STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION

Sarah Alice Duggan

University of Southern Mississippi

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by

Sarah Alice Duggan

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2007
The University of Southern Mississippi

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Sarah Alice Duggan

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ABSTRACT

STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION

by Sarah Alice Duggan

December 2007

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions held by students in two alternative school settings in urban settings in Mississippi and in two alternative school settings’ in urban settings in Louisiana. The investigator focused on students’ perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. A study of students’ attitudes and opinions about what makes them feel successful in an alternative school should contribute significantly to the field of educating and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted in this research project to evaluate how well student-centered school cultural measures predicted perceived school effectiveness. The research question was stated as follows: Are alternative school student perceptions of school culture predictive of their perceptions of school effectiveness? The hypothesis was stated as follows: There is a statistically significant relationship between students’ perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perceptions of school effectiveness among the four alternative schools represented in this study. The target population chosen as the study participants included all students in two alternative schools in Mississippi and two alternative schools in Louisiana.

The variables chosen for this study were supported by the literature describing effective alternative schools. Each item was analyzed for accuracy. The data collected
clearly showed a relationship between student perceptions of culture and student perceptions of school effectiveness. School culture factors that make a difference are safety, school size, expanded teacher role, positive relationships, academic innovation and supportive services. The partial correlation between the culture measure “academic innovation” and the students’ perceptions of school effectiveness was significant. Results indicate that academic innovation was the most single important independent variable describing effective alternative schools. The study suggests the need for further inquiry in other areas of the school environment and over a larger study group, but the variables tested were relevant within the context of the hypothesis.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Alternative school, according to The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2000), is defined as "an elementary or secondary school with a nontraditional curriculum" (p.34). Myll (1988) wrote in her book The Dropout Prevention Handbook: alternative school is defined as "a school that is deliberately differentiated from other schools in order to accommodate the needs and interests of students who are having trouble in a traditional setting" (p.34). The Mississippi Department of Education (2007) refers to an alternative school as one "that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, and falls outside of the categories of regular education, special education, or vocational education" (p.61).

In the early 1960's, alternative educational programs were introduced in an attempt to reach students who had not been successful in traditional school settings. In 1973, there were approximately 500 alternative schools in various states; by 1975, there were 5,000 alternative schools nationwide. Alternative schools have continued to increase in popularity and in number and continue to serve a wider range of students with varying needs.

Alternative schools ideally focus on development of close relationships among students and faculty members which fosters a sense of belonging. This is achieved by clearly stating expectations, building trust with individual students and individualizing instruction. Alternative schools are distinguished from their conventional counterparts because they are generally designed to serve an at-risk target population. An alternative
school "provides an option for dropouts, potential dropouts, pregnant students, and teenage parents as well as other students with special needs" (Young, 1990, p.14).

These schools usually differ in expectations, size, education, philosophy and population (Kellmayer, 1995). Characteristics common to alternative schools include small school size, small class size, flexible scheduling, and an extended role for teachers that includes student guidance counselor (Myll, 1988). Although a general goal of this alternative school is to provide students with the skills to mainstream them back into conventional schools, this is not always the outcome. Frequently, alternative school students never return to conventional schools (Kelly, 1993).

The success of alternative schools is based, in large measure, on the intensity of teacher and staff involvement in the lives of the students in these generally small programs (De La Rosa, 1996). Researchers have found that students in alternative schools benefit from teachers and staff providing positive personal interaction that includes personal and social counseling, individualized learning plans using a variety of teaching and learning techniques, social skills development, and communication from teachers and staff of their genuine concern for student's well-being and academic progress (Bauman, 1998, Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Lange, 1997; Rayle, 1998; Winborne & Dardaine-Ragguet, 1993; Wirth-Bond, Coyne & Adams, 1991). With respect to teacher investment in the lives of students, De La Rosa (1999) writes that "studies of alternative programs have consistently found that caring teachers are a vital component to any successful program and students in these programs feel the staff is genuinely concerned about them" (p.271). Because of their small size, alternative schools can engender "community" which results in more active student participation, a sense of belonging and greater
academic and social success (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Carley (1994) suggests that the culture and climate of a school are created by the combined strength of its subsystems. Those subsystems include administrators, teachers, counselors, and policies and programs. If one or more of these subsystems are not responsive to student needs, the culture and climate of the school is weakened.

Renihan and Renihan (1995) underscored the importance of schools providing an environment designed to enhance student self image and to foster a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Such an environment, they wrote, recognizes the “pastoral needs” of students. By this they mean the “dual student needs of school membership (characterized by a sense of belonging and social bonding to the school) and educational engagement” (p.8). One of the key elements of pastoral care is pastoral casework, which recognizes that teachers and counselors alike have responsibility for the academic and psychosocial needs of students.

Because many students at risk of dropping out have serious behavioral and family problems (Streeter and Franklin, 1991), the value of school counselors and social workers has been recognized in alternative school program (Franklin, McNeil, & Wright, 1990). These staff members provide both tangible and emotional support to students and their families in an effort to keep these students enrolled.

Problem Statement

This study examines the extent to which student-centered school culture predicts school effectiveness as perceived by students, and which elements of student-centered culture are most important to their success. School culture is an important consideration for students, particularly disaffected students. While the literature on school culture is
fairly expansive, research specific to the relationship between elements of school culture and effectiveness in alternative education is relatively scant.

The research hypothesis is that under varying perceptions of school culture, there are statistically significant relationships between students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness in two urban alternative schools in Mississippi and two urban alternative schools in Louisiana.

Student-centered school culture is a student-supportive climate. Student-centered school culture is characterized by these variables, which were tested in this study.

- Safe environment for behavioral success – A structured school environment with strict behavioral expectations that are clear to students. The environment is caring and supportive.
- Small size and community climate – Both school and classes are small with a student/teacher ratio of 8:1 or smaller.
- Expanded teacher roles – Teachers are responsible for taking on extra roles as advisors, mentors, counselors, character education and anger management instructors as well as teaching academic subjects.
- Positive relationships with teachers and staff - Focus on the development of warm, caring relationships between teachers and students.
- Academic innovation - Programs that emphasize basic skills, literacy skills, GED and programs that focus on social skills, personal development, and behavior.
- Integrated system of supportive services - Programs that help students deal with problems both in school and in their daily lives. Support services include
counseling services provided by social worker, counseling services through local mental health, daily advisor/advisee meetings, guest speakers, resource officer, Adolescent Offenders Program, district psychologist, speech pathologist, bus driver who acts as a positive role model and mentor, cafeteria manager who acts as a mentor.

School effectiveness is educating and meeting the needs of at risk students both academically and behaviorally. School effectiveness, for this study, is characterized by finding that:

- Students believe their experiences in the school help them have a more positive self image.
- Students believe that being in the alternative school makes them more likely to stay in school and graduate.

Purpose of the Study

Dropping out of school results in a heavy economic and social consequences. Since high school dropouts ultimately become a financial drain on society, it makes sense economically to utilize tax dollars and push for dropout prevention programs in order to keep young people in school.

A successful alternative school can make a difference in the way that students view school and progress through their school careers. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions held by students in two alternative school settings in urban settings in Mississippi and in two alternative school settings' in urban settings in Louisiana. The investigator focused on students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. A study of students' attitudes and opinions about what
makes them feel successful in an alternative school should contribute significantly to the field of educating and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally.

The value of this study lies in its identification of the characteristics that create effective alternative school settings as perceived by students. For this study, alternative school students in grades one through twelve from four schools in urban southern settings responded to a survey designed to measure those perceptions related to alternative school education. The use of multiple schools increased variability in the study population so that differences in perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness could be discerned. Further, use of multiple schools increased sample size and improved validity of the findings by enhancing generalization.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question for this study is stated as follows: Are alternative school student perceptions of school culture predictive of their perceptions of school effectiveness?

The related hypothesis reads as follows: There is a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perceptions of school effectiveness among the four alternative schools represented in this study.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Academic innovation – Programs that emphasize basic skills, literacy skills, GED and programs that focus on social skills, personal development, and behavior. This is
characterized by

- Flexible scheduling
- Individualized instruction
- Individualized instructional plans
- Variety of teaching and learning techniques
- Social skills development

**Alternative school** - An elementary or secondary school with a nontraditional curriculum (The Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2000).

**At-risk students** – Discouraged learners who are not successful in the traditional school setting.

**Character Education** – A curriculum that teaches students the six pillars of character about values including trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

**Counseling** – Professional guidance of the individual by utilizing psychological methods, especially in collecting case history data, using various techniques of the personal interview, and testing interests and aptitudes. (The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2000).

**Elementary school** – A school including usually the first four to the first eight grades and often a kindergarten (The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2000). For the purpose of this study, a school that services students in grades 4, 5 and 6.

**Expanded teacher roles** – Teachers are responsible to take on extra roles as advisors, mentors, counselors, character education and anger management instructors as well as teaching academic subjects. Expanded teacher roles include
- Support to students and families.
- Teachers and counselors alike have responsibility for the academic and psychosocial needs of students.

**Mentoring** - One-to-one relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, career, social, or personal goals (McPartland & Nettles, 1991).

**Middle school** - A school usually including grades 5 to 8 or 6 to 8 (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2000). For the purpose of this study, a school that services students in grades 7, 8, and 9.

**Positive relationship with teachers and staff** - Focus on the development of warm, caring relationships between the teachers and students and their students. Positive student-teacher/staff relationships include:

- Development of close relationships among students and faculty members, which fosters a sense of belonging.
- Intensity of teacher and staff involvement in the lives of the students.
- Teachers and staff providing positive personal interaction.
- Communication from teachers and staff of their genuine concern for student’s well being and academic progress.
- Feeling the staff is genuinely concerned about them as students.

**Safe environment** – A structured school environment with strict behavioral expectations that are clear to students. The environment is caring and supportive and expectations are clearly stated.

**School effectiveness** - Educating and meeting the needs of at risk students both
academically and behaviorally. School effectiveness is characterized by

- Students perceive a sense of active student participation in the school
- Students perceive a sense of belonging
- Students perceive greater academic and social success
- Students believe their experiences in the school help them have a more positive self image
- Students believe that being in an alternative school makes them more likely to stay in school and graduate.

**Secondary school** – A school intermediate between elementary school and college and usually offering general, technical, vocational, or college-preparatory courses (The Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2000).

**Supportive services** – Programs that help students deal with problems both in school and in their daily lives. Support services include counseling services provided by social worker, counseling services through local mental health, daily advisor/advisee meetings, guest speakers, resource officer, Adolescent Offenders Program, district psychologist, speech pathologist, bus driver who acts as a positive role model and mentor, cafeteria manager who acts as a mentor. Supportive services are characterized by the following factors:

- Includes personal and social counseling
- The value of school counselors and social workers has been recognized in alternative school programs.
- Building trust with individual students
- Subsystems of administrators, teachers, counselors and policies and programs
Small size and community climate – Both school and classes are small with a student/teacher ratio of 8:1 or smaller. Small size and community climate is characterized by the following:

- Small size engenders “community”
- Culture and climate of the school
- Fosters a friendly and supportive atmosphere
- Recognizes the dual student needs of school membership (characterized by a sense of belonging and social bonding to the school) and educational engagement.

Student-centered school culture – A student-supportive climate characterized by:

- Positive relationships with teachers and staff
- Expanded teacher roles
- Safe environment for behavioral success
- Small size and community climate
- Academic innovation
- Integrated system of supportive services

Urban – An area that is located or in close proximity to a city that is approximately 20 square miles with an approximate population of 50,000.

Limitations

- This study is limited to the students who are enrolled in two different school districts in each of two southern states.
- This study is limited by the fact that the alternative schools were in urban settings.
Justification for the Study

As an administrator of an alternative school, the investigator observed that many of the students who were assigned to the alternative school setting could easily be transitioned back to the traditional school setting by providing students with an appropriate educational environment while attending the alternative school. Many students expressed to this administrator that their successful experiences in an alternative setting was due to smaller classes, caring teachers, counseling programs, character education programs and also a structured school environment where students feel safe.

As an administrator of an alternative school, the investigator was interested in how urban alternative school programs were operated in different states. The researcher was interested in the attitudes and success levels of alternative school students in different alternative settings.

While the characteristics of student-centered cultures often are examined in the literature of alternative school effectiveness, insufficient research has been performed to test relationships among these characteristics.

It is important to investigate students’ perceptions of alternative schools for several reasons. One reason is that regardless of environments that are rural or urban, rich or poor, culturally diverse or homogeneous, all public schools face the challenge of trying to educate students who for one reason or another do not perform well in the traditional school settings and are placed in an alternative school. Many students fall behind because of academics, truancy, behavior problems, dysfunctional families, learning disabilities, and involvement with the court system. Ultimately, the success of students is a reflection on the school district. Therefore, important goals of an alternative setting are to improve
students’ self-esteem, improve students’ basic life skills, improve student attendance, redirect disruptive students and reduce drop out rates of young students. Standards and policies for responding to these students have shifted significantly in the past twenty years, as described in the literature.

“Many young people remain in school today who in the past would have ‘adjusted’ to the educational system by leaving it. Law and practice have recently made it more difficult for these young people to drop out when they want to; or for educators to exclude them when they want to. It has become more incumbent upon the public schools to educate all children as much as reasonably possible regardless of the mutual unsuitability of the students and mainstream conventional schooling” (Gold & Mann, 1984).

Summary

Since school districts are held more accountable now for the success of at risk students, research is needed to guide and test practices and policies aimed at supporting these students. Insufficient research has been done so far to test common recommendations for structuring alternative school strategy. For this reason, the current study addresses an important gap in the literature on alternative school effectiveness.

Though the official definition of alternative school has changed over the years and still varies slightly from state to state, the basic objective remains the same. The consistent objective is to reach students who do not thrive in the traditional school setting. Methods and structure of alternative schools also vary but smaller size, positive relationships, safe environment and individual counseling are the pillars of a student centered environment. This study explored the relationship of these factors to alternative
school effectiveness as perceived by the students.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of literature and research that is relevant to the factors that influence students' attitudes toward alternative school education. The chapter covers the history of alternative school education; it will also addresses some of the benefits of alternative schools, deficits of alternative school education and the characteristics of successful alternative school settings.

School Reform

American education has continuously confronted the challenges and demands associated with school reform. Educators, media and community members all have their own unique definition of school reform, but Allen (1996) reports that these groups agree that the meaning of reform refers to more dramatic change in school systems than can currently be achieved without legislation or change in school district policy. In most cases, Allen (1996) states, "fundamental school reform requires legislative or popular initiatives or the approval of a governing body for education in state" (p.1).

In a Report of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Dryer (1996), defines school reform as "breaking the ranks, conveying a recognition that old ways that no longer work must yield to change. Using technology to link schools and communities with global information networks, developing instructional strategies that engage students in their own learning and developing an integrated curriculum that makes connections to real life are several examples of reform efforts" (p.1). In general, according to Bergeson (2003), the various models of school reform have in common that they
“advocate for changing learning environments, curriculum and instruction, and personal relationships in order to improve student performance” (p.46). McPartland, Jordan, Leglers, & Balfanz (2002) describe the Talent Development High School as a reform model that describes change processes. The authors summarize “the essential components of high school dropout prevention programs: (1) structural, organizational, governance changes to establish the school norms and interpersonal relations for learning (2) curriculum and instructional innovations to give individual students the necessary time and help and (3) teacher support systems” (p.1).

According to Canaday and Rettig, one school reform initiative includes block scheduling as a way to restructure time for more flexible scheduling (Canaday & Rettig, 1996). Another school reform initiative, as stated by Berman, Minicucci, McLaughlin, McLeod, Nelson and Woodworth (1995) is the use of portfolios as a tool to assess students’ academic progress and student diversity studies of language minority students validating these students can become literate in English. A part of school reform movement has been the creation of alternative schools, which attempt to meet the needs of students who have not been successful in traditional school systems.

According to Wagner, alternative programs generally serve students with behavioral or academic problems, and gifted and talented students (Wagner, Wonacott, & Jackson 2005). Brant (1994) found that “alternative programs developed in the 1990’s to modify traditional approaches to accountability” (p. 2).

According to NASSP Bulletin (2006) alternative programs for disruptive students have played a vital role in school reform movement. One major principle of school reform is creating an orderly environment within schools where students can feel safe”
Heller (1996) found that "students who require alternative education settings, including the 2-5 percent of the chronic offenders whose behavior can interfere with the education of others, schools have developed programs that provide a full range of opportunities" (p. 3). Glass (1995) stated "alternative programs have isolated disruptive and violence-prone students and are increasingly being seen as the way to protect against classroom disruptions and the violence that sometimes accompanies it" (p. 3).

The alternative school model is not always considered a positive example of school reform. Bauman (1998) described alternative schools work as a method of allowing traditional education to continue in its traditional state "instead of directly challenging traditional structures of the public schools, the existence of alternative schools allows legislators, policy makers and many educators to avoid the necessity of making any significant reforms to the institution of schooling. The result is that policy makers are able to attribute academic failure to characteristics of the students, and foster sympathy for the home school’s decision to remove these disruptive voices.” Nor is there agreement about how at-risk students should be identified and served. According to Johnston and Wetherill (1998) “Most often what occurs is a grocery list approach in which at-riskness is treated as a unitary concept, incorporating such risk factors as class, race, gender, special needs, pregnancy, abusive home situations, relationship problems, drug use, alienation, boredom, resistance, general orneriness and most any other factor, which might cause students to be disruptive or perform poorly in school” (p.16).

Gottfredson’s work (as cited in Gregg, 1999), validates that the leadership style of the building administrator sets the tone, climate and culture of the school environment. A school with clear goals and objectives in which the school is organized can effectively
improve student behavior and academic grades as well as therapeutic programs. The Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) reports, "Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life." However, CRESPAR’s (2003) research indicated that many students are placed continually at risk by educational practices that assign some students into high quality programs and other students into low quality, control-based programs affording those limited outcomes. Clearly, positive, strength-based alternatives are the right of all children and youth—even those with significant behavioral difficulties. Nonetheless, as these contrasting views and reports indicate, there is a lack of agreement among educators about the appropriateness of common alternative school models. Foley and Pang (2006) discuss other potential deficits in alternative schools including:

- High levels of autonomy held by site personnel over curriculum, instructional methods and evaluation, and behavior standards, potentially leading to inconsistency in policy or practice.
- Failure to obtain an adequate share of budgeted education revenues
- Lack of access to libraries, science labs and other academic services
- Lack of effort to increase parental involvement in the school
- Insufficient support for the significant percentage of students with disabilities
- Inadequate support from community services

Traditional Schools

Past research Parnell (1982) and Miller (1988) found that "Traditional schools are schools that continue to teach, and in which students continue to learn through a traditionally accepted method. Lectures, worksheets, textbooks, lab work, frequently a
teacher centered focus and larger classes are some of the characteristics that often
describe a traditional school. But this system, which prepares students for further
education in a college situation, may benefit, at most, 20% of the students” (p.15).
According to De La Rosa, “students identify many reasons for dropping out of the
traditional system academic, behavioral, economic, and personal factors such as low
socioeconomic status, minority status, low-test scores and grades, and dissatisfaction with
school” (p.15).

Pittman (1986) noted that traditional educational systems failed to meet the needs
of at-risk students.

School related reasons are more commonly cited by students as a justification for
discontinuing their education than personal reasons.” While educators are quick to
blame the students for not succeeding, it is often the way that students are asked
to learn that separates alternative students from the mainstream. When researchers
examine how many students can succeed under the one institutional structure,
they find that many are left by the wayside. The sheer number of students that a
teacher has to work with on a given day interferes with the teacher-student
relationship, and therefore, makes it more difficult for students to learn (p. 16)

According to Bergeson (2003), a drop out is “a student who leaves school for any
reason, except death, before completing school with a regular diploma and does not
transfer to another school” (p.7). Bylsma & Ireland (2003) state that “some students leave
before entering ninth grade, but most drop out during their high school years” (p. 5). Lan
& Lanthier (2003) describes that “dropping out initially begins with students deviating
from the social norm of school behavior, followed by ceasing their participation in school
community, and finally disconnecting from the school community' (p. 313). Farrar and Petrie (1989) found that “High school dropouts are often viewed as a financial drain on society. Behind the push for dropout prevention programs is the fact that it may make better economic sense to put money into prevention and retraining programs to keep youth in school rather than deal with the heavy economic and social consequences later” (p. 9).

It is estimated that 4 million at-risk students who have dropped out of high school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000). It is estimated that more than half the students who drop out leave by tenth grade, 20% by eighth grade, and 3% by the fourth grade. Those who drop out make up almost half the heads of households on welfare and nearly half the prison population (Schwartz, 2000). Asche (1993) noted that high drop out rates are a serious concern for the social and economic well being of this country.

In an analysis of 2002 Washington state data, Pruitt (2003) found that “17 percent of high school dropouts received food stamps compared to 8 percent of individuals with a diploma. Also, 12 percent of high school dropouts were on public assistance while less than 9 percent of those with a diploma received such assistance”. Wald and Losen (2003) state that “approximately 68 percent of the inmates in state prisons had not completed high school and 75 percent of youths under 18 who have been sentenced to adult prisons have not completed 10th grade” (p.4).

Bergeson (2003) concludes “the costs and consequences of dropping out have become increasingly serious for individuals and for society” (p.10). Rumberger (2001) summarizes “economic, demographic and educational trends that may exacerbate the dropout problem in the future” (p. 10). Rumberger notes:
(1) The trend is toward a higher skilled labor force in the United States that will make it even harder for a dropout economically; (2) school populations increasingly tend to be students who are poor and low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, or students who do not speak English as primary language; and (3) increasing accountability in the schools is a trend that has produced policies to end social promotion and to institute high school exit exams, both of which could increase the number of students who fail to complete high school (p. 10)

De La Rosa (1999) stated that students often drop out because of the intense procedural rigor of the traditional system: “For students with extenuating circumstances, the many regulations and rigid structure of the traditional school often made it impossible for them to remain in school”. Most of the students who dropped out indicated that they had given up on traditional school after losing credit due to excessive truancies and absenteeism. Moreover, the traditional system does not quickly adapt to what is needed by society or the students they serve. De La Rosa found that students appear to be dissatisfied with an antiquated system of education, which they believe does not prepare them for the ever-increasing demands of today’s society. Students who have voiced their concerns point out consistently that the school and its policies were to blame for their disengagement (p.17).

Shelly, Cannaday, and Weddle (1997) stated, “We are losing too many young people from our schools. They are convinced they don’t or can’t fit in. The system of education is irrelevant to their lives. We need a change in the way schools do business so students can see learning as meaningful and important” (p.95). Latham (1999) suggested schools discipline plans are often ineffective because they focus on punishment for
inappropriate behavior. Consequently, this creates a coercive environment from which students want to escape or become counter-coercive. In becoming counter-coercive, students are expelled for inappropriate or violent behavior; this is reinforcing for them as they escape coercive environments. Others choose to escape altogether by dropping out. Students cannot be expected to learn and produce quality work in an unfriendly, adversarial environment (Schweikert-Cattin and Taylor, 2000). Linton (2000) found that some students in traditional educational settings want to be suspended to avoid coercive environments. Alternative schools are often designed to offer options that are supportive rather than punitive promoting educational success versus academic failure.

Students attending the traditional school setting school “indicated that they felt lost at large high schools and that the alternative school allowed them more contact with other students and with teachers” (Griffin, Richardson, & Lane, 1994). In a survey conducted by Dryer (1996) it is suggested students drop out of schools for various reasons. Some students’ outlook on their future is geared toward a career and not toward a college education. Dryer (1996) “cautions against developing a list of characteristics that describe a “typical” early school leaver on the grounds that this may place the blame for early leaving on the students rather than seeing the reasons as a combination of personal, structural and external factors. Furthermore, not all early school leavers are “at risk” some are “positive leavers” who leave to take up employment or an apprenticeship” (p.17).

Dryer’s research (1996) suggested that there are many reasons for why students choose to leave school. His research also shows that limited resources make it difficult to meet the needs of students attending the alternative school. May and Copeland (1989)
concur, adding, “Meeting the needs of diverse learners within a single, comprehensive high school environment is a challenge to current practice” (p. 16)

A report by James (2001) suggests the following factors as ways to keep students in school:

- improved connectedness between teachers and students (friendliness, mutual concern and respect) and between students and their peers
- improved curriculum (greater breadth, more vocational and practical studies, personal development and life skills)
- improved school climate (caring supportive environment, relaxed and informal)” (p. 60.)

Bruno (1985) found that “alternative programs have appeared across the nation in an attempt to “adjust the schools to the needs of the students, rather than requiring the students to adjust to the traditional school system” (p. 2). According to Gregg (1999), “a focus on fixing at-risk problem students may obscure or ignore school-based problems. Large classes or schools make it difficult to identify marginal students with academic, behavioral, and social needs. Teachers may not have received training in behavior management and instructional strategies to help students with different learning needs” (p. 107).

History of Alternative Schools

During the twentieth century, state legislators supported educational programs, not necessarily called alternative schools, based on themes (e.g., magnet schools). Reimer and Cash (2003) state “Dewey can be considered to be the father of the modern alternative school movement. He recognized the importance of individualized and
experiential education because all children do not have the same learning styles or skills. He encouraged educators to move from the ‘school as factory’ approach to a more progressive school philosophy that looked at students as individuals” (2003, p.3)

In Gregg’s opinion (1999) “the first alternative schools aimed to educate, while the purpose of many new alternative settings is correctional, whether disciplinary or therapeutic” (p. 108). He further observed “Suspension, expulsion, retention, chronic failure, and alternation all contribute to those unacceptable dropout and incompletion rates. Yet rather than look at how to improve school systems that are failing sizable numbers of students, many states have created alternative schools for “problem” individuals thought to degrade general education quality” (p.107)

The small teacher-pupil ratios and additional services of alternative schools can cost more per pupil than regular schools but, as Iowa found, these investments may pay off in the long run (Black, 1997). Gregg (1999) mentions “many new alternative schools, however, try to shape students to better fit the system. Although both approaches share the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes, a ‘fix-the-student’ focus raises the following educational, financial, and legal issues that schools should consider when creating alternative programs” (p. 107).

According to Smith, Gregory and Pugh (1981) many alternative schools were created throughout the United States in the 1970’s. Kellmayer (1995) stated that the estimated number of alternative schools established in the United States was approximately 5,000 schools by the 1990’s. Young (1990) found that “alternative schools are distinguished from their conventional counterparts because they are generally designed to serve at-risk target populations. In Young’s opinion, alternative school
education provides an option for dropouts, potential dropouts, pregnant students, and teenage parents as well as other students with special needs” (p. 14). Kellmayer (1995) stated that alternative schools are unique because they service a different student population, have different expectations, smaller schools and class sizes, and a different educational philosophy compared to the traditional schools. (Kellmayer, 1995). Myll (1988) found that alternative schools have similar characteristics including small school size, reduced class size, flexible scheduling, and teacher with multiple roles such as an advisor and student guidance counselor. Although “a general goal of these alternative schools is to provide students with the skills to mainstream them back into conventional schools, this is not always the outcome. Often, alternative school students never return to conventional schools” (Kelly, 1993, p. 92).

Contemporary Definitions of Alternative Education

Bergeson (2005) indicates that contemporary “alternative schools, sometimes called second-chance schools, are created as separate organizations for potential dropouts or to recruit dropouts back into school” (p.41). The Common Core of Data defines alternative education as “a public/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education” (cited in Lehr, Moreau, Laners, & Lange, 2003, p. 2). The Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards (2007) define alternative schools as “public elementary/secondary schools that address needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provide nontraditional education, serve as an adjunct to a regular school, and fall outside of the categories of regular education, special
Bergeson (2005) points out “alternative education is an inclusive term used to describe alternative learning experiences and programs that may or may not be linked closely with traditional schools. Some serve home-schooled students and provide classes or laboratory experiences that are difficult to teach at home, such as music or science laboratories. Many alternative programs provide flexible schedules and reduced numbers of days or hours in class. Some programs are contract-based, so students meet regularly with an instructional advisor but do not attend classes. Some are designed primarily to assist students in returning to the comprehensive high school; these reentry programs provide skills and help students improve attendance” (p.40). Kershaw and Blank (1993) noted, as most researcher agree, that alternative schools were initially established for students who were having trouble academically in the regular education classroom. However, Gregg illustrates (1999) “zero-tolerance policies, safe-schools legislation, and the commitment to provide orderly learning environments have prompted states and districts to adapt the model for disciplinary purposes. But alternative programs that lack the focus and purpose of the first alternative schools may not duplicate their success at improving student outcomes, either academic or behavioral” (p.107).

Alternative schools offer at-risk students the opportunity to enroll in a learning environment that is personal and meaningful to each student. Leone and Drakeford (1999) stated, “The most promising (alternative) schools have a clear focus on academic learning that combines high academic standards with engaging and creative instruction”
Models of Alternative Education

Koetke (1999) describes two types of alternative school systems, which developed because of earlier experiences. "Outside the system" options are educational opportunities that include private schools, parochial schools and home schooling. "Inside the system" options exist within the context of public education and typically service students with learning disabilities, those who are pregnant, students at risk of dropping out of school, students with disruptive behavior and students ordered by courts to be in school. Linton (2000) described alternative schools as being for students who are either discipline problems or students who need personalized and highly structured academic programs. Meeting these needs in the traditional high school is becoming more difficult and is becoming more critical in many rural areas. Successfully implemented alternative schools provide options for students who are at risk for dropping out. Alternative schools are most frequently described as emphasizing a disciplinary orientation and a focus on improving behavior. "One type of scenario described mandatory attendance and exit contingent upon achieving, and exhibiting appropriate behavior and academic progress while assigned to the alternative school" (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 8).

There are three types of alternative schools: Type 1 schools offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of all kinds, including those needing more individualization, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. An emphasis on discipline distinguishes Type 2 programs, which aim to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are placed in the program for specific time periods.
Because placement is short term, either the curriculum is limited to a few basic courses, or students work on assignments supplied by their "home" schools. Familiar models include last-chance schools and in-school suspension (Raywid, 1990).

Type 3 programs provide short-term but therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic or behavioral barriers to learning. Type 3 programs typically offer counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation. Although the programs serve targeted populations, students can choose not to participate (Raywid, 1990).

The distinction between the three types is not rigid, and some schools show characteristics of more than one type: for example, Type 1 and Type 2 schools increasingly offer counseling, a Type 3 characteristic (Raywid, 1994). However, the purpose of an alternative school, as defined by law or policy, remains critical to program implementation, evaluation, effectiveness, and even equity (Raywid, 1994d).

An alternative school is sometimes located on the same campus of the home school. Sometimes, it is a separate entity or an independent school located on a different campus. Wagner, Wonacott, and Jackson (2005) provide locations of alternative education alternative. Wagner (2005) lists different approaches to structure, programming, and teaching often employed in alternative education:

- Vocational schools, charter schools, magnet schools, career academics
- Work-based learning- internships, apprenticeships, work experience, work study, field-based education
- Special programs in regular schools
- Museums, planetarium, nature centers
• Community colleges
• Neighborhood organizations
• Home schooling
• Outdoor education
• Juvenile justice facilities
• Homeless shelters (p.2)

The Phase System is a model of alternative education that supports the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory’s (NREL, 1997) contention that it is necessary for clearly stated rules to be enforced fairly and consistently. For students to flourish there must be a sense of trust within the school community; students must feel their teachers believe in them (Schweikert-Cattin & Taylor, 2000). The quality and caring attitude of teachers, school personnel, and office staff enhance the academic achievement and personal well being of students at Bear Lodge High School. Surveys administered in 2002 overwhelmingly demonstrated students’ belief that their teachers and staff believed they could and would succeed. Sixty-three percent of the students felt their teachers believed they would be successful. Sixty-seven percent of the students also felt their instructors cared about them as persons and sixty-three percent felt the teaching staff treated them with respect.

Wagner, Wonacott and Jackson (2005) also describe different educational models, including:

• Montessori method
• Waldorf School
• Coalition of Essential Schools
- High Schools that Work
- School-to-work/school-to-career
- Service learning
- Self-directed learning, independent study
- Lifelong education (p. 2)

Wagner (2005) identified the following features of alternative education curriculum:

- "General Educational Development Tests (GED) preparation
- Conflict resolution, anger management
- Tech prep, career-technical education
- Leadership education
- Therapeutic adventure experiences
- Visual and performing arts

Wagner (2005) asserted that "different delivery systems as online education and distance education" (p. 2). Linton (2000) stated that the basic principles followed by alternative schools are that not all children have the same goals or the same ways of learning. Most alternative schools attempt to establish a less formal relationship between students and teachers.

Student Characteristics and Alternative School Referrals

Often times, students assigned to an alternative school setting experience problems at school, home and in the community setting (McCall, 2003). Also, students may present problems in more than one area, but usually a student presents difficulties in several areas, such as academics where more individualized instruction is needed, serious
discipline problems where a more structured environment is needed, and a dysfunctional home life where there is neglect.

McCall (2003) described the following reasons for which students might be placed at the alternative school setting:

1. Behavioral dysfunction in the school
2. Need for academic remediation
3. Social skill dysfunction
4. Family disruption or conflict
5. Chronic absenteeism (p. 113)

Bergeson (2005) observing the strong link between the reasons why students dropout and the reasons that they might be candidates for alternative education lists the following school-related reasons for dropout problems:

- conflict between home and school culture
- ineffective discipline system
- lack of adequate counseling
- negative school climate
- lack of relevant curriculum
- passive instructional strategies
- inappropriate use of technology
- disregard of student learning styles
- retentions/suspensions
- low expectations
- lack of language instructions (p.3).
In a study conducted by McCall (2003), students were asked why they did not finish school; most students replied that teachers did not treat them with respect. Students also stated that their relationships with teachers and staff members were weak. In the same study, parents had no negative comments about the alternative school settings, recommended no changes in the program and claimed their children were more successful while attending the alternative school because of dedicated teachers and more individualized instruction. Students reported that the likelihood of staying in school would have been better had they stayed at the alternative school.

Bergeson (2005) concludes that there are many reasons that educators have limited control over dropout rates. He indicated that dropouts are likely to be students who:

- from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- of color, particularly Hispanic, Native American and African American
- with poor academic achievement
- with poor school attendance
- who have repeated one or more grades
- who speak a primary language other than English
- who attend school in large cities
- who become pregnant (p.2).

Wagner, Woncott and Jackson (2005) report that alternative schools typically service the following types of students:

- Suspended or expelled students, truants, or students with behavior problems who need short-term programs to re-enter high school
• Students entering adulthood prematurely and who cannot attend school regularly because of pregnancy, parenthood, or adverse home situations
• Older students who need credits to go on to postsecondary education
• Low achievers, failing students, students with educational deficits or learning difficulties, or students over age for their educational level
• Dropouts or recovered dropouts
• Students with medical, family, or alcohol/drug abuse problems
• Gifted and talented students
• Migrant, homeless, or runaway youth (p.1).

Goals of Alternative Schools

The Mississippi Department of Education (2007) refers to an alternative school as one "that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, and falls outside of the categories of regular education, special education, or vocational education" (2007, p.61). More and more students are considered at risk of school failure in contemporary society. These students increasingly come from every sector of communities and have needs that are great and varied (Barr & Parrett, 1995). For students who do not finish high school, the outlook for their future is overwhelmingly negative (Morley, 1991). Earning power, social status, and standard of living are all dramatically affected by inadequate academic preparation and by the lack of a high school diploma. Parents, educators, and policymakers struggle with how to meet the needs of these students and how to provide educational programs that result in positive outcomes.

Alternative schools are intended to provide supportive learning environments that
address the needs of specific groups of students (Dick, Kaiser, Water, & Perry, 2003; Korn, 1990). Some alternative schools were established to address the educational and vocational needs of students who are unsuccessful in the public school system (e.g., students who are behind in credits, have a history of truancy, behavioral and substance abuse problems, have serious family problems, are pregnant or parenting themselves, and are involved with the juvenile justice system) (Grunbaum et al., 2000; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Wiest, Wong, Cervantes, Craik, & Kreil, 2001).

Giving students a choice of educational setting has been advocated as a necessary component to ensure the effectiveness of alternative programs (Raywid, 1993). An analysis of student responses suggests that choice issues are central to transfer decisions and continued attendance in the second-chance programs (Lange & Lehr, 1997); however, the goal of these programs is to not only prevent dropout, but also to improve progress and enhance performance outcomes for these students.

Alternative school programs for at-risk students in junior and high school are increasing in numbers in school districts across the country (Upperman, Curcio, Fortune, and Underwood, 1996). Fuller and Sabatino state that “they have grown because they provide school systems an alternative to expelling or suspending at-risk students who are not succeeding in the traditional classrooms” (p. 1).

According to Wircenski (1991) alternative schools are treated as a safety net to prevent students from becoming dropouts and thus becoming a financial burden to society. Wircenski (1991) concludes that alternative schools are usually a district’s last effort to help at-risk student learn how to resolve conflict and problem solve in order to function in today’s society. According to Kelly (1993), “alternative schools make up the
nation’s longest running, most widespread dropout-prevention program, yet surprisingly little is known about what actually goes on inside them” (p. 15).

Student understanding of the expectations, norms, and attitudes within the alternative schools is important because it can affect their success as students in alternative schools and ultimately, their decision to stay in school. Staton (1990) states that the nature of the role students takes in a new school and the sense they make of a new school’s environment, or the student socialization process, are integral to their success as students. Schools are important socializing agents, as they teach students the curriculum through the overt agenda, as well as values of the school and society though the covert agenda, or the “hidden curriculum” (Shulman, 1986).

Because many students at risk for dropping out have serious behavioral and family problems (Streeter & Franklin, 1991), the value of school counselors and social workers has been recognized in alternative school programs (Franklin, McNeil, & Wright, 1990). This staff provides both tangible and emotional support to students and their families in an effort to keep these students enrolled.

Gay (2002) notes “there are certain instructional practices which are likely to increase the relevance of schools for at risk students. Her suggestions include:

- Getting students personally involved in their own learning
- Using varied formats, multiple perspectives, and novelty in teaching
- Responding to multiple learning styles
- Modeling in teaching and learning
- Using cooperation and collaboration among students to achieve common learning outcomes
• Learning by doing

• Incorporating different type of skill development such as intellectual, social, emotional and moral in teaching and learning experiences

• Transferring knowledge from one form or context to another

• Combining knowledge, concepts, and theory with practice

• Students reflecting critically on their knowledge, beliefs, thoughts and actions” (p.196)

Because alternative schools enrollments are growing, Neumann (1994) states that “it is imperative to understand how new students adjust to and make sense of their alternative school experiences. In comparison to the research on conventional schools as socializing institutions, only limited attention has been paid to the ways in which students socialize into alternative schools” (p. 92).

General Characteristics of Alternative Schools

Alternative schools typically utilize a philosophy and approach to education that differs from the traditional school system in a number of ways. Korn (1990) described these differences in the following manner: students are encouraged to further personal interests independently; lesson plans are flexible and adapted to the varying needs of the students; a less obvious power differential exists among teachers, staff, and students, and students are encouraged to set goals and compete with themselves instead of peers (see also Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Wiest et al., 2001).

Glass (1995) found that successful alternative programs that service students with behavioral problems implemented strategies such as short-term intervention strategies, behavior modification techniques, focus on the whole child and a transition process from
the alternative school setting to the traditional school setting. Young (1990) reviewed several empirical studies of alternative schools and concluded, “that small school size, a supportive and noncompetitive environment, and a student centered curriculum were structural characteristics commonly associated with program success”(p. 4). Research conclusively demonstrates that alternative schools are making a positive difference for hundreds of students at risk of dropping out (Linton, 2000; Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Hurley, 2000).

Gay (2002) suggests that there are instructional practices that are more effective in working with at-risk students. Her suggestions include:

- Hands on learning
- Collaboration among students
- Different learning styles
- Modeling
- Getting students personally involved in the lesson
- Student reflection

With respect to teacher investment in the lives of students, De La Rosa (1996) writes “studies of alternative programs have consistently found that caring teachers are a vital component to any successful program and students in these programs feel the staff is genuinely concerned about them” (p. 271). Sergiovanni (1996) noted that alternative schools engaged students in active participation, created academic and social success and build a sense of belonging because of the schools’ small sizes. Linton (2000) stated for a discipline program to be successful, it needs to be highly structured.

Saunders and Saunders’ (as cited in Comfort, Giorgi & Moody, 1997) reported in
the High School Journal article entitled “Student Agenda for High School Reform,” the following:

There was remarkable consistency in what students perceived to be the major problems in their high schools and in their recommendations for what would make high schools more effective environments for learning. The three core suggestions included: 1) moving toward a connected and focused curriculum; 2) using a more flexible instructional and 3) developing a strong sense of community. Implicit in this last suggestion—the most dominant theme—was a focus on building closer and fuller relationships with teachers and school staff as well as other students and the community-at-large (p. 2)

Results from Comfort, Giorgi & Moody (1997) study indicated that students in traditional education settings didn’t have close, trusting relationships with their teachers and staff members. Students wanted to know that their teachers cared about them as individuals and also cared about their success as an academic student. Instead of concentrating on building relationships among students, students stated that teachers and staff members were more concerned with controlling them as individuals. Karp (1998) noted that the majority of students who dropped out of school did so because they did not have a relationship with adult teachers within the alternative school setting.

Cultural and Climate Characteristics of Alternative Schools

Carley (1994) suggested that “the culture and climate of a school are created by the combined strength of its subsystems. Those subsystems include administrators, teachers, counselors and policies and programs. If one or more of these subsystems are not responsive to student needs, the culture and climate of the school is weakened” (p. 2).
Renihan and Renihan (1995) "underscore the importance of schools providing an environment designed to enhance student self image and to foster a friendly and supportive atmosphere." Such an environment, they write, recognizes the pastoral needs of students. Basically their primary focus is on the student's sense of belonging and social skills within the educational setting. An important component of pastoral care is the teachers' role of both a counselor who addresses the psychological needs of a student and a teacher meeting the academic needs of a student. Knutson (1996) argues "that the "common-bond learning community: formed in alternative schools is the key to their success" (p. 119).

Dr. Christine Jax, (1998) the past Commissioner of The Department of Children, Families and Learning for Minnesota, in her PhD thesis wrote the following:

Students portrayed the alternative school experience as successful in meeting the goals of educational attainment and achievement. A reason attributed to success of the alternative school was the presence of fewer students and the relationships with teachers. They asserted the importance of class size along with the relationships with teachers. The small size of school and classes minimized distractions and conflicts with other students. It also enabled teachers to better know the students and to provide individualized attention. Teachers were perceived as caring about the students. Students viewed caring as linked with helping, which resulted in better learning.

In an article by Johnston and Wetherill, which focused on alternative schools, the authors' stated, "Students tend to interpret teachers' flexibility and interest in their success as indicative of personal respect which grants to students an element of autonomy, personal control and positive self worth" (Johnston and Wetherill, 1998). Madzey (1985) stated that
students attending alternative schools appreciate a trusting, positive relationship with their teachers. De La Rosa (1996) noted, "The small student to teacher ratio enables the staff in these programs to give their student population the attention that they require to be successful students. Small numbers of students and staff also engenders a sense of community, which some educators say results in more active student participation, a sense of belonging, and greater academic and social success" (p.22).

Jax (1998) found that "There is also some evidence that smaller class sizes enable the teacher to provide more appropriate instruction and thereby raise student achievement" (p. 23). According to Jax (1998) small class room sizes helped the students to stay focused due to fewer distractions and minimized student conflict.

Alternative school students report that individualized instruction and positive interactions with teachers and counselors support their efforts to complete high school (Griffin, Richardson & Lane, 1994; Raywid, 2001; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Wiest et al., 2001). Teachers and staff can have a profound influence on the students’ overall attitude toward school, as well as their behavior and performance. This can be especially true in an alternative high school setting. Findings suggest that successful alternative schools should encourage good communication between teachers and students (Wiest et al., 2001); have highly structured classrooms (Tobin & Sprague, 2000); and adapt to their students’ unique needs (Guerin & Denti, 1999). In this regard, the curriculum at alternative high schools should be personalized, flexible, and comprehensive (Grunbaum et al., 2000; Korn, 1990; Weist et al., 2001). School staff can also provide a school environment that is accepting of the diversity in personal expression that is characteristic of adolescents.
Staff in alternative settings are dealing with the young people that schools are no longer able to reach or with whom schools are no longer able to cope. The young people in alternative settings tend to present with multiple problems and with significant barriers that seriously impede their social, personal and academic development. Many are difficult to teach and to develop a rapport with, are emotionally unstable and erratic in behavior. They need significant and intense assistance, and assistance with multiple concerns. Normal resource provision will not suffice to enable program staff to meet these students’ needs. Links to other community support agencies and families is not a ‘nice to have’ but an essential survival and support strategy.

Gold (1995) reports that teachers who have positive results with alternative school students who had negative experiences in school have the ability to build trust and relationships with their students. The quality of the personnel and of the relationships developed between staff and students are the most critical factors in determining program success. Staff needs to be committed and highly skilled in delivering educational content, handling interpersonal issues and developing good quality relationships with at risk students.

Training and development need to be provided at the system level to prepare staff for working alternative settings and to sustain those already working in what can be very stressful/taxing situations. The effort by teachers and staff to get to know their students as individuals appears to lead to substantial rewards in terms of enhancing the students’ motivation to succeed in school. 1998’s case study of one alternative school is illustrative. Students at this school shared common negative school experiences with school staff and peers at their traditional schools. Most of them were failing or
infrequently attending their former schools. Many students felt negatively labeled or stereotyped by teachers and administrators at their former schools. They tended to adopt an “us against the world” attitude: that was echoed by other students at the alternative school. Alternative school students recommended the school to their friends and described the school environment as being “tough” but much more supportive. In addition to support from peers, school staff at the exemplar school are essential in making an individualized connection with students. When students are first admitted to the school, the principal visits with the family at their home. Although school rules are strict and the expectations for students are high, requirements are clearly communicated, and relations between staff and students are warm, friendly, and family-like. The staff members are willing to work individually with students, designing curriculum to be challenging at an appropriate level for the student. Students receive both reinforcement and recognition for their efforts from teachers, the principal, and other school staff. Open communication among staff members helps them inform one another of the progress or problems of individual students. Because of a supportive school environment, these adolescents felt accepted, cared about, and encouraged to learn and achieve.

Findings from this case study were consistent with other studies reporting that a positive, caring environment provided by teachers and staff can enable many at-risk students to succeed academically (Raywid, 2001; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). In addition, the alternative school staff actively encouraged acceptance and respect for all students, regardless of individual differences. The themes of acceptance and respect were mentioned by several students during interviews.

The study demonstrated that adolescents who were labeled as unmotivated and
possibly academically challenged in traditional high schools found that, with encouragement and individualized attention at the alternative school, they could change their school-related behaviors, attitudes, and intentions. These changes were most evident in the reduction of problems behavior, neutralizing negative attitudes about school, and ramping up educational intentions.

Key criteria for building a sense of community are choice (Black 1997; North Carolina Education, 1997) and smallness (Morley, 1991; Willis, 1996). Choice – or voluntary participation – by both students and teachers promotes affiliation, bonding, and membership (Raywid, 1994; Morley, 1991). Small size helps schools become caring communities by allowing teachers and students to get to know each other. Like a family, the school community supports the healthy development of the whole child, doing whatever must be done to ensure academic, social, and emotional growth (Morley, 1991; Duke, 1989).

Summary

Alternative education is considered one of the many products of school reform but the perceived purpose varies. Critics maintain that it is a place to put repeat offenders so that traditional education may continue stagnant and undisturbed. This approach blames the characteristics of the student rather than finding new ways to reach modern children. Educators in alternative schools, in addressing the individual needs of students, expand services to help those in need before they become intolerably disruptive.

Recently added goals of alternative education include reducing the dropout rate by addressing the needs of students, attending to different learning styles, strengthening social skills dysfunction, and implementing school-to-work programs. The effects of
“dropping out” on people and their communities have sparked the interest of those not usually interested in education. Welfare, food stamp, and prison systems all have high numbers of drop outs. The need for student centered alternative education with smaller class sizes and individualized support is universally agreed upon at this point. At-risk students need more than just the core subjects; they need educators and staff to give them links to social, health, and vocational programs in order to be successful, productive members of their communities.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter includes a description of participants, procedures for quantitative methodology study, methods of data collection, instrument that was used in the study, and the procedures that were used to analyze the data.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted in this research project to evaluate how well student-centered school cultural measures predicted perceived school effectiveness. The researcher's initial plan was to investigate the perceptions held by students in two alternative school settings in urban areas in Mississippi and in two alternative school settings in urban areas in Louisiana. The research question for this study is stated as follows: Are alternative school student perceptions of school culture predictive of their perceptions of school effectiveness? The related hypothesis reads as follows: There is a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perceptions of school effectiveness among the four alternative schools represented in this study.

In this study the dependent variable was the perception of school effectiveness in the four alternative schools. The independent variable was student-centered school culture, which is operationalized as follows:

- Safe environment – A structured school environment with strict behavioral expectations that are clear to students. The environment is caring and supportive.

- Small size and community climate – Both school and classes are small with a
student/teacher ratio of 8:1 or smaller.

- Expanded teacher roles – Teachers are responsible for taking on extra roles as advisors, mentors, counselors, character education and anger management instructors as well as teaching academic subjects.

- Positive teacher/student relationships - Focus on the development of warm, caring relationships between teachers and students.

- Academic innovation - Programs that emphasize basic skills, literacy skills, GED and programs that focus on social skills, personal development, and behavior.

- Supportive services - Programs that help students deal with problems both in school and in their daily lives. Support services include counseling services provided by social worker, counseling services through local mental health, daily advisor/advisee meetings, guest speakers, resource officer, Adolescent Offenders Program, district psychologist, speech pathologist, bus driver who acts as a positive role model and mentor, cafeteria manager who acts as a mentor.

School effectiveness is educating and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally characterized by:

- Students more likely to graduate
- Sense of belonging
- Greater academic and social success
- Positive self image
Participants

The target population chosen as the study participants for this study included all students in two alternative schools in Mississippi and two alternative schools in Louisiana. All four alternative schools were urban in nature, located within a city (approximately 20 square miles with an approximate population of 50,000). Selection of participants was based on their enrollment at any point from the beginning of August to the end of September 2006. The sample size was 104 students, which represented the total number of students who voluntarily participated in the project from all four alternative schools. The sample consisted of White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian male and female students who were attending the four selected alternative schools at the time that the researcher was conducting this research study. Some student did not participate in completing the survey and therefore decreased the sample size.

One hundred four students in grades ranging from fourth to twelfth and including court-ordered or school board ordered adolescent GED students participated voluntarily in the study. These 104 co-ed students attended four alternative schools in the south east region of the United States. The researcher was interested in studying the perceptions of alternative school students in relation to student-centered school culture and school effectiveness in the four selected alternative schools.

Alternative school A is located in an urban area in Louisiana. School A is a full-day program that provides an education to approximately 65 elementary and high school students, who have been suspended, expelled or excluded with the intent of reintroducing the students back into their home school site. School A cooperates with the local law enforcement and the judicial system to make responsible citizens of students.
who receive services daily. Students receive instruction in problem solving and conflict resolutions, which help students, avoid future problems when they return to the traditional school setting. Students attending school A, who wish to be on a diploma track, are able to earn credits in order to graduate. Students enrolled in school A will remain based at their home school site and will be included in school accountability and state assessments.

Teachers focus on helping each student overcome academic, behavioral and/or social problems. During each child’s stay at school A, teachers and staff members will develop the areas of strength, focus on the areas of weakness, and help each child acquire the tools for success and encourage each child to become a life long learner. Parents are encouraged to play an active role in the education of their child. If, for any reason, parents have questions or concerns, they are encouraged to call for a telephone conference or make an appointment as soon as possible.

Students are assigned membership to the alternative school by the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance upon consultation with the principal and parents. Formal contracts are developed which state the reason students were assigned to the alternative school, the time required to remain in the alternative school and exit requirements.

A student must meet one of the following criteria in order to be considered for membership to alternative school A:

- Released from a correctional institution
- Released from a mental institution
- Suspended from a school two or more times
- Suspended from a school for 10 days
• Expelled from a school

• Students who present a danger to themselves or others on the school campus will be sent immediately to the Alternative school.

Exiting from alternative school A is contingent upon the successful completion of the required attendance and academic requirements. Students with six (6) unexcused absences will be recommended for expulsion from the Alternative school. Students must also agree to participate in counseling sessions, demonstrate appropriate social skills and demonstrate a cooperative and positive attitude.

Students enrolled at school A do not have the right to participate or be spectators in their home school programs, sporting events, or other school sponsored activities. It is the responsibility of the students not to attend these events, and to understand that they are subject to being arrested for trespassing if they choose to attend. Students are not allowed to park on campus. Students are not allowed at any time to be on their home school campus without school A supervision.

The purpose of alternative school A is to provide students, who qualify, with the opportunity to rethink, re-evaluate and redirect their mindsets in a strict and highly disciplined atmosphere. The alternative school for students is a partnership between parents and the staff, which is designed to meet the needs of the students. The staff promises to provide a safe, consistent, and caring environment where students can learn and work to achieve their potential.

The second alternative school used in this study is Alternative School B, which is located in Mississippi services approximately 40 students in grades one through twelve. In Mississippi, the mission of alternative schools is to support academic performance,
behavior modification, functional skills, career education, and employability skills for students who have difficulty adjusting to a standard classroom environment. Student support programs are offered at school B, which include anger management, group and individual counseling, character education programs, guest speakers, yoga, art therapy, pottery, elective classes including journalism, drama and physical education, home visits by the social worker and principal, youth court support and field trips.

The purpose of Alternative School B is to:

- Correct and/or improve the behavior of students through character education and anger management.
- Enhance and maintain a structured learning atmosphere conducive to high quality instructional delivery.
- Enhance and maintain positive social interactions of students and staff.

Goals of Alternative School B are to:

- Improve and assist in the management of behavior in classrooms and other structural group settings.
- Provide students with resources for behavior management and preventive interventions.
- Improve program climate by providing regular feedback to students/parents regarding their behavioral and academic interactions.

School B is a full-day program for students at the elementary, junior high and high school level working toward a regular diploma, occupational diploma, or certificate of attendance. Students in grades 10–12 are offered Nova Net, which is a software designed to recover credits only after failing a class. Nova Net is not an option in the
areas of English II, History, Biology, and Algebra where students take the SATP, which is state wide requirement that needs to be passed in order to graduate.

In order for a student to exit school B, he/she must meet the exit criteria for behavior, attendance and grades, complete one community service project and compose a two-page essay explaining why he/she should be permitted to exit the alternative school. Exit hearings are conducted every nine week term, at the beginning of the week that term exams are conducted, so that principals at the home school could arrange for a smooth transition to begin the following nine week term. The exit hearing should be a formality to grant the student’s return to his/her home school unless the student conducts himself during the hearing in such a manner that causes members of the committee to have serious reservations about returning the student, at that point. Those reservations should be explained in writing and forwarded to the principal.

Students approved for exit from the program at school B may enter the regular academic program of a school only at the beginning of the term. The school board will consider those students recommended for reentry to their home school at the Board’s regularly scheduled meetings.

Alternative School C is the third alternative school used in this study. School C is an alternative school located in Lafayette, Louisiana, which services approximately 60 students. School C accepts students for the following offenses.

- Possession of a weapon in school or at school functions.
- Knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs.
- Sale or solicitation of a controlled substance
- Infliction of serous bodily injury to another person at school, on school
School C program provides all services and modification described in the current Individualized Instructional Plan. A functional behavioral assessment plan is developed for students with these specific needs. School C teaches social skills on a daily basis, uses positive behavior support as well as the Boys Town Well Managed Classroom techniques in an attempt to modify inappropriate behavior.

Seniors who satisfy graduation requirements while enrolled in the program are eligible to receive a diploma, and they may participate in graduation exercises at their home school.

All other students may return to their home school:

- At the end of the recommended expulsion period for weapon or drug offenses.
- Upon successful completion of the Boys Town Well Managed Classroom System as determined by the staff.
- Students may return to their home school at the end of a school year.

Students attending school C are not allowed on any other Lafayette Parish School campus. Violators will be arrested for trespassing.

Students must adhere to the following rules:

- Lafayette Parish School uniforms must be worn at all times on campus.
- Hooded jacket or sweatshirts are allowed.
- No bandannas, wave caps or rags are allowed.
- No jewelry or hats are allowed.
- No backpacks, purses, musical devices or cell phones are allowed.
- The canine unit will search all classrooms at least 12 times a year.
• Medication is allowed on campus only if proper forms have been completed by a physician.

• Aggressive acts towards a staff will result in an arrest.

• Students will be supervised at all times on campus. Students must enter restrooms one at a time. Staff will check restrooms prior to students entering and upon students exiting the restroom.

• All students will be searched with a standard police metal detector upon arriving on the school bus and intermittently during the school day.

• All contraband as listed above will be confiscated by the administrator and returned to the parent on the first offense. Second offense violations will result in items being confiscated and not returned to the parent until the end of the year or upon the exit of the student from school C.

The administrator may determine that a student in the alternative school is eligible for the GED program. In order to qualify for the GED program, a student must reach a 12.9 grade level in reading, math and language.

The fourth alternative school of interest in this study is Alternative School D, which is located in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Approximately 25 students are being serviced at Alternative School D. Alternative students share the same two common educational goals, which are to continue earning credits and passing their classes, and to earn a recommendation to return to their home school. Staff members at the school D focus on helping each student achieve his/her educational goals. Staff members are dedicated to helping each student overcome academic, behavioral and/or social problems. Staff members help each student acquire the tools for success and encourage each student
to become a life long learner.

Regular and punctual school attendance is a vital aspect of developing and maintaining a successful educational experience. Good attendance promotes a sense of responsibility, ensures educational continuity, facilitates academic growth, and prepares the student for his/her future career. Furthermore, daily attendance is important to both the school and the community in that it is the measure by which state funds are allocated to the school.

Teachers and staff members of school D believe that good learning situations depend on the best possible behavior and attitude of students. Students are encouraged to take pride in their appearance and to strive to meet public expectations; therefore, students should be neat and clean. Teachers and/or staff may counsel with students about attire that may not be acceptable. Where there is any doubt that students are adhering to the standards of dress, the principal makes the final decision.

Students enrolled in the school D do not have the right to participate or be spectators in school programs, sporting events, or other school sponsored activities. It is the responsibility of the student not to attend these events, and to understand that they are subject to being arrested for trespassing should they choose to attend.

Each student assigned to school D by the school board has an Individual Instructional Plan (IIP). The IIP emphasis is on academic basic skills in limited content areas of Math, Science, English, Social Studies, Career and Behavior Modification. The student’s individual needs above the basics are addressed while the IIP is being developed by the student, teachers, parent and counselor. Computer assisted instruction is employed when available and appropriated to the instruction of those in the
program. Students receive progress reports and grade reports each academic term.

Instruction of the student is scheduled to reflect the IIP. If the student is a special education student, the schedule will reflect both the IIP and the IEP. All schedules require a full-day attendance with rigorous workload and minimal time off. Students are supervised at all times during school hours.

Regular and punctual school attendance is a vital aspect of developing and maintaining a successful educational experience at school D. Good attendance promotes a sense of responsibility, ensures educational continuity, facilitates academic growth, and prepares the student for his/her future career. Furthermore, daily attendance is important to both the school and the community in that it is the measure by which state funds are allocated to the school. While it is the school’s belief that students have the primary responsibility for school attendance to all school classes, the school also recognizes that the parents, teachers, administrators and other school personnel share in that responsibility.

Students are allowed to return to their home school on the date determined by the school board at the time they were placed in school D or by the date the IEP determines to be the release date. A student is not allowed to return early unless he/she qualifies for early release as outlined by the school board. A student may, by Mississippi Code, be assigned additional time at school D if he/she is not showing improvement in academics, behavior, attitude and attendance. Pending school board approval, a student may qualify for early release after serving 4/5 of the assigned time. A student may not be presented to the school board for early release unless proof of improvement is evident. This proof will be determined by the school D Individual Instruction Plan (IIP) Committee, and then will
be sent to a screening committee consisting of the Alternative D principal, home school principal and the counselor.

Data collection

The following steps were taken to collect data from the participants. A voluntary sampling technique was employed: Requests were made in writing to principals and superintendents of selected school districts to receive permission for their students to participate in the study (Appendices A, B, C and D). Permission was granted from each superintendent or principal in each school district (Appendices E, F, G and H).

The study proposal was submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Review Committee (Appendix I). Permission was granted to conduct the study from the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Review Committee (Appendix J).

A survey was developed to collect data regarding student perception, as described. Consent forms were sent home to parents requesting permission for students' participation in the survey (Appendix K). All students whose parents granted permission were able to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The researcher of this study designed a two-part, self-report questionnaire to look at students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness in two alternative schools in Mississippi and two alternative schools in Louisiana (Appendix L). The researcher used structured or closed-ended questions, which have answers to choose from for each question.
While developing the survey, the researcher concentrated on being as concise as possible in order to have a valid sampling for the study. Since a longer survey, or longer survey questions may result in students skipping questions or responding to questions without actually reading them, conciseness in the instrument was considered desirable. The researcher also focused on developing a survey that contained vocabulary, which was age appropriate and understandable for students in order to obtain a valid sampling for the study.

The first section of the instrument was designed to use as a data collection device based primarily on the need for collection of student demographic data:

- Date of birth
- Gender
- Grade level
- Race
- Age
- The length of time the student had attended an alternative school.
- The type of program the student was currently enrolled in at the alternative school. Programs included regular education, special education or GED program.
- Was the student ordered by the court to be in school?
- Was the student’s attendance better at the alternative school setting?
- Does the school notify a parent or guardian when the student is absent from school?
- Does the student feel successful at the alternative school setting?
• The household living arrangements of the student. Does the student live with mother, live with father, live with both mother and father, live with grandparents or live with a legal guardian?

The second part of the self-report questionnaire was designed to use as a data collection device based on the need for collection to ascertain students’ perceptions of student-centered school culture. Questions 14-19 measured the independent variable, safe environment

• I feel safe at this school.
• The environment at my school is comfortable.
• Discipline is handled fair and consistent at my school.
• The size of the classes makes conflicts less frequent at my school.
• The smaller classes help me to feel physically safe while at school.
• I know class rules, expectations, and consequences at my school.

Questions 20 – 23 measured the independent variable, small size and community climate

• My test scores are higher because of the small class sizes.
• The smaller class allows me to get more individual attention at my school.
• The smaller class size allows the teacher to provide more appropriate attention.
• The smaller class size at my school minimizes distraction while learning.

Questions 24 – 27 measured the independent variable, expanded teacher role

• My advisor meets with me daily to discuss school problems or personal problems.
• My academic teachers counsel with me when I am having problems at school.

• My teachers teach me about Character Education as well as academic subjects.

• My teachers discuss ways to deal with anger and resolve conflict.

Questions 28–33 on the survey measured the independent variable, positive student-teacher/staff relationships

• The teachers and staff members at my school are fair and patient with me.

• The teachers at my school are concerned about my academic progress.

• My teachers are genuinely concerned about my well being as a person.

• The teachers at my schoolwork toward building trust with students.

• The teachers are friendly toward students at my school.

• My teachers are committed to helping me at school.

Questions 34–39 and question 42 measured the independent variable, academic innovation

• My grades are better at this school.

• I am on track with learning.

• The GED program is an option at my school.

• I am learning to work with others.

• I am learning new work and life skills.

• I have a variety of learning experience.

Questions 40, 41 and 43 measured the independent variable, supportive services

• A police officer visits my school often.
• Guest speakers visit my school weekly.
• The principal communicates with my probation officer.

The last section of the self-report questionnaire was designed to use as a data collection device based primarily on the need for collection to ascertain students' perceptions on school effectiveness in the four alternative schools. Questions 44 – 48 measured the dependent variables, which were multiple dimensions of school effectiveness, of the four selected alternative schools.

• I believe that being in this school makes it more likely for me to graduate with a diploma from high school.
• Experiences in this school help me have a more positive self-image.
• I perceive a sense of belonging at this school.
• I actively participate more at this school.
• I believe that I have greater academic and social success at this school.

The six independent variables measuring student-centered school culture, safe environment, small size and community climate, expanded teacher role, positive student-teacher/staff relationships, academic innovation and supportive services were combined together to create the composite variable of overall student-centered school culture differentiating the selected alternative schools used in the study.

The survey was submitted to a panel of three experts in the field of regular education and two experts in the field of special education to examine the face validity, content validity, and appropriateness of the instruments. Suggested changes by the panel of experts included using language that respondents would understand and structuring questions to provide the exact information the researcher desired in order to measure the
students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness among alternative schools. A pilot test was completed by conducting a pretest of all questions on a small group of students similar to the ones to be surveyed.

In responding to items 14 - 48, participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement using a 5-point scale: 5= strongly agree to 1= strongly disagree. On this scale, a high score of 5= strongly agree indicated a positive perception; whereas, a low score of 1= strongly disagree represented a negative perception. All questions on the scale specifically addressed school effectiveness and student-centered school culture of the four alternative schools selected in the study.

The decision to use multiple schools was made in order to increase variability in student-centered school culture and school effectiveness as perceived by students so that any differences in perception of school effectiveness may be more likely captured. Further, use of multiple schools increased sample size and increased validity of the findings by enhancing generalizability.

Procedures

The target population consisted of all students in four alternative schools, all being urban in nature. Two alternative schools were located in Mississippi and two alternative schools were located in Louisiana. Parent Information Letters and questionnaires were mailed to the four alternative schools in early September. Parent Information Letters were first sent home with every student attending the selected alternative schools used in the study, which requested permission for their child to participate in the study. Parent Information and consent letters were signed by parents granting permission for their children to complete the surveys. Students completed the
surveys and returned them to an assigned teacher, who proceeded to return them to the researcher. Parent Information Letters and questionnaires were mailed to the four principals who agreed to participate in the study. Voluntary participants whose parents granted permission among the four alternative schools completed the questionnaires and returned them to a designated school administrator. He/she in turn collected all surveys and mailed them back to the researcher.

Quantitative Data Analysis

All student data was transferred from the instrument to Microsoft Excel to be transferred to SPSS, a statistical analysis computer software program. A multiple regression analysis was conducted in this research project to evaluate how well student-centered school cultural measures predicted perceived school effectiveness. A multiple linear regression was also used to evaluate the independent variables (student-centered school culture) on the dependent variables (school effectiveness of four alternative schools). The multiple linear regression analysis was followed by a post hoc univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each significant independent variable to validate statistically significant relationships. A significance level of .05 was used to test the hypotheses. Data was entered into SPSS for analysis. The results are discussed in detail in Chapters IV and V of this document.

Summary

This study measured the students' perception of the services and characteristics provided by the alternative schools they attend. The four alternative schools are all similar in nature as they are student centered, located in the south, small in size, and service students who were not successful in the traditional school environment. The
questionnaire was used to obtain demographic data as well as the data concerning the variables. All questions were analyzed by experts in the field of education.

The study is sound in its subject matter and methodology. The researcher secured a broad based consistent population of participants. Multiple regression was implemented to insure accuracy. The dependent and independent variables have all been clearly defined.
CHAPTER IV
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides descriptive data and findings from the analyses of the data generated from the study, statistical tests for the study hypothesis, and ancillary findings. The statistical analyses include a list and description of the variables selected, or the quantitative portion of the study and the research design used to analyze the data.

The research question was stated as follows: Are alternative school student perceptions of school culture predictive of their perceptions of school effectiveness? The hypothesis was stated as follows: There is a statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perceptions of school effectiveness among the four alternative schools represented in this study.

The literature indicates that school cultures that are more student-centered are related to greater school effectiveness. Data from the 104 participants surveyed were analyzed against the test hypothesis: results are described in subsequent sections.

This study investigated the perceptions held by students in two alternative schools in urban settings in Mississippi and in two alternative schools in urban settings in Louisiana. The investigator focused on students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. In this study the dependent variable was the perception of school effectiveness in the four alternative schools. The independent variable of the study was student-centered school culture

Survey Response

The return rate on the surveys among the four schools used in this study was 58%, which was relatively high based on the enrollment at each alternative school and due to
the method of distribution for the surveys. Parent Information Letters were mailed to the
two participating schools in Mississippi and the two participating schools in Louisiana
during the Fall of the 2006 – 2007 school year. The researcher requested that the
secretary in each school have parents sign the Parent Information Letter during Intake
Meetings as students completed the registration process in each alternative school setting.

Each alternative school secretary explained to parents that each student would be
asked to complete a survey. Questions on the survey would reflect their perceptions of
student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. Students would be asked to
complete a survey in a designated area within the school building within the few months
of school. The questionnaire consisted of 48 questions gaining insight on students’
perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness of alternative
school education. The researcher communicated periodically with secretaries and
administrators to check on the progress of the return rate.

As the researcher was collecting information on specific administrative policies
and studying the operations and management of each alternative school, complications
arose. Permission to gather data at one school in Mississippi was denied because the
administrator was in the process of revising and reprinting the handbook for the new
school year. This same administrator decided that the decision to participate in the study
was too time consuming based on other duties and responsibilities throughout the school
day and decided to decline from participating in the study. After several conversations,
the researcher convinced the administrator that the data were needed in order to complete
the study. The administrator reconsidered and made the decision to participate in the
study.
Demographic Data

The decision was made to use multiple schools in order to increase variability in student-centered school culture and school effectiveness as perceived by students so that any differences in perception of school effectiveness could be more readily captured. Further, use of multiple schools increased sample size, thus increasing validity of the findings by enhancing generalizability.

Of the four alternative schools used in the study, 104 students participated. Of the total, 77.9% of the students were in grades seven through twelve with the highest percentage of students (24%) being in ninth grade (Table 1). There were substantially more boys (71%) than girls (28%) represented among the four alternative schools (Table 2). The largest racial groups represented among the subjects in this study were 48% Blacks and 43% whites (Table 3). Most students (70.2%) had spent less than one year in an alternative school program, followed by 13.5% students attending an alternative school one year only and lastly 9.6 attending an alternative school two years (Table 4). Of the four alternative schools used by the researcher, 77.9% of students who participated in the study were in regular education, 12.5% students were in special education and 5.8% students were enrolled in the GED program (Table 5).
Table 1

*Frequencies for Grade*

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Table 2

Frequencies for Gender

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Table 3

Frequencies for Race

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### Table 4

**Frequencies for Number of Years Attending Alternative Schools**

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<td>1 Year</td>
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### Table 5

**Frequencies for Academic Programs**

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<td>Spec Educ</td>
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<tr>
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A relatively small proportion of the students (20%) had been ordered by the courts to be in school (see Table 6). More students had better attendance in the alternative school program (79.8%) compared to their attendance in the traditional school setting (Table 7). Students enrolled at the four alternative schools used in this research project stated that the attendance policies kept more of them in school (67%) compared to the traditional school setting (Table 8). A vast majority of alternative school students among the four alternative schools reported that the secretary or a representative from the school notifies their parent or guardian when he/she is absent from school (91%) (Table 9).

Among all students participating in the study, 39% of the students lived with their mothers, 11% of the students lived with their fathers, 33% of the students lived with both parents, 8% lived with their grandparent(s) and 6% of the students lived with a legal guardian (Table 10).

Table 6

Frequencies for Court Ordered Status

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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Frequencies for Improved Attendance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Frequencies for Attendance Policies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

*Frequencies for Absentee Notification Policy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

*Frequencies for Household Living Arrangements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Guardians</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptive Statistics

The criterion, or dependent, variable in this study is school effectiveness, a composite variable which encompasses students’ perceptions about their likelihood to graduate, self-image, increased participation in school activities and sense of belonging at school. According to survey results, 77% of all students reported that they feel successful in an alternative school setting compared to 19% who do not feel successful in an alternative school setting (Table 11). The mean score for the composite school effectiveness variable for all four schools was 3.8 on a scale of 1 – 5 (Table 12).

Table 11

Frequencies for Feeling Successful at Alternative School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12

Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables (N = 100)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe School</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Size</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded Teacher Roles</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Innovation</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Services</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six predictor, or independent, variables are the students’ sense of safety at school, expanded teacher roles, class size and community climate, positive teacher-student relationships, academic innovation and supportive services. The mean scores for the six predictors ranged from 2.9 (supportive services) to 4.1 (positive teacher-student relationships) on a scale of 1 – 5 (Table 12). The independent variables may also be considered together to represent student-centered school culture. This composite view of independent variables is represented in Table 13, which shows ratings of student-centeredness at the four represented schools. On a scale of 1 – 5, the four schools received ratings from 3.3 to 4.2 on the student-centered school culture variable.
Table 13

**Composite Predictor Variable: Student-Centered School Culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
<th>School D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlational Statistics**

Results of the analyses show a statistically significant relationship between perceptions of student-centered school culture and perceptions of school effectiveness among the four alternative schools. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well the cultural measures predicted perceived school effectiveness. The predictors were the six cultural indices, while the criterion variable was the overall effectiveness index. The linear combination of cultural measures was significantly related to the effectiveness index, $R^2 = .472$, $R^2_{adj} = .438$, $F(6, 93) = 13.87$, $p < .001$ (Tables 14 and 15). The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .69, indicating that approximately 47% of the variance of the effectiveness index in the sample can be accounted for by the linear combination of cultural measures (Table 14). Table 16 below presents a summary of the regression coefficients.

Table 14

**Model Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.687</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.79875</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15

*ANOVA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>53.095</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.849</td>
<td>13.870</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>59.335</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>.638</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112.430</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16

Coefficients for Model Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Bivariate r</th>
<th>Partial r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe Environment</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.403</td>
<td>.688</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Size</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>1.424</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td>.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Role</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>1.033</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.528</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Student</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>1.263</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td>.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Innovation</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>3.412</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td>.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Services</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>-.108</td>
<td>-1.125</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>-.264</td>
<td>-0.116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 17 indices indicating the relative strength of the individual predictors are presented. All the bivariate correlations between the culture measures and the effectiveness index were positive and statistically significant ($p<.01$). Only the partial correlation between the culture measure “academic innovation” and the effectiveness index was significant.

The independent variables chosen for this study were supported in the literature.
describing effective alternative schools. However, there was no available theory to predict which of these school characteristics contributed to actual or student-perceived school effectiveness. Therefore, this analysis of independent variables was useful for indicating the relative effectiveness of school culture elements when predicting student-perceived success.

The partial regression coefficients in the multiple regression analysis described the relationships between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables. The remaining independent variables were held constant at the point that an individual variable was assessed for its relative contribution to the predictive linear equation. In this study, the partial regression coefficients showed that the only significantly predictive element in the linear equation was academic innovation. The other five variables (safe environment, class size, teacher role, teacher-student relationship, and supportive services) did not add enough to the prediction of the dependent variable to retain it in the prediction equation.
Table 17

*Bivariate and Partial Correlations of the Predictors with Effectiveness Index*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Correlations between each Predictor and the Effectiveness Index</th>
<th>Correlation between each Predictor and the Effectiveness Index Controlling for all other Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Size</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Role</td>
<td>.53*</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationship</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Innovation</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<.01

Summary

The variables chosen for this study were supported by the literature describing effective alternative schools. Each item was analyzed for accuracy. The data collected clearly showed a relationship between student centered culture and student perceived effectiveness. Cultural factors which make a difference are safety, school size, expanded teacher role, positive relationships, academic innovation and supportive services. Academic Innovation was the single most important predictor describing effective alternative schools specifically as it was twice as stronger than other variables described.
in this study as perceived by alternative school students. The study suggests the need for further inquiry in other areas of the school environment and over a larger study group, but the variables tested were relevant within the context of the hypothesis.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The final chapter is divided into three sections. The Conclusions section is discussed in two phases: (a) a summary of the study, and (b) a discussion of the findings in the study. The second section of this chapter will discuss the limitations of the study. The third section, Recommendations, is divided into two sections: (a) recommendations for further research and study, and (b) recommendations for school districts who service alternative school students and recommendations for alternative school administrators who would benefit from additional understanding of perceptions held by students in alternative school settings.

Conclusions

Summary of the Research Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of alternative school students in relation to student-centered school culture and school effectiveness in the four selected alternative schools. In this study the dependent variable was the perception of school effectiveness in the four alternative schools. School effectiveness in this context is defined as educating and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally. Indices include:

- Students more likely to graduate
- Sense of belonging
- Greater academic and social success

The independent variable was student-centered school culture, which is operationalized by:
- Safe environment
- Small size and community climate
- Expanded teacher roles
- Positive teacher/student relationships
- Academic innovation
- Supportive Services

Constraints on Generalization of Findings

The following information and conditions constrained the generalization of the research study findings.

1. This research study was limited to four alternative schools, two being located in Louisiana and two being located in Mississippi. The quantitative study included 104 participants, which was a relatively small sample.

2. The research study and questions used in the survey were research created.

3. One school district in this research project declined, and then later agreed to participate in the research. It is likely that this particular alternative school did not put as much effort into collecting Parent Information Letters as the other schools who participated in the study, therefore decreasing sample size.

Discussion of the Findings

The results provide a clearer picture and better understanding of effective alternative schools. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well the cultural measures predicted perceived school effectiveness. The predictors were the six cultural indices, while the criterion variable was the overall effectiveness index. The major hypothesis indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between
students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perceptions of school
effectiveness among the four alterative school represented in this study was supported.

The research project was a quantitative study to gain a better perspective of the
students' perceptions of alternative school students in relation to student-centered school
culture and school effectiveness in two alternative schools in Mississippi and two
alternative schools in Louisiana. The findings indicated that the six independent variables
listed below have an impact on student-perceived school effectiveness (students are more
likely to graduate, students' sense of belonging, and students’ achievement of achieve
greater academic and social success).

- Safe environment
- Small size and community climate
- Expanded teacher role
- Positive student-teacher/staff relationships
- Academic innovation
- Supportive services

The researcher calculated and analyzed the overall scores for student-centered
school culture and the school effectiveness for the four alternative schools used in the
study. In relation to student centered school culture, the participants in the study agreed
that the alternative school environment is safe and comfortable. Students reported that
discipline was handled fair and consistently at their schools. Students agreed that the
smaller classes reduced the amount of conflicts and helped students to feel physically
safe at school. Lastly, students were well aware of classroom rules, expectations and
consequences, which contribute to a safe environment.
In relation to the independent variable, small size and community, the students agreed that this variable made a difference in school effectiveness. Students agreed that their test scores were higher because of the small class sizes and that the smaller classes contributed to the students getting more one on one attention. The students voiced that the smaller class sizes minimized distractions while learning and allowed the teacher to provide more appropriate instruction.

The third independent variable, expanded teacher roles, teachers have a wide variety of responsibilities and roles as an educator. During the school day, a specific time is allotted for teachers to advise students on academic or personal concerns. During advisement time, the teacher focuses on a social skill, which helps students to make better decisions, to deal with anger and resolve conflict. Teaching character education enables the students to function successfully in society today.

In regard to the independent variable, positive student and teacher relationship, teachers concentrate on building trust with individual students; the teachers are actually a voice for students. Results from the survey indicate that teachers and staff members are fair and patient and are genuinely concerned about the students' well being as individuals. The students also reported that their teachers are friendly toward them and are committed to help them to be successful in school.

The independent variable was the best predictor of effective alternative schools as perceived by students was academic innovation within the four alternative school settings. Academic innovation was a construct that was measured through programs that emphasized basic skills, literacy skills, social skills, personal development, individualized instruction, flexible scheduling and a variety of teaching and learning techniques. Students
stated that their grades were better in the alternative school setting and were on track with learning. Participants also reported that they were learning to work with others and were committed to learning new work and life skills. Students reported that electives such as Physical Education, Drama, Journalism and Art were available at the alternative school setting. Academic innovation in comparison to other independent variables was twice as strong as other predictors and was the single most important factor related to students describing their alternative schools as effective.

The correlation between each predictor and the effectiveness index controlling for all other predictors are ranged in order from the most important factor to least important, academic innovation (.33), school size and community climate (.15), positive student-teacher/staff relationships (.13), support services (.12), expanded teacher role (.11), and safe environment (.04). From these results, students basically indicated the predictor, academic innovation, was at least twice as important than other variables, safe environment, small size and community climate, expanded teacher role, positive student-teacher/staff relationships and supportive services in determining whether they would graduate from school, participate more at school, feel better about themselves, feel a sense of belonging of school, and gain greater academic and social success at the assigned alternative school.

The last independent variable measured supportive services. Results from the questionnaire indicated that the instructional leader was actively involved with the youth court judicial system. The students reported that a police officer visits the school often and that the principal communicated with the probation officer assigned to specific students. Survey results validated that guest speakers visit weekly to speak to students.
within the alternative school setting.

The dependent variable, school effectiveness, was proven to have a relationship and was supported by the six independent variables, which created a student-centered school culture. Students agreed that being within the alternative school setting made it more likely for the students to graduate with a diploma from high school, and also had greater academic and social success within the alternative school setting. Experiences at the alternative school helped them have a more positive self-image therefore increasing their self-confidence and self-image. Students agreed that they perceived a sense of belonging within the alternative school setting; therefore, they participated more at the alternative school.

The researcher discovered over the years that many students who are disruptive and disrespectful come from home environments where the parents themselves had negative school experiences. Many students also come from homes where the adults in their lives have been unreliable, unresponsive, abusive or simply overwhelmed and unable to meet their children's needs for motivation and support. As a result, some young children beginning elementary school do not instinctively trust their teachers. When asked to perform a task, cooperate or participate in class, their responses are often negative and defiant, eventually classified as disruptive behavior.

A student must trust his/her educators and believe that they genuinely care in order for that student to be motivated or cooperate and ultimately learn. Behavior management efforts are doomed if a student does not trust; therefore, educators must work hard toward building trust with their students. Building trust with a difficult student must be an ongoing process beginning with the educator that requires a change in
Developing empathy and building trust are not simple tasks. They take consistent effort, skill and commitment, especially with a student who is defiant, disruptive or uncooperative. It also takes time and energy, but educators already spend an abundant amount of time "managing" their classrooms. So why not spend the time in a positive way that will help the student become successful and simultaneously build a trusting relationship.

Building trust with students involves planning. Educators must take specific steps to establish a positive relationship with the difficult student. They will have to take the time to develop and implement behavior management strategies that recognize each student's needs. Successful, proactive teachers give thought to planning their responses to difficult students. Although this type of planning requires time and energy, educators have to communicate in a manner that is responsive and caring yet consistent and firm.

Findings Relative to Research

The results of this study of effectiveness in alternative education support previous studies of this topic. As indicated previously, other research asserts that student-centered school cultural measures predict perceived school effectiveness. Research prior to this study validates the relationship between students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perception of school effectiveness. Research by Berman, Minicucci, McLaughlin, McLeod, Nelson and Woodworth (1995) illustrates that academic innovation through the use of portfolios by assessing students to meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the regular classroom. The present study affirmed that students perceive that they are able to self assess their behavior, make better
choices, and do better in their academic subjects, thus allowing them to be successful in the classroom setting.

Gottfredson's findings (as cited in Gregg, 1999) that alternative schools that have clear expectations and goals have students with positive behavior are affirmed by the results of the present study, which indicate that the variable safe environment is important to students as a dimension of school effectiveness. Students are able to make better choices and grades in a school where there are clear expectations and consistency. Conclusions from Griffin, Richardson, & Lane (1994) that students feel more comfortable and are provided more appropriate attention at a smaller school are reinforced by the finding in the present study that small size and community climate are viewed by students as positive dimensions of alternative school effectiveness. His results are also supported by findings relative to positive student-teacher relationships, because students connected in a positive manner with students and teachers at the alternative school because it was a smaller school setting. The present study also affirmed the conclusions of Wiest et al. (2001) regarding positive student-teacher relationships within effective alternative schools. Both pieces of research indicated that alternative schools that are successful have teachers who encourage good communication by building trust and relationships.

Gay's (2002) research reinforces that the factors of student-perceived school effectiveness are influenced by the instructional techniques that are practiced daily by teachers. School effectiveness is enhanced by allowing students to complete hands-on assignments, encouraging collaboration among students in learning projects and modeling what is expected of students. Applying these instructional practices to daily
lesson plans prompt students to participate more at school making it more likely for them to graduate from high school. The present study is consistent with these findings from this previous study.

This present study also indicates that, while other variables are associated with alternative school effectiveness, academic innovation is the most significant construct relative to students’ perceptions of quality alternative school education. This finding is not entirely consistent with extant literature, which suggests that other variables are as powerful or more powerful in predicting alternative school effectiveness. Examples of these variables include student-teacher/staff relationships (James, 2001), expanded teacher role (Myll, 1988), and small size and community climate (Jax, 1998).

The results from the present study on students’ perceptions of student-centered school culture and their perceptions of school effectiveness validate and support the findings of the previous research. Results from the present study provide a clearer picture and better understanding of effective alternative schools; these findings can serve as tools for school administrators who are new to the field of alternative education. This study also gives insight into the relative importance of the variables in predicting alternative school success.

The findings of this research project supported much of the literature on effective methods to support at-risk students. Traditional schools frequently use teacher-centered approaches like lectures and worksheets. Many students who are required to submit to teacher-centered methods are not able to adjust successfully to that learning style and may feel lost in the traditional setting yet traditional schools do not generally have the flexibility to adapt to the student’s learning style needs when the student fails to thrive.
under the teacher-centered culture (Griffin et. al, 1994; Parnell & Miller, 1982, 1998; and Pittman (1986) These students may succeed in a different, or more innovative, student-centered learning environment. James (2001) predicted that students would be more likely to stay in school when the curriculum included more practical lessons and attention to personal development and life skills in a more caring and connected environment. Indeed, the results of this study indicate that alternative school students perceive that they are, and will become, more successful in this type of environment, particularly with regard to the types of academic innovation James (2001) described.

However, this study did not fully support the literature student perceptions of school culture and their own lack of success. McCall (2003) reported that students connected failure to finish school with lack of respect from teachers and poor relationships in general with teachers and staff. While respect and positive relationships are considered part of student-centered school culture and were included the overall measure of student-centeredness in this research project, those elements were not shown to be significant in the overall mix of student-centeredness as it related to how students predicted their own success. Instead, academic innovation was the more important variable in students’ perceptions. This researcher found no advance support in the literature for academic innovation as the more important element that would connect student-centeredness and student success, yet this was the result of the present study. This finding presents a potentially important insight into the support elements in alternative school settings, and bears further investigation.
Implications

Recommendations for Future Research and Study

This study on alternative school education looked at the students’ perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. Questions for further research include:

1. While the other five variables safe environment, small size and community climate, expanded teacher roles, positive teacher/student relationships and supportive services did not figure significantly into the multiple regression equation that predicted student-perceived school effectiveness, these results do not suggest that those five variables are unimportant in effective school cultures. Additional research should be conducted to consider actual, versus perceived, school effectiveness measures. Repeat studies would be useful to validate the findings of this study and give further insight into the relative importance of these and similar variables in predicting alternative school success. Also, future research should be conducted to gain deeper understanding about what the significant variable, academic innovation, and about how other variables might support academic innovation.

2. A study could be done to consider which elements, including the five variables, safe environment, small size and community climate, expanded teacher roles, positive teacher/student relationships, supportive services as well as other variables such as extended school year and teacher experience, are related to, or supportive of, the variable called academic innovation. It would be useful to know, for instance, if class size, teacher roles, or school
year length are related to improved grades, varied learning experiences, and the other elements that make up the “academic innovation” measure. Further, the concept of academic innovation should be explored further to find out which components are most significant within that measure. The components used in this study, and others (such as innovative teaching methods, tutoring programs, etc.) should be evaluated to determine the most predictive composite of variables for the overall measure.

3. In light of the findings on academic innovation, a study of this variable’s relationship to students’ perceptions of school effectiveness is needed. It is recommended that each school place an emphasis on academic innovation within their curriculum characterized by programs that emphasize basic skills, literacy skills, social skills, flexible scheduling, individualized instruction, variety of teaching and learning techniques, social skills, personal development and behavior modification. After developing a plan to place an emphasis on the factors which influence academic innovation, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study among these four alternative schools, and perhaps other alternative schools.

4. Since results showed academic innovation as the most significant link between a student-centered alternative school culture and students’ expectations of success, more research should be done first to validate and expand on this finding, and also to explore the aspects of academic innovation that are most important to student success. Academic innovation, in this project, meant programs that emphasize basic skills, literacy skills, GED and
programs that focus on social skills, personal development, and behavior.

Additional investigations should look at these elements separately or in various combinations to discover the relative usefulness of each of these types of programs in terms of students' perceived and actual success in alternative school programs. Researchers might also consider various approaches and methodologies for these programs to identify and compare best practices for these programs across alternative schools. Finally, it would be useful to consider whether academic innovation or particular program elements within “academic innovation,” is more or less helpful to different students based on any relevant descriptor, such as grade level, age, length of time in alternative school or behavioral history.

5. Research could be conducted to determine administrator, teacher and staff perceptions of student-centered school culture in relations to school effectiveness.

6. There should be a longitudinal study conducted to determine the success rate of alternative school students beyond the high school level.

7. Studies could be conducted to compare the perception of alternative school students within alternative school that are operated differently.

8. Studies could be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of a full time social worker in an alternative school setting. Specifically, a study could analyze the effectiveness of behavior before and after program implementation.

9. Studies could be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of a full time behavior specialist in an alternative school setting. Specifically, analyze the
effectiveness of behavior before and after program implementation.

10. Studies should be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of therapeutic programs such as yoga, pottery and Art/Play Therapy and Physical Education, Vocational Programs, Journalism and Drama in an alternative school setting before and after program implementation.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Through related literature and the study conducted, the author learned useful information that may be beneficial to the future of alternative school education. The following are recommendations for policy and practice in school districts with alternative school programs.

1. The importance of the “academic innovation” measure is useful for directing attention to comparing and learning innovative academic practices across alternative schools, trying new programs and policies that support academic innovation, providing professional development support for teachers and staff in this area, and finding other ways to leverage this predictor of student-perceived success. Teachers could gain additional knowledge through researching programs that focus on social skills, personal development and how to handle disruptive behavior. Teachers should create individualized lesson plans, which involve a variety of teaching and learning techniques to meet the needs of challenging students.

2. School administrators should make an effort to enhance the alternative school setting by including a full-time social worker on the faculty to integrate character education within the school to address issues of self-esteem, social
interactions, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and self-value in the lives of all students within the alternative school setting.

3. School administrators should have a behavior specialist, teacher, social worker or staff member on the faculty to conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment on each student. A Functional Behavior Assessment is a process of examining antecedents and consequences for the purpose of determining why, or under what circumstance(s), the problem behavior occurs.

4. Instructional leaders, teachers and staff members of alternative school setting should have school-wide management system for students that include a positive reinforcement plan. The system is designed based on sound empirical practices for students who display inappropriate social and behavioral problems that prevent them from meeting with success in the typical school setting. The system is based on a strong teaching model that holds as its central assumption the belief that most students who are place at the alternative school setting do not possess the social or behavioral skills that would allow them to be successful in the typical school setting.

5. Alternative school principals should provide ongoing professional development to educate teachers on ways to better meet the needs of students at risk. Principals should encourage teachers to stay updated and educated by reading books, professional journals and articles.

6. Alternative schools should implement programs such as yoga, pottery, drama and art, which would provide students with tools to deal with anger management and relaxation techniques.
7. Alternative school teachers and staff members must make a conscious effort to build trust with difficult students. Trust is the foundation upon which everything a teacher needs to accomplish with a student must be built.

8. Alternative schools should have a comprehensive intervention program based on peer student training, counseling referrals, social services, the police department, the youth court system and support from the school district.

9. Alternative schools should have an anger management program, which provides students with the necessary tools to deal with anger problems.

Summary

Student centered alternative education is a viable public school reform. The literature researched indicates that school districts are typically pleased with programs that enhance student performance and provide alternatives to dropping out. Parents are pleased to see their children exceed expectations. The data on welfare, food stamps and prisons clearly show that the fewer dropouts the easier the burden on society. Parents are pleased to see their children exceed expectations. Teachers and administrators are always pleased with manageable, productive, respectful classes, and this study indicates that the students agree that their schools that reach out to them are helping them to become successful.
APPENDIX A
PERMISSION LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

August 22, 2006

Principal, Carleen Doucet
Lafayette Alternative Program
801 Mudd Ave
Lafayette, LA 70501

Dear Ms. Doucet:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is dealing with the students' perceptions of two alternative schools in urban school districts in Mississippi and two alternative schools in urban school districts in Louisiana.

With your permission, the students in your district will receive a survey to complete concerning their view of alternative school education. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study. The names of students will not be disclosed within this study.

I would appreciate your permission to allow your students to participate in this study. Please email, fax, or mail me a letter stating that I have permission to conduct this study. If I need to supply any further information, please let me know. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840
APPENDIX B

PERMISSION LETTER TO FACILITATOR

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

August 22, 2006

Facilitator, Michael Wright
Alternative Program, Vermilion Parish
904 North Fredrick Street
Kaplan, LA 70548

Dear Mr. Wright:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am pursuing a
doctorate in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is dealing with the students’
perceptions of two alternative schools in urban school districts in Mississippi and two
alternative schools in urban school districts in Louisiana.

With your permission, the students in your district will receive a survey to complete
concerning their view of alternative school education. Anonymity and confidentiality
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within this study.

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If I need to supply any further information, please let me know. Thank you for your
cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840
APPENDIX C
PERMISSION LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

June 16, 2006

Dr. Paul Tisdale, Superintendent
Biloxi Public Schools
P.O. Box 168
Biloxi, MS 39533

Dear Dr. Tisdale:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is dealing with the students’ perceptions of two alternative schools in urban school districts in Mississippi and two alternative schools in urban school districts in Louisiana.

With your permission, the students in your district will receive a survey to complete concerning their view of alternative school education. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study. The names of students will not be disclosed within this study.

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Sincerely,

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840
APPENDIX D

PERMISSION LETTER TO ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

August 9, 2006

Mr. Peresich
Assistant Superintendent
Ocean Springs School District
P.O. Box 7002
Ocean Springs, MS 39566-7002

Dear Mr. Peresich:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am pursuing a
doctorate in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is dealing with the students’
perceptions of two alternative schools in urban school districts in Mississippi and two
alternative schools in urban school districts in Louisiana.

With your permission, the students in your district will receive a survey to complete
concerning their view of alternative school education. Anonymity and confidentiality
will be maintained throughout this study. The names of students will not be disclosed
within this study.

I would appreciate your permission to allow your students to participate in this study.
Pleased email, fax, or mail me a letter stating that I have permission to conduct this study.
If I need to supply any further information, please let me know. Thank you for your
cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840
APPENDIX E

PERMISSION LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

August 22, 2006

Principal, Carleen Doucet
Lafayette Alternative Program
801 Mudd Ave
Lafayette, LA 70501

Dear Ms. Doucet:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is dealing with the students' perceptions of two alternative schools in urban school districts in Mississippi and two alternative schools in urban school districts in Louisiana.

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Sincerely,

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840

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Vermilion Parish Alternative Program

904 N. Frederick
Kaplan, La. 70548
Mr. Michael C. Wright, Facilitator
(337) 643-6178

August 23, 2006

Principal S. Alice Duggan
Center for New Opportunities
2829 Pass Rd.
Biloxi, MS 39531

Dear Miss Duggan:

First of all, let me say that I certainly enjoyed speaking with you yesterday. Hopefully we will stay in touch with each other to share ideas, strategies, interventions, etc. As per our conversation, we are delighted to assist you in your endeavor as you pursue a doctorate in Educational Leadership. Please let it be known that we will do whatever we can to help you achieve this goal. Please forward the information you need our students to complete. We will see to it that it is done and send the information back to you. Again, please feel free to call on us at any time.

Sincerely,

Rev. Michael C. Wright
Rev. Michael C. Wright, Facilitator

mwright@vrlk12.la.us
APPENDIX G

PERMISSION LETTER FROM SUPERINTENDENT

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

June 16, 2006

Dr. Paul Tisdale, Superintendent
Biloxi Public Schools
P.O. Box 168
Biloxi, MS 39533

Dear Dr. Tisdale:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is dealing with the students' perceptions of two alternative schools in urban school districts in Mississippi and two alternative schools in urban school districts in Louisiana.

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I would appreciate your permission to allow your students to participate in this study. Pleased email, fax, or mail me a letter stating that I have permission to conduct this study. If I need to supply any further information, please let me know. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840
PERMISSION LETTER FROM ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

August 9, 2006

Mr. Peresich
Assistant Superintendent
Ocean Springs School District
P.O. Box 7002
Ocean Springs, MS 39566-7002

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Sincerely,

S. Alice Duggan
alice.duggan@biloxischools.net
(228) 388-3840

(Approved)

[Signature]

[Reply]

[Signature]
APPENDIX 1

IRB APPLICATION FORM

S. Alice Duggan

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Project Narrative

1. Project Goals:

High school dropouts ultimately become a financial drain on society. It makes perfect sense economically to utilize tax dollars and push for dropout prevention programs in order to keep young people in school. High school dropouts result in a heavy economic and social consequence. In order to keep youth in school there needs to be a push for effective alternative schools to save these students before they become a burden to society. A successful alternative school can make a difference in the way that students view school. The purpose of this study is to investigate and compare the perceptions of students in two alternative schools settings in urban settings in Mississippi and in two alternative school settings in urban settings in Louisiana. The investigator will focus on students' perceptions of student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. A study of students' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about what makes them feel successful in an alternative school should contribute significantly to the field of educating and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally. The value of this study also lies in its ability to identify the characteristics that create an effective alternative school setting.

2. Protocol:

Alternative school students from four schools in urban southern settings will respond to a two part, self-report questionnaire designed to measure those perceptions. The target population will consist of all students in two alternative schools in Mississippi and two alternative schools in Louisiana. The four alternative schools will be urban in
nature, located within a city (approximately 20 square miles of an approximate population of 50,000. The first section of the questionnaire focused on demographic information such as date of birth, race, gender, year(s) in an alternative school setting and grade placement. The second part of the self-report questionnaire is compiled of 35 separate statements designed to ascertain student perception on student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. Data will be collected from the participants by using a voluntary sampling technique. Voluntary participants will be asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement using a 5-point scale, 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree. On this scale, a high score of 5=strongly agree indicated a positive perception whereas a low score of 1=strongly disagree represented a negative perception. The researcher will focus on the students' perceptions on student-centered school culture and the school effectiveness in meeting academic and personal needs. The independent variables in this study are the four alternative schools. The dependent variables are student-centered school culture and school effectiveness. Student-centered school culture is a student-supportive climate characterized by:

- positive teacher/student relationship
- Expanded teacher roles
- Safe environment
- Small size and community and community climate
- Academic innovation
- Supportive services
School effectiveness is educating and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally is characterized by:

- Students more likely to graduate
- Sense of belonging

Participation in this study is voluntary and parents are not obligated to consent to participation. Students who agree to participate will complete the survey during school hours at a designated area by the discretion of the principal. The questionnaire will require approximately fifteen minutes of the participant’s time. Students who volunteer to participate in completing the survey will be able to choose one item from a basket of school supplies:

- Pen
- Pencil
- Homework pass

If a student does not agree to complete the survey instrument, he/she student will remain in his classroom instead of reporting to the designated area.

The use of multiple schools should increase variability in school culture as perceived by students so that any differences in perception of school effectiveness may be more likely captured. Further, use of multiple schools will increase sample size and increase validity of the findings by enhancing generalizability.

Requests were made in writing to superintendents of selected school districts to get permission for their district to participate in the study. The superintendents have granted this request upon approval from the IRB with the letters attached. Each school administrator will distribute parent letters to parents during summer
registration for the 2006 – 2007 school year in July and August. Parents who give
permission for their child to participate in the study will be given a brief
presentation of the project and a quick overview of the questionnaire that the
students will complete in late August and early September. Questionnaires from
other alternative schools will be mailed directly to the researcher in a self
addressed envelope to the following address:

S. Alice Duggan
Center for New Opportunities
2829 Pass Road
Biloxi, MS 39531

All alternative schools will have similar registration whereas the parents have
to physically register their students. Since parents must be on site to register their
child, the rate of parental permission for students to participate in completing the
survey should be greater.

3. Benefits:
The potential benefits of this study would be to show that perceptions are very
important to students who attend different alternative schools in two different states. A
study of students' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about what makes them feel
successful in an alternative school should contribute significantly to the field of educating
and meeting the needs of at-risk students both academically and behaviorally. The value
of this study also lies in its ability to identify the characteristics that create an effective
alternative school setting.
Risks:

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study by the investigator. The information received will not be used for any other reason than the completion of my research project to graduate.

There are no known physical, psychological, social or financial research-related risks, inconveniences, discomforts or side effects to the subjects that can be expected in this study. The questionnaires are anonymous as no identifying information will be requested. Confidentiality will be maintained with all records being kept in a locked filing cabinet, and only the researcher and statistician will have access to them. After the research project, the questionnaires will be shredded and disposed of properly.

4. Subject's Assurance:

Whereas no assurance can be made concerning results that may be obtained (since results from investigational studies cannot be predicted) the researcher will take every precaution consistent with the best scientific practice. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and subjects may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Questions concerning the research should be directed to Alice Duggan at 228-436-5120. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820. A copy of this form will be given to the participant.
5. Signatures:

In conformance with the federal guidelines, the signature of the subject or parent or guardian must appear on all written consent documents. The University also requires that the date and the signature of the person explaining the study to the subject appear on the consent form.

Signature of the Minor Research Participant/Student __________________________ Date

Signature of the Participant to Assent __________________________ Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian __________________________ Date

Signature of the Person Explaining the Study __________________________ Date

Subject’s Initials ___________
APPENDIX J
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

The University of
Southern Mississippi
Institutional Review Board

Enclosed is The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee Notice of Committee Action taken on the above referenced project proposal. If I can be of further assistance, contact me at (601) 266-4279, FAX at (601) 266-4275, or you can e-mail me at Lawrence.Hosman@usm.edu. Good luck with your research.
HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26.111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

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

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 26062201
PROJECT TITLE: Students' Perceptions of Alternative School Education
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 11/01/05 to 05/31/07
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: S. Alice Duggan
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & Research
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 01/25/07 to 01/24/08

[Signature]
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

[Signature]
Date 1-26-07

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Name: S. Alice Duggan

E-Mail Address: Alice.duggan@boks.edu

Mailing Address: 2595 Brighton Circle, Biloxi, MS 34531

College/Division: Education/Psychology Dept.
Department Box #: 5031

Phone: 228-594-6954

Hyattburg


May 2007

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors: NA

Grant Number: NA

_ New Project

☑ Dissertation or Thesis

Renewal or Continuation: Protocol #

Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol #

Principal Investigator: S. Alice Duggan
Date: June 12, 2005

Advisor: June 12, 2006

Department Chair: June 12, 2006

Title: Students' Perceptions of Alternative School Education

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors: NA

Grant Number: NA

_ New Project

☑ Dissertation or Thesis

Renewal or Continuation: Protocol #

Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol #

Principal Investigator: S. Alice Duggan
Date: June 12, 2005

Advisor: June 12, 2006

Department Chair: June 12, 2006

RECOMMENDATION OF HSPRC MEMBER

Category I, Exempt under Subpart A, Section 46.101 ( ), 45CFR46.

Category II, Expedited Review, Subpart A, Section 46.110 and Subparagraph (C).

Category III, Full Committee Review.

HSPRC College/Division Member: 123-07

HSPRC Chair: 123-07
This form should be used to report single adverse effects. Incident reports (i.e., reports of problems involving the conduct of the study or patient participation, including problems with the recruitment and/or consent processes and any deviations from the approved protocol) should be described in a letter. Return this form to the IRB Coordinator, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39406-0001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator:</th>
<th>Phone:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB Approval #:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study title:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adverse Effect (3-4 words):**

Date of adverse effect: [3/1/2023]

Additional details/description of effect and treatment, if any. (A detailed report may be attached.)

**Adverse effect appears to be (check one):**

- Directly related to the research
- Indirectly related to the research
- Unrelated to the research

Research involved the use of:

- Was procedure intended to directly benefit subject? Yes | No
- Was subject enrolled at a USM site? Yes | No
- Has this type of adverse effect been reported before? Yes | No
- Is this type of effect likely to occur again? Yes | No
- Is the effect adequately described in the protocol and consent form? Yes | No

** If not, are changes needed in the protocol and/or consent form? Yes** | No

---

What other agencies (e.g., sponsors) have been notified of this adverse effect?

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date
APPENDIX K

PERMISSION LETTER

August 27, 2006

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Alice Duggan and I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi, located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. As a part of my requirements, I am required to write a dissertation/research project on something which is related to Educational Leadership. Being an alternative school principal, my interest is in the area of alternative school students and finding ways to better meet their academic and social needs. I am writing my dissertation on alternative school students' perceptions of school effectiveness as well as their perceptions that describe student-centered school climate. I have selected two alternative schools in Mississippi and two alternative schools in Louisiana to look at differences among the four selected schools.

To better understand alternative school students, I would like to have your child complete a survey consisting of 48 questions, but I need parental consent beforehand. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are not obligated to consent to participation. Students who agree to participate will complete the survey during school hours. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study.

If you have any questions about the process, you can call me at (228) 436-5120 during school hours. The project has been approved by my superintendent and the university and information received will not be used for any other reason than the completion of my research project to graduate. I do plan to share my finding with all four schools so that we may plan ways to better meet the needs of alternative school students.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Study Participants Protection Review Committee which ensures that research projects involving human study participants follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, (601) 266-6820

If this letter is not returned by Wednesday, September 20, 2006, you are giving your child permission to complete the survey. I want to thank you in advance for allowing your child to participate in this study.

S. Alice Duggan,
Principal, Center for New Opportunities

Please mark your response below.

- Yes, I give my child permission to participate in this study as described above.
- No, I do not give my student permission to participate in this study as described above.

Parent Signature __________________________ Date ____________

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APPENDIX L

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Alternative School Survey

Instructions: Please answer the following by circling the number next to the answer that best describes you where possible; otherwise please fill in the answer in the blank provided.

1. Date of Birth ______

2. Please indicate your gender: 1. Male
    2. Female

3. Please indicate your grade: 1. Fourth
    2. Fifth
    3. Sixth
    4. Seventh
    5. Eighth
    6. Ninth
    7. Tenth
    8. Eleventh
    9. Twelfth

4. Race/ethnic origin: 1. White
    2. Black
    3. Hispanic
    4. Asian
    5. Other

5. Age: 1. 10 years old
    2. 11 years old
    3. 12 years old
    4. 13 years old
    5. 14 years old
    6. 15 years old
    7. 16 years old
    8. 17 years old
    9. 18 years old
6. How long have you attended an alternative school?
   1. Less than 1 year
   2. 1 year
   3. 2 years
   4. 3 years
   5. 4 years

7. Which program are you currently enrolled in at your school?
   1. Regular education
   2. Special education
   3. GED program?

8. I am court ordered to be in school?
   1. Yes
   2. No

9. My attendance is better at this school.
   1. Yes
   2. No

10. The attendance policies here keep me in school.
    1. Yes
    2. No

11. The school notifies my parent when I am absent from school.
    1. Yes
    2. No

12. I feel successful at this school.
    1. Yes
    2. No

13. Which sentence describes your household living arrangements?
    1. I live with my Mother
    2. I live with my Father
    3. I live with both my Mother and Father
    4. I live with my Grandparents
    5. I live with a Legal Guardian
The purpose of this survey is to gather information about alternative schools. Answer questions as honestly as possible that describes the way you feel about alternative schools. Please rate your opinion by using the following scale: 1 for Strongly Disagree and 5 for Strongly Agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. I feel safe at this school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The environment at my school is comfortable.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Discipline is handled fair and consistent at my school</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The size of the classes makes conflicts less frequent at my school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The smaller class sizes help me to feel physically safe while at school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I know class rules, expectations, and consequences at my school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My test scores are higher because of the small class sizes.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The smaller class size allows me to get more individual attention at my school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The smaller class size allows the teacher to provide more appropriate instruction.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The smaller class size at my school minimizes distractions while learning.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. My advisor meets with me daily to discuss school problems or personal problems.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. My academic teachers counsel with me when I am having problems at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. My teachers teach me about Character Education as well as academic subjects.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. My teachers discuss ways to deal with anger and resolve conflict.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The teachers and staff members at my School are fair and patient with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. The teachers at my school are concerned about my academic progress.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. My teachers are genuinely concerned about my well being as a person.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. The teachers at my school work toward building trust with students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. The teachers are friendly toward students at my school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. My Teachers are committed to helping me at school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. My grades are better at this school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I am on track with learning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. The GED program is an option at my school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I am learning to work with others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I am learning new work and life skills.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I have a variety of learning experiences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. A police officer visits my school often.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Guest speakers visit my school weekly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Electives such as PE, Drama, Journalism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and Art are available at my school.

43. The principal communicates with my probation officer.

44. I believe that being in this school makes it more likely for me to graduate with a diploma from high school.

45. Experiences in this school help me have a more positive self image.

46. I perceive a sense of belonging at this school.

47. I actively participate more at this school.

48. I believe that I have greater academic and social success at this school.
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