the principals and assistant principals either agreed (33%) or strongly agreed (67%) that the Phoenix Program is helpful to school administrators.

Q8: All of the principals and assistant principals either agreed (28%) or strongly agreed (64%) that they would recommend the use of the Phoenix Program to administrators in other school systems.

Q9: All of the principals and assistant principals either agreed (22%) or strongly agreed (78%) that more programs such as the Phoenix Program were needed in the school system.

Q10: Finally, when the principals and assistant principals were asked if they thought the Phoenix Program kept referred students from dropping out of school 83% felt that it did but 17% of the principals and assistant principals were undecided.

Statistical Results

Table 10

Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program

	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Student	30	3.67	.69
Parent	18	4.31	.42
Principals	36	3.83	.48
Staff	17	4.40	.60

Note: SA = 5 S = 4 NS = 3 D = 2 SD = 1

Table 10 contains the means and standard deviations for the four groups. The perceptions of effectiveness surveys used a five-response Likert scale. For the purpose of this analysis each response was assigned a number in a five point scale. Strongly Agree was assigned the number five, Agree was assigned the number four, Not Sure was

assigned the number three, Disagree was assigned the number two and Strongly Disagree was assigned number one.

A one-way ANOVA and a Tukey's Post Hoc follow up procedure was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between students, parents, Phoenix Program staff members, and school administrator's perceptions of effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program. The analysis revealed that there is a significant difference $F(3,97) = 10.41$, $p<.001$, between current students, parents, staff members, and school administrators. Staff members and parents perceptions of the effectiveness Phoenix Alternative Program were higher than the perceptions of the principals and the students. Staff members ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .60$) had the most positive perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. The Cronbach alpha for the staff member survey was (.72). The parents ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .42$) also had very positive perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program but not as positive as the staff members. The Cronbach alpha for the parent survey was (.77). The principals and administrators ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .48$) perceptions of effectiveness were not as high as the staff members and parents. The Cronbach alpha for the principal and assistant principal survey was (.74). The students ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .69$) had the least positive perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program. The Cronbach alpha for the student survey was (.77).

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered during this study:

1) During the 2005-2006 school year 58.9% of the Phoenix Program students were suspended again after returning to their regular school. During the 2006-2007

school year 54.6% of the Phoenix Program students were suspended again after returning to their regular school.

2) A relationship between student attendance and the Phoenix Program could not be determined because of insufficient data. There was not enough data provided to make a comparison of student attendance before and after the Phoenix Program.
3) During the 2005-2006 school year 30.4% of the students obtained their high school diploma. During the 2006-2007 school year 9.3% of the students obtained their high school diploma.
4) During the 2005-2006 school year 60.7% of the Phoenix Program students showed a decrease in discipline referrals after returning to their regular school. During the 2006-2007 school year 64.9% of the Phoenix Program students showed a decrease in discipline referrals after returning to their regular school.
5) A one-way ANOVA determined there was a significant difference among students who attended the Phoenix Program, the parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, Phoenix Program staff members, and principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. The staff members and parents had higher perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program than the principals and assistant principals and the students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program with students who were suspended from school for a long-term. This study was designed to analyze the performance of former Phoenix Program students once they returned to their regular school and to determine if there was a significant difference among students, parents, staff members, and school administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program.

After receiving IRB approval to conduct research, perceptions of effectiveness surveys were distributed to students who attended the Phoenix Program, the parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program, Phoenix Program staff members, and high school administrators who referred students to the Phoenix Program. Surveys were received from 30 students, 18 parents, 17 staff members, and 36 principals and assistant principals. Data was also gathered and analyzed on student performance after the students returned to their regular school. The office of the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services provided profile sheets on students who attended the Phoenix Program during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school year. These profile sheets were used to determine if students showed a decrease in discipline referrals, avoided further suspensions, and graduated from high school with a diploma after returning to their regular school.

Statistical data showed that the overall performance of students improved from 2005-2006 to 2006-2007, a change that may be the result of improvements that were

made over the years. In recent years, the school has increased the number of teachers, added an additional counselor, implemented a character education program, improved parent and teacher communication, and increased the number of mentors who visit the school. In 2002, high school graduation courses were added to the curriculum to prepare students for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. This addition may have contributed to the increase in the percentage of 11th and 12th grade students who obtained a high school diploma.

The results of this study indicated that the Phoenix Program has achieved success in returning students to their regular school, decreasing discipline referrals, and assisting them in graduating with a high school diploma. Although most students showed a decrease in discipline referrals more than half of the students continued to receive suspensions from school. Some of the reasons for the success of the program are the small classes that enhance student learning, an experienced staff which consists of retired teachers and administrators, extensive counseling services, character education, weekly mentoring sessions, and the nurturing and caring attitudes that the school conveys to the students. These factors are similar to the characteristics of successful alternative schools described by Friedman (2001).

Implications

Discipline Referrals and Repeat Suspensions in the Regular School

Student performance was generally good after students returned to their regular school. The statistics on decreasing discipline referrals support this assessment. To ensure good performance of students, the Phoenix Program sends a guidance counselor

into each high school to follow up on former students and to track their performance once they leave the program.

In some of the comments from the principals' and assistant principals' surveys, most of them had positive comments about student performance. However, some of them indicated that many times they did not see a difference in students' behavior after returning from the Phoenix Program. Most of the principals and assistant principals responded on their survey that students have been suspended again after returning from the Phoenix Program. The data in Table 1 shows that even though discipline referrals did decrease for the vast majority of students, more than half of the returning students in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 were eventually suspended again.

High School Graduation

The Phoenix Program has achieved success in helping students obtain a high school diploma. The data in Table 1 reflects this statement. Of the 24 students who were eligible for graduation in 2005-2006, 17 students graduated with a diploma. In 2006-2007, 9 of the 11 eligible students obtained a high school diploma. One principal commented on the survey that not only has he or she seen students leave the Phoenix Program and graduate with a diploma but he or she has seen students attend four-year universities, community colleges, and join the military.

Staff Members Perceptions of Effectiveness

One of the strengths of the Phoenix Alternative Programs is the experienced staff members that work with the students. Of the 17 staff members who completed perception of effectiveness surveys, 15 staff members had previous experience in an elementary, middle, or high school setting. All of the 17 staff members had 25 or more

years of teaching experience. The demographics of these staff members showed that the directors of the Phoenix Program look to hire experienced teachers to work with their students. The prior experience of the teachers may reflect the changes that are seen in students' grades, attitudes, and behavior while at the Phoenix Program. This may attribute to the attitudes and the performance of the students while attending the Phoenix Program. A majority of the students responded to their surveys that the staff worked with them more, spent more time with them, displayed more of a caring attitude, and communicated with their parents more at the Phoenix Program than at their regular school. This may be attributed to the experience of the teachers at the Phoenix Program.

A one-way ANOVA showed that the staff members had the most positive perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. A vast majority of their responses indicated that the Phoenix Program has had a positive effect on the students that have attended the program. The staff members felt that the Phoenix Program has been successful in improving students' grades, behavior, and attitude. The staff members also agreed that they were able to do things with students that they were not able to do at regular schools such as communicate with the parents more, and spend more time with students due to smaller class size.

The staff members' opinions may have been higher than the other participants because the staff members had the opportunity to evaluate student performance over a longer period of time. Their perceptions were drawn from all of the students that were observed over the years. Students' and parents' perceptions of the school were drawn after attending the program for one semester. The results of this study showed the staff

members of the Phoenix Program were confident in the difference they made in the students that were referred to their school.

Parents' Perceptions of Effectiveness

The results of this study indicated that the parents of students who attended the Phoenix Program had the second highest perception of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Most of the parents responded that their child was referred to the Phoenix Program for disruptive behavior at their regular school. All of the parents agreed that attending the Phoenix Program would improve their child's grades and behavior after returning to his or her regular school. This is a positive indicator that the Phoenix Program may be working with disruptive students.

A majority of the parents had positive attitudes towards the structure of the Phoenix Program and their relationship with the faculty and staff. The structure of the school and the close relationship between the teacher, student, and parents are considered important characteristics of an effective alternative school (Reimer & Cash, 2003). In the comment section of the perceptions of effectiveness surveys, some of the parents had very positive comments about the faculty and staff of the Phoenix Program. Many of the comments alluded to how much support the students had around them and how often the teacher contacted them about their child's progress. One parent stated, "The staff was very supportive and encouraging." Another parent wrote, "It saved my child." These are the types of responses that showed how impressed the parents were with the Phoenix Program. The parents' opinions of the program were overwhelmingly positive. They all agreed they would recommend the Phoenix Program to other parents.

Principals' and Assistant Principals' Perceptions of Effectiveness

The principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program were not as positive as the staff members and parents. The one-way ANOVA analysis showed that their mean was lower than the staff members and parents. This finding may have to do with the principals' and assistant principals' observation of students once they returned from the Phoenix Program. On the perceptions of effectiveness survey, 73% of the principals and assistant principals agreed that students have been suspended again once they returned to their regular school. This is also indicated in the statistical data shown on students who attended the Phoenix Program in 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. This statistic on suspensions apparently showed that students who attended the Phoenix Program still got into trouble when they returned to their regular school. Even though parents saw a change in the students while they were at the Phoenix Program, the principals and assistant principals saw that these students still displayed some of the same behavior that was displayed before attending the Phoenix Program.

Just like the staff members and parents, many of the principals and assistant principals agreed that they saw a difference in the students' attitudes, behavior, and grades. But some principals and assistant principals responded that they did not see a notable change. Only 45% of the principals and assistant principals agreed that students improved their grades when they returned to their regular school. Some of these results indicated that the principals and assistant principals may have seen change in some students but did not see where the Phoenix Program changed a lot of the students' behavior. However, this does not mean that the principals and assistant principals do not

support the Phoenix Program. All of the administrators responded that the Phoenix Program helped administrators deal with disruptive students and that the school system needed more programs such as the Phoenix Program. All of them agreed they would recommend the use of the Phoenix Program to other administrators in other school systems. Apparently, the principals and assistant principals viewed this program as a useful tool for struggling and disruptive students but they were not quite convinced that it changed behavior. In the comment section of the survey many administrators voiced positive opinions about having a place to refer disruptive students. Several administrators wrote that the program was two small and more alternative programs were needed in the school system. One administrator stated, "The Phoenix School should follow up with students much like probation officers." The Phoenix Program does have a similar system in place for checking on student progress. The guidance counselor visits the students in their school once a semester to check on their grades and behavior. This may be an area that the Phoenix Program can address to decrease the number of suspensions and improve students' grades.

Students' Perceptions of Effectiveness

The students who were currently in the Phoenix Program at the time of this study had the least positive perceptions about the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Of the 30 students who completed surveys 87% of them were black students and 13% were white students. There were no other races enrolled in the Phoenix Program at the time of this study. It can be assumed that most of the students who were referred to the Phoenix Program were black. There was not a great discrepancy in the gender of students who were referred to the program. The numbers of male and female students were the same.

Most of the students who were referred to the Phoenix Program were between 15-17 years of age. There were only six students who were 18 years of age or older. All grade levels were represented at the Phoenix Program but there were mostly ninth, tenth, and twelfth graders enrolled in the program. The age and grades of the students could play a key role in the structure of the program and the type of curriculum that is needed at the school. The younger students may need more counseling and mentoring than the older students and the older students may need more assistance with passing the graduation exam and meeting graduation requirements. The demographic information revealed that a large number of students were referred to the Phoenix Program for drugs or disruptive behavior. The Phoenix Program addresses those students' needs by randomly drug testing students twice a semester and providing extensive counseling to students while attending and after leaving the Phoenix Program.

The students' perceptions of effectiveness were the least positive of the four groups. The results of this study showed that even though the students had some positive comments about the Phoenix Program, they did not feel as good about the program's effectiveness as the staff members, parents, and administrators. All but one of the students agreed that their grades improved while at the Phoenix Program. This showed that the Phoenix Program is structured to help students improve their grades. This can be attributed to the experience of the retired faculty members and maybe even the size of the school. A majority of the students also agreed that the size of the school helped them more at the Phoenix Program than at their regular school. All of the groups indicated that the students' grades improved while at the Phoenix Program.

The students' opinions about other aspects of the school fluctuated. Most of the students had positive attitudes when they were first assigned to the Phoenix Program. The students who had negative attitudes seemed to change their mind about the program while attending. On the comment section of the perceptions of effectiveness survey, most of the students had positive things to say about the Phoenix Program. Some students responded that the program helped to change their attitudes and improve their grades. Other comments indicated that the program helped them to practice better self-control. Overall, the students gave positive responses about how they were taught and treated by the faculty and staff. Some of the students mentioned in their comments that they were able to get more attention from the teachers at the Phoenix Program than at their regular school. One of the students stated: "The Phoenix Program is a great program and I would like to go back if possible." This statement gives the idea that the students would rather remain at this program rather than return to their regular school. Although this may be the request by some students it is not the opinion of all of the students. When the students were asked if they would like to return to the Phoenix Program, 53% said they would return, 33% said they would not return and 13% were undecided. The students indicated that there are some good things about the Phoenix Program and it even helped them to improve their grades but the students still look forward to eventually being in a normal school setting.

Conclusions

The results of this study revealed that there is a significant difference between the students', parents', staff members', and the principals' and assistant principals' perceptions of effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. The mean scores of the staff

members and the parents were higher than the principals and assistant principals and the students. This indicated that the staff members and the parents had a stronger opinion about the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program than the principals and assistant principals and the students. They felt very strongly about the positive effect the Phoenix Program had on students who had been suspended for a long term.

The staff members had the highest mean of the four groups. The mean of the staff members was over four, which indicated that most of the staff members had positive perceptions of the Phoenix Program. The mean scores of the parents were slightly lower than the staff members, which showed the parents also had positive perceptions of the Phoenix Program. The principals and assistant principals and students both had mean scores of over three which shows they had some positive perceptions of the Phoenix Program but not as positive as the staff members and parents. The students had the lowest mean score, which indicated their perceptions of the Phoenix Program were not as positive as the other three groups.

The results of this study revealed that the students, parents, principals, assistant principals, and staff members had positive perceptions about the Phoenix Program's success with students who were suspended for a long term. However, some groups' perceptions of the program were more positive than others.

Statistical data provided by the Assistant Superintendant of Student Services, supported the results of the one-way ANOVA. Even though students continued to get suspended during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school year, the majority of Phoenix Program students showed a decrease in discipline referrals and eventually graduated from high school with a diploma after returning to their regular school.

Limitations

Research on alternative schools indicates that most alternative programs lack a dependable evaluation process. The difficulty in evaluating alternative schools lies in determining valid indicators to measure the alternative school's effectiveness and how to design an effective evaluation instrument that utilizes those indicators (Schargel & Smink, 2004). Despite the large number of alternative schools in existence, as well as the accolades they have received for helping troubled youth, there is very little data available that verifies its effectiveness. For years researchers have depended primarily on interviews and individual experiences at alternative schools to determine if they are effective. To this date, a reliable instrument has not been developed to accurately collect data on the success or failure of alternative schools (Schargel & Smink, 2004).

In this study the effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program was measured by analyzing the perceptions of students, parents, administrators, and Phoenix Program staff members, as well as examining statistical data on students' performance after returning to their regular school. The first limitation came while analyzing the statistical data provided by the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services. Initially, attendance was listed as an indicator of student performance after returning to the regular school. It was desired to determine if attending the Phoenix Program improved the students' attendance after returning to their regular school. The students' regular school attendance before they attended the Phoenix Program and after they returned to their regular school was needed to make this determination. The Assistant Superintendent's office was only able to provide the students' attendance after attending the program. Without the students' attendance records before attending the Phoenix Program a comparison of the

students' attendance could not be made. This would also make it hard to determine if attending the Phoenix Program had an affect on student attendance. This resulted in a limitation to this study. The second and last limitation was created before distributing surveys to the parents. Initially, the surveys were to be distributed to the parents by the guidance counselor of the Phoenix Program during end of the semester evaluations. The guidance counselor agreed to give each parent a survey during this evaluation. However, the guidance counselor was not able to distribute the surveys during the end of the semester. Instead of the parents completing the surveys during their evaluation conference, the guidance counselor had to locate the students at their regular school and send the surveys home to the parents through the students. This became a limitation because the guidance counselor did not receive as many parent surveys as she could have during the evaluation conferences.

Recommendations for Policy

Survey responses from this study suggested that all participants felt like the students who were suspended for a long term benefited from attending the Phoenix Program. The services and curriculum that the Phoenix Program utilized seemed to have some success on students who were suspended for a long term. The Phoenix Program utilizes research based strategies such as smaller classes, experienced teachers, structured environment, and extensive counseling. The program also implements several other programs such as mentoring, tutoring, career counseling, and drug testing. As a result students who have attended the program have improved their grades and showed a change in attitude before leaving the Phoenix Program. The statistical data showed that

when the students returned to their regular school most of the students showed a decrease in discipline referrals and eventually graduated with a high school diploma.

The Phoenix Program appears to be successful with students who have been suspended for a long term, however there are still some areas of the program that could use improvement. According to the statistical data a majority of the students showed a decrease in discipline referrals, but more than 50% of the students were suspended again once they returned to their regular school. The principals and assistant principals also indicated that many of the former Phoenix Program students have been suspended again once they returned to their regular school. The directors of the Phoenix Program may want to pay close attention to this statistic and find a way to prevent former students from getting suspended again once they return to their regular school. The Phoenix program currently sends a guidance counselor to each school to check on the progress of each student, but they may want to provide more support to their students after leaving the Phoenix Program. In order to decrease the number of student suspensions in the regular school, the Phoenix Program should hire more counselors to visit the students and increase the amount of visits that the counselors makes to the regular schools. The Phoenix Program provides an excellent service by sending counselors to the former students' schools. However, this service should be extended to provide a support system to students who continue to get suspended from school.

In many of the administrator's survey comments, several administrators expressed the need for more alternative schools in their school system. All of the administrators indicated that the Phoenix Program was a useful tool, but some of the administrators commented that the size restrictions of the Phoenix Program prevented them from

referring disruptive students to the Phoenix Program. Another recommendation to the Phoenix Program would be for them to collaborate with the Mobile County Public School System as well as their other supporters to find a way to expand the Phoenix Program or create other facilities for the alternative program in the school system. Increasing the number of students that attend the current Phoenix Program may not be appropriate because research says that smaller school enrollment and class sizes create more effective alternative schools. Expanding the Phoenix Program may allow the principals and assistant principals more opportunities to refer students who need the interventions and services of the Phoenix Program to help improve their grades, attitude, and behavior.

Recommendations for Future Research

While conducting this study one of the analyses revealed that most of the students who were referred to the Phoenix Program were black. Future research should be conducted to analyze race, ethnicity and gender of students who are referred to the Phoenix Program to determine if one race or gender is referred to the program more than others and if the school seems to be more effective with students from certain socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another recommendation for future research would be to closely analyze the type of students who have attended the Phoenix Alternative School. Research could be done to track students' grades and discipline in earlier grades such as elementary and middle school to determine if there has been a pattern of this type of behavior. If students are displaying at-risk behaviors at this age it is possible that they have been displaying this behavior at an earlier age as well. This would help school districts develop strategies to help at-risk students before they reach high school.

The final recommendation for determining the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program is to compare the performance of long-term suspended students who attended the Phoenix Program to long-term suspended students who chose not to attend the Phoenix Program. When students are suspended for a long term from the Mobile County Public School System, the students are referred to the Phoenix Program. However, some students and parents choose not to attend the Phoenix Program. Students who choose not to attend the alternative program stay out of school for the rest of the semester. A comparison could be made, using similar indicators from this study to determine which group of students performs better once they return to their regular school. In future research, I may investigate the factors behind race, ethnicity and gender as well as student performance after attending the Phoenix Program.

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Jason Laffitte, and I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am also a high school assistant principal in Mobile, Alabama. I am conducting research on the perceptions of principals, assistant principals, students, parents, and Phoenix Program staff members on the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Information gathered from this study may show benefits and possible improvements for the Phoenix Program, as well as other alternative programs. The results of this study will be included in my dissertation and the Phoenix Program will receive a copy for future reference.

Your participation in this research study is needed, but strictly voluntary. If you would not like to participate in this study, there is no obligation. If you choose to participate in this study you may withdraw at any time without penalty. All survey responses will be kept confidential and participants will not be identified. After completing the survey, please mail it to me using the self-addressed, stamped envelope. It will take about 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at the telephone numbers listed below.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Institutional Review Board Office, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, (601)266-6820.
Sincerely,

Jason Laffitte
Home (251) 661-7360
Work (251) 221-3351

APPENDIX B

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent,

My name is Jason Laffitte, and I am currently a graduate student in Educational Leadership at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am also a high school assistant principal in Mobile, Alabama. I am conducting research on the perceptions of principals, assistant principals, students, parents, and Phoenix Program staff members on the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Information gathered from this study may show benefits and possible improvements for the Phoenix Program, as well as other alternative programs. The results of this study will be included in my dissertation and the Phoenix Program will receive a copy for future reference.

As a current student at the Phoenix Program, your child's input is needed but strictly voluntary. I would like to ask permission for your child to participate in this study by completing a survey. It will take 5-10 minutes to complete this survey. All survey responses are confidential and participants will not be identified. This is not a requirement and there is not a penalty if your child does not participate. If your child has your permission to participate in this study please sign your name in the space provided at the bottom of this form. Your child may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the telephone number listed below.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Institutional Review Board Office, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS39406, (601)266-6820.
Sincerely,

Jason Laffitte
Home (251) 661-7360
Work (251) 221-3351

My child, _____ has permission to participate in the research study involving the Phoenix Program.

_____
Parent Signature

APPENDIX C

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Dear Student,

My name is Jason Laffitte, and I am currently a graduate student in Educational Leadership at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am also a high school assistant principal in Mobile, Alabama. I am doing research on the opinions of student, parents, and administrators on the effectiveness of the Phoenix Program. Information gathered from this study may help the Phoenix Program make possible improvements. The results of this study will be included in my dissertation and the Phoenix Program will receive a copy for future reference.

As a current student at the Phoenix Program, your input is needed but voluntary. I would like for you to participate in this study by completing a survey. It will take 5-10 minutes to complete this survey. All survey responses are confidential and you will not be identified in any way. This is not a requirement and there is not a penalty if you do not participate. If you would like to complete a survey please sign your name in the space provided at the bottom of this form. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the telephone numbers listed below.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.
Sincerely,

Jason Laffitte
Home (251) 661-7360
Work (251) 221-3351

I, _____ agree to participate in the research study involving students at the Phoenix Program.

APPENDIX D

SURVEY INSTRUMENT I

Phoenix Program Student Survey

Please check all boxes that are appropriate to you.

1. What is your race? ☐ White ☐ Black ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian ☐ Other

2. What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female

3. What is your age? ☐14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 19

4. What grade are you in? ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12

5. Why were you assigned to the Phoenix Program?
   ☐ Drugs ☐ Weapons ☐ Behavior ☐ Expulsion ☐ Other_____

Please answer the following questions with:
5)Strongly Agree – 4)Agree – 3)Strongly Disagree – 2)Disagree – 1)Not Sure

6. My grades improved while I attended the Phoenix Program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

7. When I was first assigned to the Phoenix Program I had a negative attitude towards the program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

8. My attitude towards the Phoenix Program has changed since I have been attending the program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

9. The teachers and administrators at the Phoenix Program provided more attention and spent more time with me than I normally receive at my regular school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

10. I like the Phoenix Program better than my regular school.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

11. The number of students at the school and the size of each class helped me more at the Phoenix Program than at my regular school.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

12. The faculty and staff at the Phoenix Program treated me more fairly than at my traditional school.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

13. My teachers and administrators communicated with my parents more at the Phoenix Program than at my regular school.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

14. The Phoenix Program offered programs and services that I liked but are not offered at my regular school.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

15. If given the opportunity I would attend the Phoenix Program again.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

Please provide any additional comments about the Phoenix Program or alternative programs that may help with this study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

SURVEY INSTRUMENT II

Phoenix Program Parent Survey

Please check all boxes that are appropriate to you.

1. Why was your child referred to the Phoenix Alternative Program?
   ☐ Drugs ☐ Weapons ☐ Behavior ☐ Expulsion ☐ Other_____

Please answer the following questions with:
5)Strongly Agree – 4)Agree – 3)Strongly Disagree – 2)Disagree 1)Not Sure

2. My child's grades improved while attending the Phoenix Program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

3. When my child was first assigned to the Phoenix Program, I had a negative attitude towards the program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

4. My attitude towards the Phoenix Program has changed while my child has been at the Phoenix Program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

5. I like my child attending the Phoenix Program better than his/her regular school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

6. The size of the school and classes helped my child while at the Phoenix Program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

7. The faculty and staff of the Phoenix Program treated my child more fairly than at his/her traditional school
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

8. The teachers and administrators at the Phoenix Program communicate with me more than at my child's regular school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

9. The Phoenix Program offered programs and services that my child and I liked but are not offered at his/her regular school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

10. I think my child's experience at the Phoenix Program will improve his/her grades and behavior after returning to his/her regular school?
☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

11. If it were possible, I would send my child back to the Phoenix Program.
☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

12. I would recommend the Phoenix Program to other parents of students who have been suspended, expelled, or have had problems with school.
☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

Please provide any additional comments about the Phoenix Program or alternative programs that may help with this study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

SURVEY INSTRUMENT III

Phoenix Program Staff Survey

Please check all boxes that are appropriate to you.

1. Before teaching at the Phoenix Program have you ever taught in a regular school setting?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. What grade level was your prior teaching experience?
   ☐ Elementary ☐ Middle ☐ High ☐ None ☐ Other _____

3. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
   ☐ 0 - 10 ☐ 10 - 15 ☐ 15 - 20 ☐ 20 - 25 ☐ 25 or more

Please answer the following questions with:
5)Strongly Agree – 4)Agree – 3)Strongly Disagree – 2)Disagree – 1)Not Sure

4. The majority of my students have improved their grades while attending the Phoenix Program.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

5. The majority of my students show a positive change in attitude towards the Phoenix Program before they left the school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

6. I am able to spend more individual time with students at the Phoenix Program than I did teaching at my regular school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

7. The structure and environment of the Phoenix Program is helpful for struggling students.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

8. As a teacher I communicate with my parents more at the Phoenix Program than at a regular school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

9. My students who attend the Phoenix Program benefit from the small classes and the smaller student enrollment.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

10. The Phoenix Program offers programs and services that are helpful to children but are not offered at the regular school.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

11. I recommend the Phoenix Program as a second chance for suspended or expelled students.
    ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

Please provide any additional comments about the Phoenix Program or alternative programs that may help with this study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX G

SURVEY INSTRUMENT IV

Regular School Program - Principal and Assistant Principal Survey

Please check all boxes that are appropriate to you.

1. Have you ever referred a student to the Phoenix Program?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please answer the following questions with:
5)Strongly Agree – 4)Agree – 3)Strongly Disagree – 2)Disagree – 1)Not Sure

2. Students you have referred to the Phoenix Program have been suspended when they returned to your school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

3. Students who attended the Phoenix Program returned to your school with a better attitude.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

4. Students referred to the Phoenix Program are more likely to show an improvement in attendance when they return to your school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

5. Students referred to the Phoenix Program showed an improvement in behavior after they returned to your school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

6. Students referred to the Phoenix Program are more likely to improve their grades when they return to your school.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

7. Referring disruptive students to the Phoenix Program is helpful to administrators.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

8. I recommend the use of the Phoenix Program to administrators in other school systems.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

9. More programs such as the Phoenix Program are needed in the school system.
   ☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

10. The Phoenix Program has kept referred students from dropping out of school.
☐Strongly Agree ☐Agree ☐Disagree ☐Strongly Disagree ☐Not Sure

Please provide any additional comments about the Phoenix Program or alternative programs that may help with this study.

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX H

PERMISSION FROM IRB

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **28050502**
PROJECT TITLE: **The Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Phoenix Alternative Program**
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **09/01/08 to 08/31/08**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Jason Laffitte**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**
DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**
FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **07/31/08 to 07/30/09**

Lawrence A. Hosman
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

7-31-08
Date

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