Summer 2022

Secondary School Administrators, Teachers, and Students' Perspectives on Reducing Recidivism in Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs

Chrissell Rhone

SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON REDUCING RECIDIVISM IN DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

by

Chrissell Damon Rhone

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Education and Human Sciences
and the School of Education
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by:

Dr. Kyna Shelley, Committee Chair
Dr. Noal Cochran
Dr. David Lee
Dr. Richard Mohn

August 2022

Published by the Graduate School

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI®

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study sought to explore student and staff perspectives on what led students to return to or remain in DAEPs for longer than they were assigned. The researcher reviewed literature related to the history of alternative education programs, placement policies, and alternative school practices. This researcher obtained permission from two schools in a rural county in a southern state. Qualtrics was used to collect all quantitative data. Data was collected using questionnaires and focus groups. The quantitative component of this study was employed so that students could maintain anonymity and honestly respond without feeling pressured or intimidated. Student data was used to design questions for the qualitative portion of research which staff participated in. Focus groups were used so that multiple perspectives could be obtained in minimal sessions, while also allowing participants to guide the discussion with their responses. Overall data revealed that students remained in disciplinary alternative education programs longer than their assigned time because the program was beneficial for them, either academically or behaviorally.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Dr. Kyna Shelley for her guidance and support throughout my doctoral journey. Her knowledge and expertise, as well as her encouragement and motivational talks were valuable assets in completing this dissertation. Whether it was answering phone calls, replying to emails, or meeting (in person and via Zoom), she rose to the occasion to ensure my success.

I would like to thank Dr. Richard Mohn for advising on the best manner to collect and analyze my data. Dr. Noal Cochran and Dr. David Lee, your feedback allowed me to perfect my research questions so the data could be presented as accurately and succinctly as possible. The Research Support Center's assistance in crafting my instruments was integral. Your willingness to mentor me through process is appreciated.

DEDICATION

"No man is an island. No man stands alone!" This dissertation is dedicated to those who have been my support and encouragement through this program. I first thank God for ordering my steps and not only placing me where I needed to be, but also placing people in my path who have been a blessing to me. wisdom, guidance, and strength.

My wife, Dimitria, thank you for pushing me when I needed motivation. My girls and niece, continue to excel and build. To my nephews and great nephews, know that no goal is too insignificant or too extravagant. Follow your dreams and achieve greatness. It can be and has been done.

My family, friends, SISTAS, and church family. Your prayers, listening ears, and strong shoulders helped me push forward during the hard times.

Thank you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DAEP	Disciplinary Alternative Education Program
MDE	Mississippi Department of Education

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Alternative schools are often associated with problem students, yet alternative schools were created to meet diverse student needs, often focusing on varied intellectual acuity, cultural differences, or vocational/career preparation. According to Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Petrosko (2013) alternative schools are necessary because students need environments where they can be advocated for and be provided with optimized learning environments when traditional schools are no longer beneficial for them. Presently, alternative schools serve students who are considered to be highly likely to experience school failure because of academic difficulties or behavioral struggles, and more and more students need the services these schools provide. Typically, the obvious way to rectify the problem of disruptive and troublesome students is to separate them from the general student population which leads to an increased number of students being placed in DAEPs. Avery (2016) found that students who experience more than one placement at a DAEP face a greater likelihood of feeling disconnected from school and the educational process. Thomas and Dyment (2016) cite Kim and Taylor's 2008 research that found a correlation between the growing number of alternative schools and the increase in disenfranchised students.

Background

Many schools and districts use exclusionary practices as a means of student discipline. Koury Avery (2016) cites Booker and Mitchell's findings that multiple placements in DAEPs may be the result of students exhibiting behaviors that the

traditional school officials deem worthy of removal from the home campus. Vanderhaar, Petrosko, and Munoz (2013) quote Morrison, et al. (2001):

> Exclusion remains the intervention of choice due to the dominant worldview in the education policy realm that reflects the general orientation of the U.S. criminal justice and legal system as opposed to a worldview that recognizes interactions and student misbehavior and school discipline practices as a result of longstanding inequalities rooted in social, economic, and historical forces. (p. 4)

Release from mental health facilities (a placement not related to behavior), scholastic support and remediation, and parental preference are some of the reasons why students enroll in alternative education programs. According to Heitzeg (2009), zero tolerance policies, which were implemented to reduce guns and drugs in schools, have become a large contributing factor for alternative school placement. Skiba, et al. (2006) defined zero tolerance as a "philosophy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the seriousness of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (p. 1). Zero-tolerance policies follow the assumption that implementing severe consequences and separating problematic students leads to lower incidences of misconduct and a more positive school environment based on Skiba, et al.'s (2011) research. Vaught (2011) reports school officials have no choice but to remove students who are guilty of particular, leading to increased DAEP placement because of an abundance of zero tolerance policies at the state, district, and school levels that require administrators to suspend or expel all students who commit certain infractions leads to an

increase in assignments to disciplinary alternative schools. As cited by Kennedy-Lewis (2015), Vandehaar, Petrosko, and Munoz (2013) assert that when students' behaviors disruptive the learning process and threaten academic progress, especially when zero-tolerance policies have been violated, those students are relocated to alternative schools that have a disciplinary focus. Booker & Mitchell's research (2011) observed that less serious violations of school discipline policies and behaviors that are not covered under zero-tolerance policies are resulting in more arbitrary removals from traditional school campuses. . Tefera, Siegel-Hawley, and Levy refer to Skiba, Eckes, and Brown's 2010 study that found school districts' zero-tolerance policies have made minor behavior concerns, such as disruptive behavior and insubordination, offenses worthy of suspension. As cited by Mongan and Walker (2012), Polakow-Suransky (1999) found that in a Michigan school district the zero-tolerance policy was applied in "an arbitrary and capricious manner". In many instances, administrators' choice of punishment was not "rationally related to the facts of the case".

Recidivism is a hinderance for some students moving between disciplinary alternative education programs and traditional school campuses. Regardless of the initial placement decision, some students stay at DAEPs longer than their original assignment, while others find themselves unable to successfully return to their home school and remain there. Students who find themselves in either of these categories are referred to as recidivists. The reason some students return to DAEPs is unclear. Educators must identify whether family/home life, academic deficiencies, behavioral or psychological difficulties, or some combination of them all contribute to alternative school recidivism.

Recidivism poses a threat to students' educational success and likelihood of graduating. Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Petrosko conclude in their 2013 research that identifying the factors that contribute to recidivism and providing supports for these students is essential to ensure their success. Osher, Amos, and Gonsoulin (2012) report that students' entire ecology must be addressed to promote successful reentry. Their family, culture, interactions with positive adults, and community/environmental factors influence whether youth will be successful upon reentering their previous environment.

> "To foster better reentry outcomes, youth, families, and service providers must equip themselves with a set of competencies—developing and enhancing interpersonal tools by addressing the youth's risk and protective factors, fostering the cultural and linguistic competence of all stakeholders, and supporting the youth's social–emotional learning." (p. 13)

Jolivette, Swoszowski, Josephs, McDaniel, and Ennis (2012) reported that open and consistent communication between campuses is essential to ensure successful transition for students. Such communication increases the likelihood that students and staff will be knowledgeable of expectations, policies, and procedures prior to the student returning to their home campus. This study found that supports and a plan need to be in place to help students transition from alternative school to traditional school. Many times, students are simply sent back to their home school with no guidance or plan in place.

Vanderhaar, Munoz, and Petrosko (2013) found that exclusionary practices are not effective at discouraging future misbehaviors when it is the student's first time being expelled. Heilburn, Cornell, and Lovegrove (2015) report that adverse behaviors such as,

lack of interest and involvement in school, academic struggles, withdrawing from school (no longer attending), and juvenile criminal justice activity are potential outcomes for students who have been suspended.

Students' enrollment in attending disciplinary alternative education programs DAEPs increased at a continuous rare. During the 2007-2008 school year, were enrollment at public alternative schools in public school districts was 645,500 students (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010) compared to 612,900 in the 2000-2001 school year ("Public", 2002). School districts use disciplinary alternative schools to continue to provide educational services for students who are removed from traditional school practices for violating discipline policies. Separating disruptive and troublesome students while continuing to provide for their academic, social, and behavioral needs was the primary goal for DAEPs. (Texas, 2007). Students are assigned to the alternative school for a predetermined amount of time, depending on the severity of the infraction – the more serious the infraction, the2 longer the duration.

According to Booker and Mitchell (2011), the key to reducing DAEP enrollment and increasing success at the home campus may lie in understanding the reasons students are initially placed in alternative settings. The diversity in behaviors identified as punishable by alternative placement increases the likelihood that students are subject to repeated removal from home campuses. Teske, Huff, and Graves (2013) found that "removing students from schools that serve as a buffer against delinquency is counterproductive to the goals of education, best practices in juvenile justice, and community safety."

Statement of the Problem

While research has been conducted to determine what leads to alternative school placement, not as much attention has been given to what happens to those students after their initial placement. Few studies have been conducted to determine why some students spend longer than their assigned time at disciplinary alternative schools and some never return to their home school. Such students are considered recidivists. In a study of San Mateo County (California) schools, Gurantz (2010) found that of 418 students 59% returned to their home school, 17% reenrolled in an alternative school, and 24% completely dropped out of school. In a study of alternative schools in Pennsylvania, Hosley (2003) found that in the same academic year 8% of students were resent to alternative schools after returning to their home school in the same year and 37% extended their placement through the following academic year. Little is known regarding why students return to alternative schools or dropout of school completely.

Booker and Mitchell (2011) identify two categories of disciplinary infractions that send students to alternative schools – mandatory and discretionary. It is mandatory that students be placed in a DAEP when conduct is punishable under zero tolerance policies. Such conduct includes conduct punishable as a felony, alcohol and drugs, dangerous weapons, or serious bodily injury. Conversely, school administrators decide which other behaviors warrant disciplinary alternative placements thereby classifying them as discretionary behaviors. While much is known about initial placements, there is a lack of information on why students are repeatedly placed in DAEPs or fail to return to their home campuses at all.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that students, teachers, and administrators believe contribute to students' placement at disciplinary alternative schools. The study will also examine what factors contribute to student recidivism to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. While the behaviors that lead to placement in DAEPs have been identified, not enough attention has been given to what can be done to reduce or eliminate these behaviors. Heilburn, Cornell, and Lovegrove (2015) found that despite an abundance of research on the negative consequences of suspension, not as much attention has been given to the factors that contribute to high suspension rates.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What factors do students, teachers and administrators report contribute to students being repeatedly sent to disciplinary alternative education programs?

RQ 2: According to students, teachers, and administrators, what factors contribute to students remaining at disciplinary alternative education programs longer than their originally assigned time-period?

RQ 3: What changes do students, teachers, and administrators say need to be made, in policy and practice, that would reduce the recidivism rate for secondary disciplinary alternative education students?

Justification

Students who are assigned to disciplinary alternative schools are met with challenges that their peers do not face. Behavioral problems, legal/criminal justice concerns, and learning disabilities often hinder their academic progress and interrupt their

educational process. Many times, these obstacles are present before the students are assigned to a DAEP, and placement reduces the likelihood of students receiving the help and support they need to earn a high school diploma. The fact that many students are repeatedly assigned to DAEPs, or stay longer than originally placed, places them at a further educational disadvantage. Kim and Taylor (2008) research found that as the population of disenfranchised students increased, so did development of alternative schools. When students become disenfranchised and fail to see the value of education, the likelihood of dropping out increases.

Both students and school administrators could benefit from identifying and reducing the factors that lead to repeated alternative school placements, which contributes to decreased likelihood of high school graduation. Determining the factors that lead to multiple and extended placements can help districts and administrators devise plans to help these students stay in school and graduate, which could lead them to become more productive members of society. By identifying contributing factors of behaviors that lead to repeated suspension and exclusion, school administrators can revise their discipline policies and reduce student disenfranchisement, which has the potential to lead to greater student achievement.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory examines how children's environments shape and influence the development of children's relationships. This theory focuses on the impact that children's environment, in both close and distant proximity, has on their lives and defines how the child's development is impacted by the

complex layers of their environment. (Paquette and Ryan, 2011). Alternative school recidivism is the result of many factors. The Ecological Systems theory facilitates study of multiple factors that impact student behaviors that lead to alternative school placement.

Methodology

This study will be mixed methods and use focus groups and survey as the methodologies. This design will serve best for collecting data from multiple perspectives. A questionnaire would be completed by students first so that their perspective can be given. The results from the questionnaire will guide the discussion questions for the focus groups which will consist of teachers and administrators. Focus groups also provide the opportunity to obtain primary data through verbal channels and approach the research area from various perspectives (Dudovskiy, 2018). Administrators will be asked a few additional questions regarding the decision-making process for recommending expulsion because they make the final decision. Students will also be asked additional questions about their experience transitioning to or from a disciplinary alternative education program. Once all of the focus group sessions have been completed, each participant will be asked to complete a Likert-type scale that assesses general knowledge and attitudes toward alternative school placement.

Definitions

Comorbid(ity): the simultaneous presence of two chronic diseases or conditions in a patient.

Discretionary discipline: when schools issue punishments for actions that could be perceived as disrespectful, dangerous, or harmful to the classroom environment on an individual level.

Disciplinary alternative education programs: an educational program for students in elementary through high school grades who have been removed from the traditional school settings. These programs focus on self-discipline and alternative instructional methods and have been adopted by local policies to serve students who have been removed for mandatory or discretionary reason.

Exclusionary practices: the practice of removing students from a traditional education setting for disciplinary reasons. \

Recidivism: reoffending, or the repetition of criminal acts by a convicted offender.

Delimitations

1. This study will be limited to secondary schools (grades 7-12)
2. This study will collect data from students, teachers, and administrators only.
3. Participants in this study were limited due to school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alternative Schools

History of Alternative Schools

In the United States, the first alternative education program opened its doors in the 1960s (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010). Alternative systems of education in the United States originated during colonial times when only those affiliated with wealth or religious groups were allowed to be educated according to Koetke (1999). Progressive, student-centered, no cost schools that were founded in the 1960s have largely contributed to the rise in alternative education programs. (Boss, 1998). According to Herndon and Benbenutty (2014) the U.S. Department of Education defines an alternative school is any public school with grades kindergarten through twelve that meets certain criteria for students who could not otherwise be effectively accommodated. An alternative school can also be a school that offers curriculum differing from the district norm. Additionally, alternative schools are separate from settings that can be deemed regular, special, or vocational and serve as an additional component of the school district. As early as the 1960s, alternative schools had been implemented by educational authorities to "address the unique needs of students who are flagged as being at risk of school failure" (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009 24). Gilson (2006) notes overall, alternative education derives from 8the awareness that all people can be educated.

Alternative education is any educational activity that falls outside of the traditional K-12 system. It could be gifted programs or remote learning. More commonly, alternative schools are known as facilities which serve who have disenrolled from traditional schools and are considered vulnerable (Aron, 2003).

Alternative schools are also referred as open schools (Tissington, 2006) which led to the creation inspired the establishment of additional programs in the public education system which include: programs for intellectually enhanced students, schools without walls; schools within a school, culturally diverse schools; and drop-out prevention; (Obleton et. al., 2012). More facilities to service students who presented behavior problems and disrupted the learning process were established in the 1908saccording to Young (1990.The prominence of such schools influenced the character of many alternative options.

Although the precise number of the types of existing alternative schools, Aron (2003) concluded there were in excess 20,000 open in the United States. Beginning in 2002, as new national guidelines and policies about school completion rates and score standardized testing were implemented, student enrollment in alternative schools grew moderately. (Fresques, Vogell, & Pierce, 2017). There were over 645,600 children attending schools which were for at-risk students or considered an alternative setting (nces.ed.gov, 2010) and over 10,000 district-operated alternative education programs. According to Fresques, Vogell, & Pierce (2017) close to 500,000 individuals were enrolled in alternative schools in 2014. Despite fewer students being enrolled in alternative education programs, the programs remain relevant; the decrease in alternative

school enrollment may be attributed simply to schools seeking options other the removal as well as changes in zero-tolerance policies.

As time has progressed the term “alternative school” has evolved in meaning. Many campuses that carry this title no longer offer the services that were provided by the earliest alternative schools. Though the purpose has changed, the necessity and relevance of alternative schools is still evident. Perzigian (2018) stated “almost 70% of urban districts, 40% of suburban districts, and 35% of rural districts offer public alternative schools for students presenting academic or behavior difficulties.” “An assignment to a school district’s alternative education program is considered a higher level of consequence than an assignment of suspension or out of school suspension” (Allman & Slate, 2011).

Purpose of Alternative Schools

Because the term “alternative school” means different things to different people, the true purpose of alternative schools is not clear. Avery (2016), citing Jones (2011) describes an alternative school as a public elementary/secondary school where students’ needs, which cannot be met in a traditional educational setting, are addressed. These facilities provide nontraditional education and serve as an adjunct to a regular school or falls outside the categories of regular special education, or vocational education. The fundamental purpose of alternative schools is to meet the educational needs of students who exhibit academic or behavioral deficits. Of at-risk, disenfranchised students” (Burkett, 2012). According to Washburn-Moses (2011) alternative schools build personalized, supportive environments for students who are experiencing extreme

difficulty in the traditional school setting. Foley and Pang (2006) found that some view alternative education programs as a tool to provide students who have been identified as at-risk for school failure an opportunity to receive individualized opportunities designed to meet their unique educational needs. Of course, even the term at-risk can vary in meaning with Gilson (2006) stating that students bearing this have been labeled as "those exposed to inadequate or inappropriate educational experiences in the family, school or community" (p. 49). Washburn-Moses (2011) provides a succinct explanation of alternative schools by stating that alternative schools are often viewed as a dumping ground for students who are problematic in traditional settings.

According to Carver, Lewis, and Tice (2010) alternative schools sometimes operate in a different building, a distinct classroom, or placed inside of another school. Students who have been identified as displaying problematic behaviors, volatile, disruptive, and/or dangerous are intended students for such schools. These alternative schools are intended for individuals who are considered dangerous, violent, disruptive, or who exhibit challenging behaviors. They continue stating that students are referred to alternative schools for many reasons that include suspension or expulsion from home/traditional school, experiencing academic difficulty, or behavioral difficulties. Criteria for admission to alternative schools frequently includes truancy, a history of social-emotional problems, eligibility for expulsion, risk of becoming a dropout, and/or referral from a district school.

Based on Tajalli-Garba's research, (2014) Texas, Connecticut, Hawaii, and Kentucky established disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEP) as a

supplement to zero-tolerance policies. The same study reported that the Safe Schools Act (Texas, 1995) established DAEPs for students "whose behavior violated local or state rules of conduct. The purpose was to provide a place to deal with the educational and behavioral needs of suspended or expelled students" (p. 622). Ultimately the goal of all alternative programs is to provide an alternative path for students to graduate and become productive members in society (Kentucky Department of Education: Profile of Kentucky Alternative Schools, 2013).

Clearly, different alternative schools focus on meeting different needs for students. Some programs focus on addressing students' disciplinary needs while others cater more to their educational needs. McNulty and Roseboro (2009) assert that alternative schools incorporate diverse instructional and behavior management strategies to serve students with individualized educational and social requirements. Morley (1991) stated that the belief that learning can occur in diverse contexts under varied circumstances is the foundation for alternative schools. Mississippi Department of Education also asserts that alternative education programs are intended to be temporary removal from the tradition setting. Such programs are designed to provide both academic and behavioral support for students whose behavior hinders their success in the traditional school setting.

According to Herndon and Benbenutty (2014), to enroll in alternative schools, students must either: a) be habitually truant; b) have failing grad8es as a result of excessive absences; c) have a high truancy rate due to a lack of motivation; d) be identified as at-risk of dropping out; or d) would simply benefit from the placement.

Foley and Pang (2006) offered an extended definition to include students who are referred by their home school for concerns such as social-emotional/behavioral issues and truancy. Cable, Plucker, and Spradlin (2009) found low grades, habitual absenteeism, and disruptive behavior (including but not limited to drug/alcohol use and fighting) are the most common reasons for students to be assigned to an alternative school. Other reasons such as disruptions in home life, prolonged illness, and social or emotional issues have also resulted in students being placed in alternative education settings.

Finally, specifically in Mississippi, "the purpose of Alternative Education is designed to accommodate behavioral and academic needs of students when those needs cannot be adequately provided in a traditional school setting. Additionally, alternative education programs provide direct in instruction social, emotional, and behavior management to students" (MDE, 5).

Whether the purpose is academic, behavioral, or vocational, alternative schools strive to meet the diverse needs of students. The services provided in each of these schools are a reflection of what their students need to be successful. These programs have successfully reduced dropout rates, while effectively decreasing disruptive behavior and increasing student attendance (Washburn-Moses, 2011).

Types of Alternative Schools

Typically, when one hears the term alternative school, problem students come to mind. Burkett (2012) identifies multiple types of alternative schools, most of which are not discipline-focused or punitive: magnet schools focus on student interests whether they be academic, arts-related, or career oriented. Learning centers provide studies in

specific content areas, including vocational and training. Continuation schools allow at-risk students to continue their education and not drop out. Finally, schools without walls are schools that encourage students to go beyond the classroom and learn in the community as well. Burkett cited Raywid (1999) stating that "flexibility and autonomy were characteristic of alternative schools since their inception."

Gable, Bullock, and Evans (2006) assert currently, increased inclusivity and responsibility are tenants of most alternative schools. They also cite Fuller and Sabatino (1996) emphasizing that, at the legislative level, alternative schools can no longer operate as facilities where students are "dumped". because their behavioral challenges hinder success for themselves are others. The students' disruptive and inappropriate behavior, which jeopardizes academic and social success of themselves and others, does not justify excluding them from the educational process.

As cited by Gable, Bullock, and Evans (2006), Raywid (1994) identified three types of alternative schools. Schools which are purposely designed to be more humane, rigorous, and engaging than regular schools are known as innovative schools which is one type of alternative. Last chance schools are a different type of alternative school that provide a final opportunity for students to continue their education before being sent to a more restrictive environment. Students who can benefit from an environment that provides emotional and social rehabilitation, as well as academic support and remediation may attend another type of alternative education program called the remedial school. Each type of alternative program mentioned above serves a different type of student. Innovative, or Type 1 programs primarily serve academically advanced or highly

intellectual students. Students who exhibit more serious discipline problems are usually placed in Type 2 settings which primarily serve students on a short-term basis. Alternative schools who are therapeutic in nature are referred to as Type 3 settings (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006) serving students who have a diagnosis of an emotional or behavioral disorder. As stated in Wilkerson, Afacan, Yan, Justin, and Datar (2016) type 1 schools are innovative programs and only serve students who are admitted after an application process. Type 2 schools serve students who are referred or recommended by their home school due to behavioral concerns. Type 3 schools focus on academic remediation and seek to help students stay on track to receiving their high school diploma.

One type of alternative school focuses on students' strengths rather than their weaknesses. Such schools use solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) which employs an intervention philosophy that promotes dropout prevention and offers students solution-building skills (Franklin, Streeter, Kim, and Tripoli, 2007). Researchers propose that the techniques used in SFBT help provide positive outcomes for at-risk students. According to Franklin (2007), when SFBT is used as an intervention, students achieve goals, have fewer negative feelings, have fewer concerns, experience increased self-esteem, manage their behavior better, and earn higher grade point averages.

Another type of alternative education program is the disciplinary alternative education program. For students who face being removed from the educational system due to inappropriate behavior or who have chronic behavioral problems, these schools serve as the consequential alternative placement (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Avery

(2016) cited Yearwood, Jibril-Adbum, and Jordan affirming that the primary responsibility of such schools is to help students who are considering discontinuing their education, academically unsuccessful, and chronically absent. The learning experiences in these schools "consist of strategies intended to communicate and demonstrate acceptable behaviors so that students will live better lives" (Flower et. al, 2011) which leads to students being successful at their regular schools which is the ultimate goal. In addition, students continue to receive academic instruction which they would not receive if they were suspended or expelled.

Characteristics of Alternative Schools

"In some ways, the alternative school setting can be likened to a triage unit of a hospital, administrators and teachers involved are highly skilled in a variety of interventions, and they can work to react to students' specialized needs in a rapid and responsive manner" (O'Brien & Curry 12). Allman and Slate (2014) quote Kemere and Walsh (2000) noting "alternative education programs create an educational environment in which challenging behavior is simultaneously addressed. Delivering meaningful and relevant instruction to marginalized students helps them feel connected to the curriculum and school site according to Mottaz (2002). Such programs create and maintain a sense of community, make education interesting for students, and provide structure and routines which make the first two factors possible. If an alternative school is to be successful, it must be founded on the principal that its students can succeed and graduate (Gilson, 2006, p. 61). Students need personal and social support, sustained motivation, self-regulation training. Glass (1995) reports programs with a focus on the diverse needs of

students and provide behavior modification and intervention strategies that lead to students successfully returning to their traditional school setting are characterized as successful alternative programs. Disciplinary alternative education programs extend services that students may not receive in a traditional school setting including supervised counseling, social work intervention, and non-traditional schedules (Allman & Slate, 2011) which could be beneficial for students who struggle in the traditional school setting. As reported by Washburn-Moses (2011) a general high school diploma track curriculum, self-paced instruction, crisis and behavior intervention and collaboration with outside agencies are key components of a strong alternative education program.

Perry-Randolph (2016) declares that disciplinary alternative schools (DAS) strive to correct, change, and manage students' behaviors. She found that educators expect DAS and public schools to provide solutions that prevent antisocial, aggressive, and disruptive behaviors. In actuality, these schools seek to provide an education to students whose disruptive behaviors impedes their educational process as well as that of others. O'Brien and Curry (2009) state "as discipline is the main focus of these institutions, there is a concentrated interest in helping students build specific skill sets, such as anger management and behavior modification". Kim (2011) suggested that alternative schools fall into three categories: ideal havens, warehouses or dumping grounds, and school/prison extensions. The ideal haven alternative schools are those that address the differentiated needs of students. The warehouse or dumping-ground alternative schools are typically for students deemed dangerous, disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional. Kim (2011) continued to posit that school/prison extensions are alternatives that have rigid

policies, and they are surrounded by chain link fences. These schools perform surprise searches on students and the facilities resemble prisons instead of welcoming schools.

Despite the negative perception of alternative school programs, the campuses can be beneficial to students. Anzalone stated that when counseling is provided along with consequences such as expulsion, suspension, and assignment to DAEPs, students' understanding as to why they continually commit egregious offenses is broadened and these programs have the potential to teach students how to refocus their negative actions in a different and more proactive direction (Niemeyer & Shichor, 1996; Rodriguez, 2007). Morrissette (2011) found that an alternative education program's non-intimidating and supportive atmosphere can be instrumental in students feeling more comfortable in school. Moreover, the physical arrangement and mood of the learning environment provide an inviting and safe atmosphere. Students report feeling emotionally safe and describe how they are able to relax and began to enjoy learning when they are in an environment where they feel supported and respected. The sense of community that an alternative school provides also contributes to students' sense of belonging and success. Watson (2011) found that students enjoyed the fun, flexible, and creative nature of alternative schools (p. 1507). She also noted that learner-centered instruction, personalized learning, and differentiate learning allow students a certain amount of control over their learning, which increase student motivation.

Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) listed several practices that aid in student success in alternative education programs. Alternative education students should be paired with a school-based adult mentors as it has been noted that students benefit from

positive relationships with adults at school. Teaching problem solving skills, encouraging reinforcing positive behavior, and listening to students is the primarily responsibility of the mentor. Social Skills instruction is also recommended because its goal to remediate acquisition and performance deficits for students who present challenging behaviors. To ensure students continue to work on the same grade level as their peers in typical school settings, alternative education programs are encouraged to provide adequate, effective, and high-quality academic instruction. It is also essential that parents of students in AEPs are actively involved. Parents must regularly communicate with school staff concerning student progress, participate in school activities, and be a part of behavior intervention programming.

According to Morrissette (2011) teachers' intuition and sensitivity contribute to student success as well. Students value teachers' ability to quickly assess the emotional state of their students, attend to understated details, and respond accordingly. As cited by O'Brien and Curry a study by Ray (2007) found that students felt more capable of handling challenges, were more satisfied with their performance, and received more support from staff when school counselors and teachers collaborated to assess students' needs and classroom challenges.

Alternative schools should incorporate both quantitative (measurable) and subjective (immeasurable) characteristics into their practices if they wish to be successful. Providing caring staff and an effective teaching environment is equally as important as having fewer students, with a smaller teacher-pupil ratio and quality teaching methodologies. Gilson, (2006) noted that basic qualities such as relevant subject

matter, nurturing teachers, and students who are invested in strengthening their weaknesses are the foundation any successful school. Fitzsimons-Hughes, et al. (2006) identified six characteristic of alternative schools that set them apart from traditional education programs: wide-ranging student evaluation and referral system; a curriculum that provides atypical academic choices and reflects real-world expectations ; courses that promote social, emotional, and behavioral change within a safe, positive, and nonpunitive environment; regular professional development for staff; policies and procedures that encourage student transition from a more to a less restrictive environment; and frequent reflection of the program's effectiveness and changes that are data driven.

MDE mandates that alternative education programs must, among other things, guarantee that there are no more than 15 students for every adult in the classroom; provide for students' academic and social/behavioral needs; implement strategies that promote behavioral and academic change for students as well as instruction on appropriate behavior and remediation to address academic deficits.

According to O'Brien and Curry, due to their self-contained nature, alternative schools typically provide more intimate settings than traditional schools. Alternative educators have a unique opportunity to build a community of learners, despite students' reluctancy to attend an alternative school. Students are allowed to engage socially within the classroom as a way of learning more appropriate manners of interaction.

As indicated by Wilkerson and Afacan and colleagues (2016), behavior-focused alternative schools, which are designed to meet the needs of students not expected to successfully complete secondary school, should offer specialized curriculum, a

significantly smaller student-teacher ratio, greater access to counselors. The likelihood that students will acquire the social and academic skills necessary for life after high school increases when students take advantage of the techniques of solution-based alternative schools. Students had fewer office referrals and suspensions while attending behavior-focused alternative schools. Alternative education programs should assure that there are high expectations for students by providing academic instruction that is tailored to meet the specific needs and learning style of students. Providing counseling for parents and students; provide adequate, caring, certified staff who are motivated and culturally diverse also facilitates student success.

When members of the school community agree on appropriate educational and socio-developmental interventions that ensure student success in their new environment, alternative school students can be successful (O'Brien & Curry, 21). Izumi, Shen, and Xia (2015) identified multiple factors that contributed to students successfully graduating from alternative schools which included using interdisciplinary teachers, block scheduling, small group instruction, and nontraditional and varied curricula. Collaboration with community members is also suggested as a way to increase graduation rates at alternative schools.

Franklin, Streeter, Kim, and Tripodi (2007) identified eight techniques that solution-focused alternative schools (SFAS) employ which contribute to student success that include: maximizing students' strengths; focus on student progress and building individual relationships ; stressing personal responsibility and allowing students to make choices; dedication to achievement and hard work; confidence in students' evaluations;

emphasis on students' success rather than their past difficulties; celebrating of small victories and minor progress; and implementation of goal-setting activities.

In SFAS programs, teachers are expected to do more than focus on instruction. Staff members are encouraged to become a facilitator and motivator who encourages students to take responsibility for their education. Additionally, Rumberger (2004) suggests SFAS programs offer: environments that are less intimidating and promote learning; staff who are compassionate and accept personally invested in students' success; an environment that promotes collegiality, taking risks, and self-governance; and promoting student encouragement by having smaller class sizes.

Other qualities that set alternative schools apart from traditional schools include the school's environment, organizational structure, course offerings and method of teaching, and community. (Gilson 2006). Foley and Pang (2006) report that collaboration between alternative education programs and community services provides support for students enrolled in DAEPs. Mills (2013) stated:

> Administrative leadership was focused on listening, caring, and putting students first, and teachers established positive relationships with students while separating the student from his/her behavior. Other aspects noted focused on the importance of establishing a calm environment, creating collaborative relationships for staff and administration, communicating high expectations for students, training teachers in curriculum and teaching strategies, keeping a low student-adult ratio, implementing transition programs, and involving parents and community members. Based on the findings from interviews and case studies, the

> researchers believe that alternative education programs are most successful when the enrolled students believe that teachers and administrators care about and believe in them. Students are motivated more when their teacher values their input and treat them fairly. Creating rules as a group helps students feel more involved and valued within their alternative school program. Students are also more successful when adults take a more nonauthoritarian approach to leadership within the classroom and school environment. When students see their teachers as role models who care about them and their futures, they tend to be more compliant and more goal-oriented than in a traditional classroom setting" (p. 33).

One way in which alternative schools can effectively enhance students' potential to succeed is "by promoting more positive interactions such as group projects, community service, and outreach programs" (Herndon & Bembenutty, p. 53). Franklin (2007) asserts that alternative schools are usually more effective at dropout prevention because they emphasize students' successes. Students who attend alternative schools "feel accepted and respected by their peers and teachers," (Wilkerson & Afacan, p. 90) which contributes to their success, along with teachers having high expectations of their students.

According to the MDE Handbook of Alternative Schools, the alternative education program should embody a proven repertoire of support techniques that maximize student development. "The program provides a comprehensive student assistance program that includes referrals to community agencies as needed. Relationships are established to support the academic, physical, and mental health needs

of the students enrolled. The program provides guidance and counseling to promote student performance, offers a broad range of weekly individual and/or group counseling sessions, and utilizes research-based dropout prevention strategies and character-building programs (i.e., conflict resolution, mentoring programs, etc.)."

These practices, when implemented properly, help students achieve more positive outcomes during their alternative school placement.

Outcomes of Alternative Schools

MDE mandates that "students assigned to the alternative education program must exhibit appropriate behavior and adhere to the alternative school's rules and regulations" (p. 9). When operated properly, alternative schools "decrease truancy, minimize suspensions and expulsions, enhance academic achievement, deter poor behavior in traditional schools, and reduced dropout rates. (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). Lehr (2014) contended that DAEP students exhibit more positive relationships with their peers, increased commitment to school, and improved academic performance. When students feel positively about the school environment they perform better academically and behaviorally. According to Poyrazli, et al. (2008), "students who have a more positive perception of their teachers, counselors, and administrators will have a greater sense of school membership, which may directly relate to a more positive perception of their school environment" (p. 553). Staff at alternative schools are trained to "actively build positive relationships with students" which has the potential to "lead to positive student socioemotional functioning and academic

success" (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, p. 135). Hafen and colleagues (2015) cite Brophy and Good stating that "students tend to rise or fall to the level of expectations that their teachers have for them" (p. 426). This self-fulfilling prophecy can have either a negative or positive effect. For students who are enrolled in DAEPs having a teacher who motivates and encourages them could provide the extra push they need to change and excel, both academically and behaviorally. Hafen, et al. (2015) further state "positive beliefs about a student's potential are beneficial regardless of a student's risk status" (p. 427).

When students have a positive perception of their school, they experience a greater sense of belonging and connection to the school, which typically increases student involvement. Greater student involvement leads to increased grade point average and better conduct. Edgar-Smith & Palmer (2015) "emphasize the importance of the teacher-student relationship and a sense of belonging within the school community, since it is not only related to academic success but social and emotional functioning as well" (p. 139). D'Angelo and Zemanick (2009) attribute student success at alternative schools to the personality and positive attitudes of teachers, small class sizes, learning at students' own pace.

Owens (2004) found that because alternative schools offer smaller class sizes, remain in one classroom rather than transition for each subject, have stronger bonds between teachers and students, create a sense of belonging and inclusiveness, and allow students to work at their own pace, students reported feeling most comfortable in those settings.

When looking at an alternative school in the Austin (Texas) Independent School District, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, and Tripoli (2007) found that students enrolled at the solution focus alternative school earned more credits, improved attendance, and increased graduation rate. Wilkerson, Afacan, Yan, Justin, and Datar (2016) found the same outcomes for students attending alternative schools and also noted a lower likelihood of students receiving office discipline referrals. Farkas, et al. (2012) reported an increase in levels of appropriate behavior and a decrease in office discipline referrals in an alternative school setting after the implementation of school-wide positive behavior support.

The ultimate goal of alternative schools is to support students who could not be successful on the traditional school campus. When a student's placement at an alternative education center is over there should be evidence of growth and positive evolvement. After providing proper support and remediation, the purpose of the alternative school has been served, and each student should return to their home school and perform better. When students receive the appropriate, positive outcomes from attending alternative schools they successfully transition back to traditional schools.

Transition to Traditional Campus

Transitioning from alternative to traditional school campuses can present several challenges to students. Teacher expectations, student expectations, and peer interactions must all be considered and may not always be on the same page. School staff may have higher expectations of students returning to campus while failing to create a supportive environment for these students. Wolf and Wolf (2008) report that alternative school

employees observe a repetitive cycle of suspensions, hearings, DAEP assignments, transition to homeschool school, which is a prevalent problem. Students returning to home schools often become targeted by traditional school teachers and staff. The students become stigmatized because of their previous alternative school placement and usually face resuspension. Wolf and Wolf continue that instructional practices that do not accommodate student learning styles, as well as policies that do not address students' behavioral needs contribute to student misbehavior. This could include disciplinary policies that require exclusion when a less punitive measure may be appropriate or programs that are inadequately prepared to meet the needs of students and staff during student transition to traditional schools.

Scholessberg's Transition Theory "identified four factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. (Evans, Forney, and Guida-DiBrito, 1998). What led to the transition and how timely it is, as well as whether the transition is temporary, permanent, or uncertain must be understood in order for the transition to be successful. Additionally, having a support system of family, peers, and staff in place, along with strategies for modifying the situation and stress management aid in successful transition.

In her dissertation, Darlene Davis (2017) expounded on Sholessberg's theory. Situation refers to how individuals react differently to different types of changes or may react differently at different times to the same type of transition. Self refers to an individual's identifying information such as gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, and age. Supports are described as who and what is around to

help with the transition; these supports can be based on the individual's interpersonal support system, which consists of the student's immediate and extended family and members from the institution, church, and community. Students can also receive academic or behavior supports. Traditional school environments do not offer the supports that are offered in most alternative schools (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002; Rutherford & Magee-Quinn, 1999). Alternative education programs strengthen students who are academically weak, have intellectual or behavior challenges, considering dropping out, or may need individualized instruction (Coles et al., 2009; Losinski et al., 2014).

"Students attending alternative schools also receive social skills training that teaches (a) classroom survival skills, such as how to follow directions, ask questions, and deal with responses of "no"; (b) friendship-making; (c) effective problem and conflict resolution; (d) alternatives to aggression; (e) anger management; and (f) work-related skills (Flowers, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2001). "Students also learn to apply social skills and behavioral strategies that will assist them in developing appropriate transferable skills related to communicating and interacting with others" (Davis, 2017).

According to Perry-Randolph (2016) in her dissertation, Chalker and Brown suggest that schools use front-loading interventions such as survival-skills preparation courses, transition teams, peer mentoring programs, visiting staff members, transition plans, transition centers, transition aftercare courses, and on-campus alternatives (p. 52). In order for these interventions to be successful they must be implemented "with ongoing support and progress monitoring before and after students are placed in DAS (p. 52).

To help students successfully transition back to traditional school campus, disciplinary alternative education programs need to identify "the social, in-school and self-regulatory factors associated with students' academic performance" (Herndon & Bembenutty, p. 49). Osher, Amos, and Gonsoulin identified five elements that lead to successful transition for students. Those elements are an effective transition team, development and monitoring of a transition plan; pre-release programming that prepares youth for transition, mentoring and advocacy, and monitoring and intervention (p. 9). Despite offering short-term intervention, , in order to be truly successful alternative school programs must provide a follow-through function as well (Glass, 1995).

> To ensure the successful transition of students with emotional/behavioral disorder (E/BD) and other disabilities as well as those without disabilities, many alternative education (AE) settings have instituted an "exit at entry" transition process (Valore, Cantrell, & Cantrell, 2006). This means, the faculty and staff begin the transition process during the intake process at the AE setting. For transition to be effective, all stakeholders must have the means for consistent communication across settings, so that new policies or procedures can be shared in advance to help ensure the information is passed down to the student (Jolivette, p. 47).

According to Jolivette, (2012) "Transition should be addressed at the start of a placement in an AE setting – "exit at entry" planning, and can be embedded within the SWPBIS framework, including systems, data, and practice levels" (p. 54). Relationship building is also crucial to successful transition. In her dissertation, Davis found "in order

to smoothly transition back to the traditional school setting, students use their interpersonal supports from their immediate and extended family members as well as peers, teachers and members of the community and church (Marbley & Rouson, 2013; Schlossberg, 1981). 'Students also learn to apply social skills and behavioral strategies that will assist them in developing appropriate transferable skills related to communicating and interacting with others' (Davis, 2017).

"Having positive relationships is especially important for students returning to their home schools because they need all the support they can get" (Powell and Marshall, 2011). Additionally, "the cultivation of genuine relationships between adults and children is essential for successful transition programming in alternative schools. Rather than something extra that can be added, relationships are central to straight success" (p. 16). Successful transition to traditional schools is more probable when students feel welcomed into their new school.

In most school districts transition plans are recommended for students who are entering alternative programs as well as students returning to traditional programs in order to bolster student success. The transition team should be comprised of staff from both the traditional setting and the alternative program as well as the student and his parent. A meeting should be held "to discuss strategies that produced positive and acceptable behavior from the student. After the student has attended their home school for about a month, the transition team should meet to discuss any needed change in strategy" (MDE 10-11).

Clark, Marthur, and Helding (2011) noted that students who received enhanced transition services prior to transition had a 64% less chance of returning to detention (p. 525). By providing a full academic day as well as a rigorous workload in courses required for graduation, transition plans allow students to maintain their current progress toward graduation. An appropriate transition team is comprised of the student, staff from the student's home school, alternative school staff, parents, and other support staff. The team is responsible for and should be actively involved in drafting, implementing, monitoring, and periodically modifying the transitional plan. The alternative school handbook declares:

> "The transition team assesses and matches needs to services to ensure that early interventions are developed to minimize the number and length of alternative education placements; social readiness is assessed before returning to the school of origin; continuance of required services is provided to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency and/or significant skill deficiencies are addressed" (MDE).

Three steps included in transitioning students back to their home school are preparation and planning, school/facility integration, and follow-up. Implementation of these steps may vary from district to district.

Owens (p. 173) stated that students are unsuccessful upon returning to traditional campus when there are no clear rules and consequences, they feel ill-equipped to manage their anger, lack positive relationships with teachers, are placed in large classes, and have no support person to go to when situations arise. McNulty and Roseboro (p. 420) report

students often confront preconceived notions held by others once they return from alternative schools to their home school, causing them to feel picked on and disliked. Further, when students returned to their home schools, they described themselves as targets and unable to transcend the label of an alternative school student.

There are some instances in which transition to the home school is unsuccessful. In such cases students are sent back to the DAEP for an additional placement. The repeated placement is known as recidivism and can be attributed to multiple factors.

Recidivism

Recidivism is typically defined in regard to criminal activity. It has been defined as "a return to criminal or delinquent activity after previous criminal or delinquent involvement" and broken down into three categories: "youth adjudicated for new offenses while in custody; youth supervised who a have subsequent arrest or adjudication/conviction while on supervision; or youth discharged for juvenile court jurisdiction and then have a subsequent arrest, adjudication or conviction" (Crime and Justice Institute). Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, & Spann (2008) define recidivism as a youth whose second incarceration occurs within three years after the first incarceration. Despite its criminal connotation the term can still be applied to adolescents enrolled in disciplinary alternative schools because many of them are placed in such schools as the result of criminal activity. Mississippi Department of Education defines recidivism as any student who returns to an alternative education program within a 12-month period.

Studying adolescents and recidivism can be challenging because of "the nature of the population and procedures in place to protect participants" (Balkin, et al., 2011).

Adolescents who have been identified as having more serious behavior problems are more likely to display repeat misbehaviors. The Psychopathology Checklist – Screening Version (PCL-SV) is used to predict likelihood of recidivism. Basque (2012) found that a higher score on Factor 2 of PCL_SV (socially deviant lifestyle) is a strong indication of repeating violent and non-violent behaviors (p. 1152). Balkin, et al. (2011) found that "court-referred adolescents who had higher degrees of antisocial behavior and anger mismanagement were more likely to reoffend within two years of receiving an intervention program" (p. 56). McReynolds, Schwalbe, and Wasserman (2010) found that disruptive behavior disorder, as well as comorbidity of substance use disorder and disruptive behavior disorder, predicts recidivism. It was also noted that "the overall recidivism rate for youths with any disorder was higher than for youths with no disorder" (p. 212) and comorbidity increased the likelihood of recidivism. Young people who have previously been involved in the juvenile justice system are more likely to experience recidivism when they also have a mental health disorder. Youth diagnosed with conduct disorder "may be more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors" and "show the presence of repetitive and persistent violations of major age-appropriate societal norms and rules" (Balkin et. al, 2011). Such behaviors are contributing factors to placement in disciplinary alternative schools. Repeating these behaviors could explain why some students return to or never leave alternative schools after their initial placement.

Hoeve, McReynolds, & Wasserman (2013) report that when adolescents have a dual diagnosis (comorbidity) of internalizing (affective and anxiety) disorders and disruptive behavior (oppositional defiant, attention deficit-

hyperactivity, and conduct) disorders were six times more at risk of recidivism than non-disordered peers (p. 297). Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, and Spann (p. 188) cite Malmgren and Leone's (2000) research findings which state re-offending and recidivism are highly correlated with low levels of academic achievement. Students who exhibited a deficit in basic skills and received special education services were also noted to have higher recidivism rates. However, providing students with academic intervention with other services, such as mental health and family services (p. 188) reduces recidivism.

In their research on transition planning Wolf & Wolf (2008) found that recidivism has more to do with adult perceptions and practices than with actual student behavior.

> "School staff and administrators view a 'revolving door' of suspensions, hearing, assignments to alternative, and returns to mainstream school as a prevalent problem. Resuspension may be encouraged by the stigma that attaches to students as a result of the alternative school experience, thus making their behavior a likely disciplinary target for mainstream teachers and other school staff. It may result from classrooms and teaching styles that are not a good fit with the learning styles and needs of students with behavioral problems; from disciplinary policies that mandate removal to an alternative school when a less restrictive response may be appropriate to a particular case; or from resources that are inadequate for meeting the twin challenges of preparing students for their return to mainstream school

and of preparing their mainstream school teachers and administrators for receiving them and meeting their needs" (p. 188).

Avery (2016) identified both school and teacher factors that contributed to student recidivism. School factors include: lack of school structure and supervision; inadequate classroom and behavior management; larger class sizes; and stigmatization by staff. Teacher factors include teachers' attitude toward students and teacher-student relationships.

Understanding why students are initially assigned to alternative schools may reduce the number of placements. Offering solutions or alternatives to the behaviors that lead to alternative school placement will ultimately reduce recidivism and increase student achievement.

An abundance of research exists on the need for alternatives and how students benefit from attending, but not as much attention seems to be given to reducing or preventing placement in disciplinary alternative education programs. Understanding why students exhibit serious or repeated misbehavior is necessary, but so is providing them with the tool necessary to reduce or eliminate the behaviors. Additionally, reviewing and revising school districts' placement and zero-tolerance policies could reduce the number of placements in DAEPs.

CHAPTER III – METHOD

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that teachers and administrators believe contribute to students' placement at disciplinary alternative schools. The study will also examine what factors are viewed to contribute to student recidivism to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. Data will be collected from students, traditional school staff and administrators, alternative school staff and administrators, and central office administrators to gain insight about why students are repeatedly assigned to alternative education programs for discipline reasons. Focus groups and questionnaires will be used to ascertain this information.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What factors do students, teachers, and administrators believe contribute to students being repeatedly sent to disciplinary alternative education programs?

RQ 2: What do these groups identify as factors that lead to students remaining at disciplinary alternative education programs longer than their originally assigned time-period?

RQ 3: What do these groups identify as changes that need to be made, in policy and practice to reduce the recidivism rate for secondary disciplinary alternative education students?

Participants

For the first phase of the study, a small number of students from secondary (grades 7-12) schools in a rural county of a southern state will be asked to voluntarily participate in this research. In addition, district office, alternative school, and traditional

school administrators, as well as district and teachers from alternative school, will participate in focus group discussions. The diversity of participants provides an array of perspectives from individuals who have a different stake in alternative school placement. Each group will be asked the same questions. Data collected from the focus groups will be used to develop a questionnaire that will be answered by the participants, which will illuminate the participants' perceptions of alternative school recidivism.

Permission from the superintendent will be necessary to gain access to school and central office staff. Parents must give written permission before students participate in the focus group or complete the questionnaire. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants can choose to remove themselves from data collection at any time. Each participant will be eligible to participate in a drawing to receive one of two Amazon gift cards (one gift card will be given to adult participants and another will be given to student participants). Facilitators (staff members responsible for disseminating questionnaires) will receive a $25 amazon gift card.

Teachers and administrators from both traditional and alternative school settings will be included in the study. However, the only central office staff who would be invited to participate are those who are involved in placement decisions. Students who are currently or have been previously placed at disciplinary alternative school will participate in the study.

Instruments

In phase one of the study, groups of students from each district will complete a questionnaire that has been developed by the researcher. The questionnaire will focus on

reasons for placement and qualities of alternative education programs. Both open-ended and Likert scale items will be included in the questionnaire. Additional items will be those used to gather sociodemographic information. This questionnaire will be pre-tested to clarify items after which a pilot test will be conducted to establish instrument reliability.

The themes and factors identified in the results of the questionnaire will be applied to development of focus group (phase two) questions of the study will consist of three focus groups: one group of teachers; one group of school-site administrators; and one group of district office administrators. In addition, sub-questions prompted by the groups' responses will be used.

Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design, which collects quantitative data in the first phase and qualitative data in the second phase, will be used for this study. This design is used for qualitative data to give greater insight to the initial quantitative results, which is why it is important to connect quantitative results to qualitative data collection.

Procedures

Superintendents in school districts from a rural county in a southern state will be contacted to gain permission for schools to participate in this research. Once permission is granted schools will be asked to select students and teachers to participate in the study. Permission letters will be sent home with each student chosen by the staff. Once permission has been granted the survey portion of the study will begin.

In the first phase of the study, students from secondary (grades 7-12) alternative schools will complete a questionnaire. Upon receiving parental consent to participate, an electronic link to the questionnaire will be emailed to a designee at participating schools. The designee will forward the link to participating students. The responses will be submitted to Qualtrics and automatically recorded.

So as to minimize interrupting instructional time, participating students will be asked to complete the questionnaire one (1) day for approximately one (1) hour. They will be surveyed regarding what they perceive to be benefits of attending alternative school and what challenges await students returning to traditional schools.

After the data from phase one has been collected and analyzed, focus group questions will be developed. These questions will be used to guide discussions with alternative and traditional-school teachers (grades 7-12), secondary school administrators, and district office administrators. Participants will be grouped based on academic role. The principal investigator will moderate each focus group. Discussions are expected to last between one (1) and two (2) hours. Focus groups will be conducted using Zoom. All focus group meetings will be recorded, and the discussions transcribed pri8or to data analysis.

Data Analysis

Responses from both phases of data collection will be analyzed to discover similarities and differences among subject groups' replies. These data will be used to develop interview questions related to teacher and administrator perspectives on alternative school recidivism.

Qualitative data from phase two will be transcribed and a constant comparison analysis will be completed. Constant comparison analysis allows the focus group researcher to determine if saturation has occurred in general, as well as groups. Existing data is compared to new data as it emerges in the research.

For the quantitative portion of the study scale questions one and two and open-ended questions one and two address research question 1; scale questions three through five and open-ended questions three through five address research question 2; and scale questions six and seven and open-ended questions six and seven address research question 3.

Once data from phase one has been identified and themes have been identified focus group questions will be delivered. Although they will be clustered based on academic role each group will receive the same questions.

CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

This mixed-methods study sought to explore student and staff perspectives factors that led students to return to or remain in DAEPs for longer than they were assigned. Data were collected using questionnaires and focus groups. The quantitative component of this study was employed so that students could maintain anonymity and honestly respond without feeling pressured or intimidated. Student data was used to design questions for the qualitative portion of research in which staff participated. Focus groups were used so that multiple perspectives could be represented, while also allowing participants to guide the discussion with their responses.

Participants

Participants in this study are students and educators of in a rural country in a southern state. The alternative schools in two school districts, District A and District B, are the focus of this study. Students from a school in District A and a center for alternative education in District B completed questionnaires to provide the student perspectives on disciplinary alternative school placement and recidivism. Student responses were used to develop focus groups questions for district employees to answer and discuss.

There are three school districts within PRMS County: PBD, PMT, and PGH. PBD and PMT have their own alternative schools. Students from PGH also attend the alternative school in PBD. Administrators from PGH did not respond to solicitations for participants; therefore, no staff members from PGH participated in this study.

In phase I of the study, 63 students in grade seven through twelve completed the questionnaire (see Appendix A). Student participants were diverse in gender, grade level, and ethnic background (see Table 1).

Phase II of research consisted of three focus groups consisting of paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators from District A and District B. There were 33 total participants. Prior to focus group meetings, participants completed a questionnaire (see Appendix B) that asked demographic information (see Table 1), district policies regarding alternative school placement, and perceptions of alternative schools.

Three two-hour focus group meeting were held. Groups were heterogeneously combined to include staff from different districts and different schools within the same district. Discussion topics included when a student should be placed at alternative school, duration of placement, differences between traditional and alternative schools, and transition to traditional school.

Results

Phase I

Of the 63 student participants, most of them (40%) reported being assigned to the alternative school for nine weeks, followed by students assigned for 36 weeks, an entire school year (36%). Most students (21%) reported being at the alternative school between zero and three months, which is equivalent to a nine-week placement, followed by 16% stating they had been in an alternative school for an entire year or longer.

Seventy percent of students surveyed indicated they like the alternative setting better than their regular school. Twenty-three percent of participants had been placed in an alternative education setting more than once during their educational career. Of those who had been assigned more than once, the majority were reassigned for violence (27%), 22% were resent for the same offense (not specified), 14% for drugs, and nine percent for repeated classroom disruption. Eighteen percent of students who replied requested to return to the alternative school.

Of the thirteen students who responded to being asked why they remained at the alternative school, seven (54%) listed positive outcomes (i.e., better grades or behavior) and six (46%) listed negative outcomes (i.e., no change in behavior or worse grades). Four (31%) responded that they liked it at the alternative school, three (23%) responded that they had better grades, four (31%) responded that they had a fight, and two (15%) responded that their behavior had not improved.

When asked about their interest in returning to the traditional school campus seventeen students responded. Eight students (47%) stated that they did not want to return at all, five (29%) stated that they wanted to return full time, and four (24%) stated that they wanted to return part time. Eleven students provided reasons for preferring to stay at the alternative school that included: receiving more assistance (36%), earning better grades (18%), preferring smaller setting (18%), preferring alternative setting (9%) and a combination of all stated reasons (18%).

Eighty-three percent of students surveyed held a positive opinion of their DAEP. Seventy percent strongly agreed and 13% agreed when asked if they liked the alternative

setting better that the regular school. According to respondents, disciplinary alternative education programs offer multiple programs and services to help students achieve success. Tutoring, counseling, Restorative Justice, and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports were identified as tools DAEPs employ to assist their students. Sixty-five percent of students surveyed indicated that their program offered all the aforementioned services. Participants listed varied practices that alternative schools do differently than traditional campuses. Student-teacher relationships, tutoring/assistance, smaller class sizes, quality of instruction, and environment/culture were repeatedly listed as techniques that set the alternative campuses apart from the traditional campus. One student responded, "the alternative school makes sure you understand what you're learning, and they don't rush you into doing things." Another replied, "they actually interact with you and help you when you need help, and the classrooms are smaller and easier to focus in." It was also noted, "(alternative schools) take time to get to actually know the students, how they learn, etc." According to a different student, "they give more hands-on learning."

"Students were also asked what traditional schools could to do make transition back to campus easier for students returning from alternative school for disciplinary reasons. Responses encompassed support services (academic and social/emotional) for students, less judgment from staff, smaller class sizes, and reward systems. A respondent said. "I believe they should allow more personal connections with their students." Another answered, "they should show that they care about their students instead of making it seem like it's only about them getting paid." A student shared, "the

students start (instigate) stuff to send the kid back to alternative." One expressed, "they should actually be there for the student and when the student gets mad, actually contain the student instead of pushing them away." Another student declared, "traditional schools should be open minded to the fact that the students who return from alternative schools tend to either be better or possibly even remain the same (behavior wise), but most students want to be treated the same and not differently from traditional school students."

In summary, when given the opportunity to openly share their thoughts regarding DAEPs, the respondents offered a variety of responses. A positive environment, teachers who help, caring staff, and different instructional practices were noted as memorable experiences for students. (See Table 2 for full list of responses.)

Phase II

"Staff members provided many views on the purpose of alternative schools. Some assert that alternative schools exist to rehabilitate students who exhibit severe or habitual behaviors that disrupt or threaten the learning process for themselves and others. Others note alternative schools are there for students who are not successful in traditional and larger school settings, whether for behavioral or social/psychological concerns. One staff person stated, "the purpose of alternative schools is to continue to have students in a learning environment as opposed to out of school suspension or expulsion."

The ultimate goal of alternative schools is remediation, as declared by one focus group participant. According to staff, students should be assigned to DAEPs for major discipline infractions, repeated disruptive behaviors, possessing contraband on campus, sexual inappropriateness, violent behavior, and behaviors that threaten the safety of

others. Zero-tolerance policies, which state students should be removed from the traditional campus for "the big three" (drugs, weapons, violence/bodily), also played a role in determining if students should be assigned to an alternative setting. According to some staff respondents, "students should not be assigned to alternative schools for minor infractions such as dress code and cell phone violations, tardiness, minor classroom disruptions (for IDEA identified students), and vaping, even for repeated offenses." One participant added, "there should be an option between removal from traditional campus and alternative school placement in zero-tolerance cases." Another staff member voiced concern about students who are considered a threat to others, stating, "individuals are a threat to the traditional campus, they are probably a threat to the alternative campus as well."

Remaining in a DAEP too long could be detrimental to students. It has been observed by alternative school staff that some students become too comfortable if they remain in alternative settings too long and begin to engage in more negative behaviors, as well as experience a decline in academic performance. One respondent indicated, "those who do not want to be there can cause problems for those who want to be better." Another responded, "some kids seem to give up when they know they have a longer placement and do not attempt to do well. They get discouraged the longer they have to stay. When we see them getting frustrated that they cannot go back, it becomes counterproductive."

Mississippi alternative school policy states that students cannot be assigned alternative setting longer than 365 days, according to one administrator who participated

in the focus group. If it is in the student's best interest to be placed longer, the school (administrators, teachers and other staff familiar with the student) must discuss this with the student's parent prior to day 365. Staff suggest that students return to their home school after 45 days or when alternative placement is no longer effective for that student. According to one teacher participant, "(PGH) only places their students at the PBD campus for 45 days and rarely have any that return.

To encourage students to return to their home school, thereby reducing recidivism, some staff members suggest reminding students of the things alternative schools do not offer such as athletics, extracurricular activities, dances, Career and Technical Education programs, and certain classes required for graduation or college admission (i.e., foreign languages). Several staff members stated that students would be less inclined to stay if the program were more punitive, strict, uncomfortable, or unpleasant. It was noted that including students in developing their transition plan, that include having a support system in place would aid in encouraging students to return their home school.

Placement Policies

Sixty-one percent of staff participants strongly agreed that each school district should have a policy regarding alternative school placement criteria. Sixteen percent expressed that districts should not have criteria for alternative school placement. Most respondents, 43%, did not agree that their district applied zero-tolerance on all discipline problems without question and 42% agreed that zero-tolerance was applied to major discipline matters. Concerning minor discipline matters, 27% disagreed that zero-

tolerance policies were never applied. The majority of staff participants either strongly disagreed (36%) or disagreed (48%) that students were never placed at alternative schools for non-disciplinary reasons which indicates they believe students are placed in DAEPs for reasons other than behavior. Fifty-two percent of the adults who participated agreed or strongly agreed that parents should be able to voluntarily place their children in an alternative setting.

Outcomes of Alternative Placement

Examining reasons for DAEP recidivism necessitates a look at alternative school practices. When asked what happens while students are attending a DAEP, 45% agreed and 13% strongly agreed that students thrive academically while attending alternative schools. Twenty-seven percent strongly disagreed and 60% disagreed with the statement that students' behaviors never change after attending an alternative school. Forty-nine percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that staff at alternative schools are more nurturing and supportive than traditional schools. When it comes to the quality of education at DAEPs, 42% of participating staff members strongly disagree or disagree, whereas 42% agree or strongly agree that students receive the same quality education they would at their home school. (See Table 3).

Some students reported that the alternative school was easier than traditional schools, and that this is why some choose to remain after their assigned period has expired. Staff members state that students may perceive the work is easier because of the instructional practices employed in an alternative setting. One staff responded declares, "with fewer students enrolled, teachers at DAEPs can give more individualized assistance

to students who need it." Also, as reported by staff, "teachers at alternative schools can move at a slower pace than traditional schools which provides more opportunities for reteaching and remediation." One teacher specifically declared, "students may not get the same number of assignments or projects as their counterparts who attend regular school, but the assignments and instruction they do receive are just as rigorous as the regular school."

When analyzing the results from this research, it was observed that recidivism is not inherently a negative phenomenon. While the goal of alternative school is to improve student behavior and performance, evidence shows that some students thrive in an alternative setting and benefit by remaining longer than their originally assigned period.

Themes

Reviewing the data from both students and staff revealed several themes. Students and staff both indicated student-staff relationships and more academic assistance as reasons for students wanting to remain at the alternative school. Lack of support from traditional school staff was also noted as a contributing factor for students being reassigned to the alternative school. Both groups also reported that students purposely misbehave to that the student can be reassigned to the DAEP.

Student-Staff Relationships

When asked why they extend their placement at DAEPs, student responses reflected the idea that teachers at the alternative school were more nurturing and cared about students more. Teacher responses mirror the students' statements. Teachers

attributed the ability to build closer relationships with students to the fact that alternative schools have smaller class sizes which allows them to get to know their students better.

One student noted, “they are very respectful. They teach you very well.” Another commented, “the alternative school is a good school. All the teachers care about you, and everyone helps you achieve what you want to achieve.” An additional student stated, “I have been here for over two years and in comparison, to the high school, it is tenfold better. The teachers seem to actually care about how you feel and are doing, academically and personally. I would encourage anyone who may have focus issues, attention dependency, or maybe you just struggle to keep up and need more personalized help One child recorded, “for me this school is better because it has smaller classes, and because I can trust the teachers here. I feel like here there are people that actually care about me, whereas at the high school I know my teachers didn’t care.”

Some staff offered perspectives that contribute to the difference in staff-student relationships at DAEPs. “Having time to get to know students and connecting with them to intervene when you see behavior developing,” reports on teacher. Another identifies “having a relationship with kids, bond, get to know (them) on a deeper level.” It was also proclaimed that “by its nature alternative schools lends itself to a family that students need.” (It is) “not as difficult to focus on student needs at alternative school,” declares another staff member.

Academic Assistance and Behavioral Support

Sixty-two percent of student participants reported that DAEP staff implements strategies to help them behave. Both sets of respondents asserted that, because of smaller

class sizes, teachers have more opportunities to give students individualized attention and more remediation when it is needed.

Students' thoughts on getting additional assistance at the alternative school include: the alternative school is more patient and takes more time to go over things as many times as needed until you understand. They teach differently and are more involved with their student than the regular school; smaller classes with less people and easier to learn; they educate us individually and they have fun tasks that make the subjects look fun; they give more hands-on learning; they give you more time if needed and they actually help you and explain the work to you if you don't understand it unlike regular school.

Regarding giving students additional support and assistance, staff reported that lower student-teacher ratio (at alternative school) benefits a lot of students. The smaller population "allows counseling/redirecting" when misbehavior occurs. Staff also noted, "alternative schools have more structure." Another staff person stated, "alternative school is better able/more likely to make accommodations for all students not just (special ed.) students.

Lack of Support at Traditional School

Both groups of participants highlighted the importance of support from traditional school staff in students' success or failure upon returning from alternative schools. It was specifically pointed out that students are targeted once they return to their home schools. Reportedly, they are still labeled as bad kids or judged by their previous behavior. One student shared, "teachers and students (need) to stop treating us like juvenile delinquents

and to stop putting a target on our back." Another student expressed, "traditional schools should be open minded to the fact that the students who return from alternative schools tend to be better." Another suggested, "staff at the home school (should) not criticize and dictate their actions based off of their (students') origins." One student replied, "schools need to realize just because you got in trouble one time doesn't mean you're a bad kid." More than half of student respondents expressed (52% agreed or% strongly agreed) that the adults at the regular school treat them differently after returning from alternative school.

Staff members concur with student thoughts on how students should be treated and what needs to happen when students return to their home school. One staff member asserted, "(traditional schools) should be more welcoming – the welcome is not warm enough. Staff have negative feelings toward returning students; returning school should celebrate success." Another educator declared "(staff) should expect success not trouble". Respondents emphasized "the need for a transition plan or plan of care should being developed for students who are returning to the traditional campus, as well as more collaboration between the alternative school and the home school."

Students and staff stressed the importance of giving returning students time to adapt to their new settings. Both groups also expressed that "there should be someone on staff at the traditional school who is responsible for helping students successfully transition back and monitor their progress."

Intentional Misbehavior

Because students experience success – academically, behaviorally, or both – while attending DAEPs, some respondents say they may want to stay longer or return after the initial placement ends. Over one-third of students surveyed (9% agree and 26% strongly agree) that they misbehave at their home school so they can be sent back to the alternative school. In focus group discussions, teachers reported witnessing student behavior escalate because they want to be sent back to the alternative school.

Summary

Typically thought to be punitive, placement at a DAEP can, in fact, benefit students. One teacher asserted, "recidivism is not always a bad thing. It happens for many reasons. The alternative school's typical clients have to learn from their mistakes". While a negative behavior may have necessitated the placement, attending alternative school has been a positive experience for some students. Whether is smaller class sizes, less distractions, more support from school staff, a nurturing environment, or a combination of all these things, alternative education was beneficial to the student. Often students remain longer than their initial placement because either they, their parents, or school staff recognize that setting is best for the student.

Although there can be negative repercussions to remaining in an alternative placement too long, that is not the absolute truth. As one administrator emphasized, "If people feel recidivism is bad, they don't have a clue about alternative schools and what they provide for the vast majority of students."

Table 1 *Demographics*

Student Gender	N	%
Female	23	63.5
Male	40	36.5
Total	63	100
Student Ethnicity		
Asian	1	1.6
Black	20	31.8
Hispanic/Latino	3	4.8
Native American	3	4.8
White	31	49.2
Other/Not Specified	5	7.9
Total	63	100
Student Grade		
7th	6	9.5
8th	17	27
9th	13	20.7
10th	11	17.5
11th	7	11.1
12th	9	14.3
Total	63	100
Staff Gender		
Female	28	84.4
Male	5	15.6
Total	33	100
Staff Position		
Paraprofessional	6	18.8
Teacher	26	68.8
Principal	3	9.4
Central Office Administrator	1	3
Total	33	100
Staff Years of Experience		
0-5 years	13	40.6
6-10 years	4	12.1
11-15 years	5	15.6
16-20 years	6	18.8
21-25 years	5	15.6
Total	33	100

Table 2 *Open Ended Responses*

Open ended responses about what alternative schools do differently

1.	The alternative school makes sure you understand what your learning and they don't rush you into doing things.
2.	They actually interact with you and help you when you need help. The classrooms are smaller and easier to focus in.
3.	they explain work better and we have shorter classes
4.	I dont know
5.	teachers are better
6.	they let students out at 2:00 rather than 3:00
7.	better help
8.	They let us out earlier so I have a better time to get ready for work
9.	our school helps us
10.	No break, No phones, Smaller classes, and Free Dress Days due to your behavior sheets
11.	They give more hands on learning .
12.	Take time to get to actually get to know the students, how they learn, etc.
13.	they help give you more time if needed and they actually help you and explain the work to you if you don't understand it unlike regular school
14.	teachers, the way they act, the rules its just so much better.
15.	In alternative school the teachers actually teach. I was out of school for the first month because i had covid. When i came to school after having covid none of my teachers tried to help me get caught up or anything of the sort. They all handed me a stack of papers, then proceeded to tell me that they weren't going to help me At alternative the teachers actually care how im doing or how im feeling. If the teachers here see that im not doing good than they take the time out of their day to make sure im okay.
16.	One on one with students after school.
17.	You can walk freely around your classroom. Very open and helpful towards the students.
18.	They educate us individually, and they have fun tasks and make the subjects looks fun. There are also good kids here and nice ones, but some have their bad sides. This school is just a 10/10 in general and most people would agree with me.
19.	We are watched more carefully, and more help is provided.
20.	helps students one on one with their work
21.	the alternative is more fun and easier for you to comprehend.
22.	The alternative gives me the help that i need more than a traditional school
23.	yes
24.	i dont really know at all besides its just better to me
25.	Alternative school will understand you. Traditional schools jump straight to the point instead of listening.
26.	They dont play you barely get a chance
27.	they let you have free dress when you act good
28.	have phone
29.	help more
30.	they threaten us

Table 2 Continued

31.	they treat you like family
32.	The alternative school helps u with your work and gives you work on your level.
33.	smaller classes with less people and easier to learn
34.	Nothing
35.	they give us snacks and they make us focus better
36.	they help u more than usual
37.	you can get one on one help with tha teacher, its better then reguler schools!
38.	they talk to us like people instead of kids
39.	More direct teaching, coupled with an ability to help students who may need one-on-one help.
40.	Ours is just as bad.
41.	give more help
42.	They get to know and understand their students
43.	classes are smaller and have less work
44.	help u in school
45.	Less students, more restrictions, and easy work
46.	its more one on one help
47.	They do behavior sheets, and they have a metal detector .
48.	I can't speak for other alternative schools but mine focuses on the students more, so its more bearable, if you're respectful and try hard you get rewards.
49.	A lot less people better food better teachers.
50.	They actually help
51.	to make school better
52.	one on one help.
53.	idk
54.	Alternative schools aren't that much different than traditional schools but alternative school is more rewarding when it comes to good behaviors and good grades.
55.	nothing i personally don't see alternative school as a punishment more than a reward
56.	Less people
57.	teaching the kids
58.	smaller classes
59.	lets you wear anything
60.	They are not has mentally challenging as the regular teachers.
61.	they take away all your freedom

Table 3 *Staff attitudes toward DAEP policies and practices*

	Question	Strongly Disagree %	N	Disagree %	N	Neither Agree Nor Disagree %	N	Agree %	N	Strongly Agree %	N	Total
1.	Each school district should have a policy regarding criteria for alternative school placement for disciplinary reasons.	15.15%	5	6.06%	2	0.00%	0	15.15%	5	63.64%	21	33
2.	My district always applies "zero tolerance" on all discipline matters without question	21.88%	7	40.63%	13	18.75%	6	15.63%	5	3.13%	1	32
3.	My district applies "zero tolerance" major discipline matters only	6.06%	2	21.21%	7	21.21%	7	39.39%	13	12.12%	4	33
4.	My district never applies "zero tolerance" minor discipline matters	18.75%	6	25.00%	8	31.25%	10	21.88%	7	3.13%	1	32

Table 3 Continued

5.	Students are never placed at alternative school for non-disciplinary reasons	36.36%	12	45.45%	15	6.06%	2	12.12%	4	0.00%	0	33
6.	Parents should be able to voluntarily place their children at the alternative school, regardless of the reason	9.09%	3	9.09%	3	30.30%	10	36.36%	12	15.15%	5	33
7.	Students thrive academically while they're at the alternative school	3.03%	1	15.15%	5	24.24%	8	45.45%	15	12.12%	4	33
8.	Students' behavior never improves after they attend alternative school	28.13%	9	59.38%	19	6.25%	2	6.25%	2	0.00%	0	32
9.	Alternative school staff is always more nurturing and supportive that traditional school staff	0.00%	0	24.24%	8	27.27%	9	36.36%	12	12.12%	4	33
10.	Students receive the same quality education at the alternative school as they would at their home campus	9.09%	3	36.36%	12	15.15%	5	30.30%	10	9.09%	3	33

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate why some students attend disciplinary alternative education programs longer than their original placement, as well as why some students are placed in alternative settings repeatedly. This research sought to understand what factors students and staff may believe contribute to repeated and prolonged placement at discipline alternative education programs. Students completed a 22-question questionnaire that answered questions regarding what leads to DAEP placement, what happens at alternative schools, what happens after leaving alternative school, and why some students choose to stay or return to DAEPs. Staff completed a ten-item questionnaire addressing district policies for alternative school placement, environment at DAEPs, and quality of education at DAEPs. Staff also participated in focus group discussions that explored questions concerning placement policies, quality of DAEP education, and post-alternative school student needs.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study confirmed four themes from the experiences of students, paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators in a rural county in a southern state: (a) student-staff relationships; (b) more assistance; (c) lack of support; and (d) intentional misbehavior.

Research Question 1

Research question one asked "what factors do students, teachers and administrators report contribute to students being repeatedly sent to disciplinary alternative education programs?" The following themes resulted from research question

one: student-staff relationships, lack of support, and intentional misbehavior. This question revealed that students perceived teachers and administrators targeted them once they returned to the traditional school and did not expect to perform better than they did prior to DAEP placement. Staff also reported that students are sometimes negatively labeled after returning from an alternative school and held to a stricter standard for behavior. Students and staff also indicated that the students need a support system once they return to the traditional school, but the school does not always provide one. Additionally, both groups expressed that sometimes, because their needs are not being met, students purposely misbehave at their home school so that they can return to the DAEP.

Research Question 2

Research question two asked, "according to students, teachers, and administrators, what factors contribute to students remaining at disciplinary alternative education programs longer than their originally assigned time-period?" The following themes emerged from research question two: staff-student relationships and more assistance. Students noted that staff at alternative schools build relationships with students more than at traditional schools. Connecting to students on a non-academic, nurturing level led to students' improved behavior and academic performance. Staff discussion groups disclosed that, because there is a smaller student population, teachers can get to know students on a deeper level and bond with them. By knowing the students better, staff are more likely to notice when things may not be right with the student and intervene to offer assistance. Students and staff suggested students receive additional assistance with

instruction and assignments. Students say that teachers repeat lessons and allow them to work at a slower pace when necessary. Staff say that they are able to provide remediation and more individualized attention to students because of smaller class sizes and more flexible planning.

Research Question 3

Research question three investigated "what changes do students, teachers, and administrators say need to be made, in policy and practice, that would reduce the recidivism rate for secondary disciplinary alternative education students"? Responses to this question revealed three themes: student-staff relationships, more assistance, and lack of support. Students would like to see traditional schools provide academic support, be more understanding, and not hold students' past mistakes against them. Students need assistance, academically and socially, when students first return to their home school, and it is often not provided. Having someone on staff who can provide student support, as discussed in the staff discussion groups, could reduce the likelihood that students would return to an alternative setting, voluntarily or involuntarily. Knowing that someone at the regular school can support them and has positive expectations for them helps students perform better and stay out of trouble.

Results Related to Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems explores how children's environments impact the individual as a whole. Inherent in their environment are relationships. Children and students respond, typically in kind, to their environment. Negative surroundings and relationships tend to negatively impact youth, whereas positive

environments usually produce positive influences. The Institute of Medicine (2011) cited Gorman-Smith findings that living in a disadvantaged neighborhood may be associated with negative outcomes for youth including delinquency, violence, substance use, lower academic achievement, problems with social competence, and mental health problems.

Student and staff responses to research questions demonstrate the validity of this framework. When students enter an educational environment where they feel nurtured and supported, they thrive. When they are in an environment critical and judgmental, students underperform academically and engage in more negative behaviors. Students in this study repeatedly emphasized that they performed better because of how the teachers interacted with them on a more personal level and how teachers provided additional academic support when they knew students needed. Several students proclaimed that they did not feel supported at their home (traditional) school and struggled academically and behaviorally as a result. This reinforces Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory. Staff members from different types of schools also shared that the culture and environment of the campus impacted student behavior and academic performance, thus supporting Bronfenbrenner's theory as well. Staff members concurred that "because students feel they have a target on their back and do not feel supported they are more likely to struggle in class and with appropriate school behavior."

Limitations

The current study was limited to sixty-two students, thirty-two staff members, and two school districts in a rural county in a southern state. Though student and staff participants represent varied backgrounds, there are similarities that limit the scope of

this study. Both school districts share similar demographics of student and offer the same type of alternative education program, which may not be likely to result in diverse experiences and differences in perceptions.

Despite school districts having some level of autonomy, because the school districts are in the same state, many of their policies are reflective of state policies and mandates and mimic each other. Other districts and states have alternative schools that address different needs and have different placement policies. Including other states in the research could reveal not only what recidivism looks like in these districts, but what they are doing to address it.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to school closures as the result of COVID-19, there was a very limited number of schools who agreed to participate in this study to. Only one county in one state was included in this study. More research should be conducted in other counties and states to gain insight into perspectives regarding alternative school recidivism. Alternative school policies and practices vary from state to state, as well as district to district within states, and further investigation could yield different results.

It would be worthwhile for traditional schools and district leaders to review policies and practices regarding alternative school placement, particularly for students who have had previous placements. As reported by both students and staff, former alternative school students are not always given a new beginning or support once they return from DAEPs.

Additionally, because zero-tolerance policies have been scrutinized, and even eliminated, in some areas, districts should evaluate the impact of these policies on alternative school recidivism. In 2015, Illinois governor Bruce Rauner signed Senate bill 100 which restricted the use of zero-tolerance disciplinary practices in public schools (Moreno and Scaletta, 2018). The idea behind the reform was to reduce exclusionary disciplinary actions and provide more supports for students.

Implications for Practice

When analyzing the results from the research, it was observed that recidivism is not inherently a negative phenomenon. While the goal of alternative school is to improve student behavior and performance, evidence shows that some students thrive in an alternative setting and benefit by remaining longer than their originally assigned period. Traditional schools could implement some of the practices used at DAEPs to reduce the amount and frequency of students being sent to alternati4ve schools.

Academic and Behavioral Support

One of the practices that was noted multiple times during this research was the amount of support that students receive in alternative school setting. When secondary school students are identified as “at-risk” because of their behaviors, schools could offer counseling or mentoring in an effort to reduce negative behavior and avoid excluding the student from school. Having someone on staff that the student can go to when they need support was also recommended as a tool that traditional schools could use to support these students.

Student and staff participants also indicated that students need academic support when returning to their home school. Traditional schools should offer tutoring and academic support so that students who are transitioning back are not left behind.

Discipline

Alternative school placement is beneficial students who need it. It should, however, be the last line of defense, rather than the first choice. Students who are a threat to themselves, others, and the educational process should be removed from traditional campuses, as one respondent stated. Schools and districts must provide other options for dealing with minor behavioral concerns before removing students from traditional campuses.

Placement

There may be some instances when removal or exclusion is in the best interest of the student and/or the school district. In such cases, placement durations should not be arbitrarily assigned, nor should there be a predetermined length of assignment based on the behavior. Several staff respondents pointed out that prolonged placement in DAEPs can be detrimental to some students. Therefore, no student should be assigned prolonged placements. One respondent recommended quarterly reviews of students' progress to assess students' progress and reconsider placement durations. Doing so has the potential to ensure student success academically and behaviorally.

Though viewed by many as a punitive measure, placement in disciplinary alternative education problems can be beneficial students. Relationships between staff and students, academic and behavior support have been identified as resources that set

DAEPs apart from traditional school regarding student success. Some students need more time than others to thrive from the supports provided while others need less. Placement duration, as well as what supports students receive while in the program, should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

APPENDIX A – Instruments

Student Demographics

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON DISCIPLINARY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL RECIDIVISM

Gender
___Male ___Female

Race

___Asian ___Black ___Hispanic/Latino ___Native American __White

___Other

Location/State

___ AL ___ FL ___ GA ___ MS ___ NC ___ SC

Age

___11 ___12 ___13 ___14 ___15 ___16 ___17 ___18+

Current Grade

___ 6 ___ 7 ___ 8 ___ 9 ___ 10 ___ 11 ___ 12

I have been assigned to the alternative setting for

___1 week ___2 weeks ___9 weeks ___ 18 weeks ___27 weeks ___36 weeks

I have been at alternative setting for

____0-3 months ___3-6 months ___6-9 months ___9-12 months ___12+months

I have been assigned to alternative setting

___ this is my first time ___ I have been more than once

I live with

___ myself ___ my parents ___other relatives ___foster/group home

My alternative school setting is

___ At a different location ___ At my school

The students at my alternative setting come from

___ Only my school ___Other schools in my city

strongly disagree disagree neither agree nor disagree agree strongly agree

1. I like alternative placement better than my regular school	
2. I like to be sent back to the alternative setting because the work is easier.	
3. I act better after I go to alternative setting	
4. I want to decide when I go back to my regular school	
5. It's easy for me to make friends when I go to my regular school	
6. The kids at regular school treat kids who have been to an alternative placement bad	
7. I am good at my regular school so I don't get sent back to alternative	
8. I misbehave at my regular school so I can go back to an alternative placement	
9. I can control my behavior but choose not to	
10. Alternative setting doesn't have the same rules as regular school	
11. Alternative setting does things to help me behave	
12. Regular schools do things to help me behave	

13. The alternative setting teaches me how to behave at regular school	
14. The adults at my regular school treat me different after I come back from alternative setting	
15. Adults from my regular school help me more if they know I went to alternative setting	
16. I should choose when I go back to my regular school	
17. My principal should decide if I go back to regular school	
18. Adults from both schools should decide when I go back to regular school	
19. Regular schools should have a teacher to help alternative kids when they go back	
20. I should graduate from alternative setting if I want to	

Choose the answers that best describe you

1. A student should be sent to an alternative school for
   A. Drugs
   B. Violence
   C. Repeated classroom disruption
   D. Weapons
   E. Too many office referrals

2. I was sent back to an alternative school for
   A. Drugs
   B. Repeated classroom disruption
   C. The sane thing I did before
   D. Violence
   E. When I asked
   F. Never

3. I have stayed at alternative school longer because
   A. I had a fight
   B. I like it here
   C. My behavior is not better
   D. My grades are better

4. I want to go back to my regular school
   A. Full time
   B. Part time
   C. Not at all

5. I don't want to go back because
   A. Alternative school helps me more
   B. My grades are better
   C. I prefer a smaller setting
   D. Other _____

6. My alternative school offers
   A. Counseling
   B. Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)
   C. Restorative Justice
   D. Tutoring
   E. All of the above

Use the space below to answer these questions

1. What do alternative schools do differently than traditional schools to make school better?

2. What should traditional schools do to help students who are returning from alternative schools?

Please write anything else you want us to know about alternative schools.

Focus Group Staff Demographics

Demographics

Current Position

Paraprofessional ___Classroom Teacher ___ Asst Principal___ Principal ___ Central Off ___

Years in current position

0-5 years ___ 6-10 years ___ 11-15 years ___ 16-20 years ___ 21-25years ___ 30+ years __

Grade level(s) currently working with

6^{th} ___ 7^{th} ___ 8^{th} ___ 9^{th} ___ 10^{th}___ 11^{th}___ 12^{th} ___

Race

African American ___ Caucasian ___ Hispanic ___ Native American ___ Other ___ Prefer not to say ____

Gender: Female ___ Male ___ Non-Binary ___ Prefer not to respond ___

Age: 21-25 ___ 26-30 ___ 31-35___ 36-40___ 41-45___ 46-50___ 51-55___ 56+___

Please indicate your position on each statement below by marking the appropriate column

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Each school district should have a policy regarding criteria for alternative school placement for disciplinary reasons.					
My district always applies "zero tolerance" on all discipline matters without question					
My district applies "zero tolerance" major discipline matters only					
My district never applies "zero tolerance" minor discipline matters					
Students are never placed at alternative schools for non-disciplinary reasons					
Parents should be able to voluntarily place their children at the alternative school, regardless of the reason					
Students thrive academically while they're at the alternative school					
Students' behavior never improves after they attend alternative school					
Alternative school staff is always more nurturing and					

supportive that traditional school staff					
Students receive the same quality education at the alternative school as they would at their home campus					

Open ended responses (for focus group discussions)

Please answer the questions below openly and honestly as these responses will not be associated with you in any way.

What is the purpose of alternative schools?

What behaviors warrant alternative school placement?

What behaviors do not warrant alternative school placement?

What should be the longest period of time a student is placed in an alternative setting for disciplinary reasons?

What do alternative schools do differently than traditional schools?

How are programs like Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), Restorative Justice, and counseling beneficial to schools?

Feedback from students indicates that they feel that alternative school is easier than traditional school. What is your opinion about this observation?

Why do students (or parents) choose to extend their alternative school placement)?

What can alternative schools do to make them want to return to their home school)?

What supports should students receive once they have returned to their home/traditional school?

What should happen after students leave alternative school?

Do you have any thoughts or concerns about alternative schools that have not already been addressed in this conversation?

APPENDIX B –IRB Approval Letter

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5125 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6576 | USM.EDU/ORI

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and 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 involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-21-14
PROJECT TITLE: Secondary School Administrators', Teachers, and Students' Perspectives on Reducing Recidivism in Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education, Educational Research and Admin
RESEARCHER(S): Chrissell Rhone, Kyna Shelley

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: August 16, 2021

Donald Sacco Jr.

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

REFERENCES

Abdel-Salam, S. (2013). Self-control as a predictor of relapse and recidivism in adolescent therapeutic community treatment. *Substance Use & Misuse, 48.* 157-172.

Allman, K.L. & Slate, J.R. (2011). School discipline in public education: A brief review of current practices. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation 6*(2).

Anzalone, J. A. (2015) Educators' perspective on secondary alternative placement (dissertation). Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Aron, L. Y. (2003). *Towards a typology of alternative education programs: A compilation of elements from the literature.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Atkins, T., & Bartuska, J. (2010). Considerations for the placement of youth with EBD in alternative education programs. *Beyond Behavior*, *19*(2), 14-20.

Avery, K. (2016). Factors that cause repeated referral to the disciplinary alternative education program. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from proquest.com. 10248674

Balkin, R.S., Miller, J., Ricard, R.J., Garcia, R., & Lancaster, C. (2011). Assessing factors in adolescent adjustment as precursors to recidivism in court-referred youth. *Measurement in Counseling and Development, 44*(2), 52-59.

Basque, C., Toupin, J., & Cote, G. (2012). Predicting recidivism in adolescents with behavior problems using PCL-SV. *International Journey of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 57*(9), 1140-1157.

Booker, K. & Mitchell, A. (2011). Patterns in recidivism and discretionary placement in disciplinary alternative education: The impact of gender, ethnicity, age, and special education status. *Education and Treatment of Children, 34*(2), 193-208.

Boss, S. (1998) Learning from the margins: The lessons of alternative schools. *Northwest Education, 3(4),* 2-11.

Burkett, L.E. (2012). Administrators' perceptions of alternative school characteristics and their relationship with recidivism (dissertation). The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Cable, K. E., Plucker, J.A., & Spradlin, T.E. (2009). Alternative schools: What's in a name? *Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, 7*(4), 1-11.

Carver, P. R., Lewis, L., & Tice, P. (2010). *Alternative schools and programs for public school students at risk of educational failure: 2007-08* (NCES 2010-026). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Clark, H.G., Mathur, S. R., & Helding, B. (2011). Transition services for juvenile detainees with disabilities: Findings on recidivism. *Education and Treatment of Children, 34*(4), 511-529.

Crime and Justice Institute. https://www.doc.ks.gov/juvenile-services/committee/documentation/6-2017/Recidivism/view. Accessed 3 March 2019.

Davis, D.P. (2017). Change in placement: Transitioning between schools (dissertation). Capella University, Minneapolis, MN.

D'Angelo, F. & Zemanick, R. (2009). The Twilight Academy: An alternative education program that works. *Preventing School Failure, 53*(4), 211-218.

Dudovskiy, J. (2018). *The Ultimate Guide to Writing a Dissertation in Business Studies: A Step-by-Step Assistance.* January 2018 edition. Retrieved from https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/qualitative-research/focus-group/

Edgar-Smith, S., & Palmer, R.B. (2015). Building supportive school environments for alternative education youth. *Preventing School Failure, 59*(3), 134-141.

Evans, Forney, & Guida-DiBrito (1998). *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice.* Jossey: Bass: San Fransisco, CA, 111-114.

Farkas, M.S., Simonsen, B., Migdole, S., Donovan, M.E., Clemens, K., and Cicchese, V. (2012). Schoolwide positive behavior support in an alternative school setting: An evaluation of fidelity, outcomes, and social validity of tier 1 implementation. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 20*(4), 275-288.

Fitzsimons-Hughes, A., Baker, P., Criste, A., Huffty, J., Link, C.P., Roberts, M. et al. (2006). *Effective practices in meeting the needs of students with emotional and behavior disorders in alternative settings.* Reston, VA. Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.

Flower, A., McDaniel, S.C., & Jolivette, K. (2011). A literature review of research quality and effective practices in alternative education settings. *Education and Treatment of Children, 34*(4).

Foley, R.M., & Pang, L. (2006). Alternative education programs: Program and student characteristics. *The University of North Carolina Press, 89*(3), 10-21.

Franklin, C., Streeter, C.L., Kim, J.S., & Tripodi, S.J. (2007). The effectiveness of a solution-focused, public alternative school for dropout prevention and retrieval. *Children & Schools, 39*(3) 133-144).

Fresques, H., Vogell, H., & Pierce, O. (2017). Methodology: How we analyzed alternative school data. https://www.propublica.org/article/alternative-schools-methodology

Fuller, C. G., & Sabatino, D.A. (1996). Who attends alternative schools? *The High School Journal, 79,* 292-297.

Gable, R.A., Bullock, L.M., & Evans, W. H. (2006). Changing Perspectives on alternative schooling for children and adolescents with challenging behavior. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(1), 5-9.

Gilson, T. (2006). Alternative high schools. What types of programs lead to the greatest level of effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies. 6*(1), 48-66.

Glass, R. (1995). Alternatives that help kids succeed. *The Educational Digest,* 60(5).

Gurantz, O. 2010. *The Academic Progress of Alternative High School Students Transitioning into Comprehensive High Schools*. Stanford, CA: The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities.

Hafen, C.A., Ruzek, E.A., Gregory, A., Allen, J.P., & Mikami, A.Y. (2015). Focusing on teacher-student interactions eliminates the negative impact of students' disruptive behavior on teacher perceptions. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 39*(5), 426-431.

Heilburn, A., Cornell, D., & Lovegrove, P. (2015). Principal attitudes regarding zero tolerance and racial disparities in school suspensions. *Psychology in the Schools, 52*(5), 489-499.

Heitzeg, N.A. (2009). Criminalizing Education: Zero tolerance policies, police in the hallways and the school to prison pipeline. *Forum on Public Policy 2009*(2), 1-21.

Herndon, J.S. & Benbenutty, H. (2014). In school and social factors influencing learning among students enrolled in a disciplinary alternative school. *Learning and Individual Differences, 35,* 49-55.

Hoeve, M., McReynolds, L.S., & Wasserman, G.A. (2011). The influence of adolescent psychiatric disorder on young adult recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 40*(3), 289-301.

Hosley, N. S. (2003). Survey and analysis of alternative education programs. Harrisburg, PA: Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

Institute of Medicine (US) and National Research Council (US) Committee on the Science of Adolescence. The Science of Adolescent Risk-Taking: Workshop Report. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2011. 5, The Influence of Environment.

Izumi, M., Shen, J., & Xia, J. (2015). Determinants of graduation rate of public alternative schools. *Education and Urban Society, 47*(3), 307-327.

Jolivette, K., Swoszowski, N. C., Josephs, N. L., McDaniel, S. C., Ennis, R. P. (2012). District-wide PBIS team questions related to using the PBIS framework to transition students with challenging behaviors from an alternative school to a

neighborhood school. *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals,* 45-64.

Katsiyannis, A, Ryan, J.B., Zhang, D. & Spann, A. (2008). Juvenile delinquency and recidivism: The impact of academic achievement. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 24*(2), 177-196.

Koetke, C. (1999). One size doesn't fit all. In *Tech-Nos Quarterly.* Bloomington, IN: Agency for Instructional Technology

Kennedy, B. L., Acosta, M. M., & Soutullo, O. (2017). Counternarratives of students' experiences returning to comprehensive schools from an involuntary disciplinary alternative school. *Race and Ethnicity Education.* DOI 10.1080/13613324.2017.1376634

Kim, J. H. & Taylor, K. A. (2008). Rethinking alternative education to break the cycle of educational inequality and inequity. *The Journal of Educational Research, 101*(4), 207-219.

Lehr, C. A. (2004). Alternative schools and students with disabilities: Identifying and understanding the issues (Information Brief, 3). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute of Community Integration

Lehr, C. A., Tran, C., & Ysseldyke, J. (2009). Alternative schools: A synthesis of state-level policy and research. *Remedial and Special Education, 30,* 19-32.

McNulty, C.P. & Roseboro, D. L. (2009). "I'm not really *that* bad": Alternative school students, stigma, and identity politics. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 42*(4), 412-427.

McReynolds, L. S., Schwalbe, C.S., & Wasserman, G.A. (2010). The contribution of psychiatric disorder to juvenile recidivism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 37*(2), 204-216.

Mills, P.D. (2013). Evaluation of schools in South Carolina: A companion dissertation. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from proquest.com. 3609065.

Mongan, P. & Walker, R. (2012). "The Road to hell is paved with good intentions": A historical, theoretical, and legal analysis of zero-tolerance weapons policies and American schools. *Preventing School Failure, 56*(4), 232-240.

Moreno, G., & Scaletta, M. (2018). Moving away from zero tolerance policies: Examination of Illinois educator preparedness in addressing student behavior. *International Journal of Education, 10(2),* 93-110.

Morley, R. E. (1991). Alternative education. Dropout prevention research reports. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center.

Morrison, G. M., Anthony, S., Storino, M. H., Cheng, J. F., Furlong, M. F., & Morrison, R. L. (2001). School expulsion as a process and an event: Before and after effects on children at risk for school discipline. *New Directions for Youth Development, 92,* 45-71.

Morrissette, P. J. (2011). Exploring student experiences within the alternative high school context. *Canadian Journal of Education, 34*(2), 169-188.

Mottaz, C. (2002). *Breaking the cycle of failure: How to build and maintain quality alternative schools*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press.

Obleton, E.V., Reames, E.H., & Kochan, F.K. (2012). Principals' perceptions of the relationship between school efficiency factors and student success in alternative schools. *Southern Journal of Educational Administration, 1*(1), 3-18.

O'Brien, E. R. & Curry, J.R. (2009). Systemic interventions with alternative school students: Engaging the omega generation. *Journal of School Counseling 7*(24), 1-32.

Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement, Alternative Education, GED and Counseling. (2010). Mississippi Department of Education *Alternative Education Handbook.* Jackson, MS: Author.

Osher, D., Amos, L.B., Gonsoulin, S (2012). Successfully transition youth who delinquent between institutions and alternative and community schools. *American Institutes for Research.*

Owens, L. & Konkol, L. (2004). Transitioning from alternative to traditional schools: A student perspective. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 13*(3), 173-176.

Paquette, Dede & Ryan, John. (2011). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Perry, Randolph, P.L. (2016). Disciplinary alternative schools and recidivism: an exploratory study of recidivism in a disciplinary alternative middle school in a large urban district (dissertation). Spalding University, Louisville, Kentucky.

Perzigian, A. (2018). Social competence in Urban alternative schools. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education, 15*(11),

Policy Research: Disciplinary Alternative Education Program Practices. (2007). Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency.

Powell, N.W., & Marshall, A. (2011). The relationship factor: Making or breaking successful transitions for youth at risk. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 20*(2), 13-16.

Poyrazli, S., Ferrer-Werder, L., Meister, D. G., Forthun, L., Coatsworth, D., & Grahame, K. M. (2008). Academic achievement, employment, age, and gender and students' experience of alternative school. *Adolescence, 43,* 547–556.

Public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure 2000-2001(Rep.). (2002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Rumberger, R.W. (2004). What can be done to prevent and assist school dropouts? In P. Allen-Meares & M. W. Fraser (Eds.), *Intervention with Children and Adolescents: An Interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 311-334). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Skiba, R., Eckes, S. & Brown, K. (2010). African American disproportionality in school discipline: The divide between best evidence and legal remedy. *New York Law School Review, 54* 1072-1112.

Skiba, R., Horner, R., Chung, C., Rausch, M., May, S. & Tobin, T. (2011). Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review, 40,* 85-107.

Skiba, R., Reynolds, C. R., Graham, S., Sheras, P., Conoley, J. C., & Garcia Vazquez, E. (2006). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. A Report by the American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, Washington, DC.

Tajalli, H. & Garba, H.A. (2014). Discipline or prejudice? Overrepresentation of minority students in disciplinary alternative education programs. *Urban Review, 46,* 622-631.

Tissington, L. D. (2006). History: Our hope for the future. Preventing School Failure, 51(1), 19-25. doi:10.3200/PSFL.51.1.19-25

Tefera, A., Siegel-Hawley, G. & Levy, R. (2017). Why do racial disparities in school discipline exist? The role of policies, processes, people, and places. scholarscompass.vcu.edu

Teske, S.C., Huff, B. & Graves, C. (2013). Collaborative role of courts in promoting outcomes for students: The relationship between arrests, graduation rates, and school safety. *Family Court Review, 51*(3), 418-426.

Thomas, J. & Dyment, J. (2019). The role of flexible learning programs in enabling behavioural engagement. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.* DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2019.1633740

U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2002). *Characteristics of the 100 largest elementary and secondary school districts in the United States: 2000-2001*(NCES 2002.351). Washington, DC: Author

Vanderhaar, J. E., Petrosko J. M., & Muñoz, M. A. (2013). "Reconsidering the Alternatives: The Relationship between Suspension, Disciplinary Alternative School Placement, Subsequent Juvenile Detention, and the Salience of Race." Paper presented at the National Conference on Race and Gender Disparities in Discipline, Washington, DC, April 5.

Vaught, Sabrina E. 2011. “Juvenile Prison Schooling and Reentry: Disciplining Young Men of Color.” In *Juvenile Justice: Advancing Research, Policy, and Practice*, edited by F. Francine, T. Sherman, and Francine H. Jacobs, 310–330. New York:Wiley & Sons, Inc. 10.1002/9781118093375

Washburn-Moses, L. (2011). An investigation of alternative schools in one state: Implications for students with disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education, 44*(4), 247-255.

Watson, S.L. (2011). Somebody’s gotta fight for them: A disadvantaged and marginalized alternative school’s learner-centered culture of learning. *Urban Education, 46*(6), 1496-1525.

Wilkerson, K. L., Afacan, K., Perzigian, A., Justin, W., & Lequia, J. (2016). Behavior-focused alternative schools: Impact on student outcomes. *Behavioral Disorders, 41*(2), 81-94.

Wilkerson, K. L., Afacan, K., Yan, M., Justin, W., & Datar, S. D. (2016). Academic remediation-focused alternative schools: Impact on student outcomes. *Remedial and Special Education, 37*(2), 67-77.

Wolf, E.M. & Wolf, D.A. (2008). Mixed results in transition planning program for alternative school students. *Evaluation Review, 32*(2), 187